Did You Know | Why It Matters | For Equity Now

Commit to (Re)commit: Making Equity Work Personal

[Image description: Eight connected hands of varying colors: red, orange, yellow, green, light blue, dark blue, black, and brown.]

There's a difference between interest and commitment. When you're interested in doing something, you do it only when circumstance permit. When you're committed to something, you accept no excuses, only results.

- Art Turock

Did You Know

(Re)commitment is a Daily Process

"Commitment is an act, not a word."

- Jean-Paul Sartre

[Image description: A hand holds a small sign with the words: Decide, Commit, Focus, and Succeed. Each word is displayed in alternating colors: light blue and yellow.]

Sharpening Our Equity Focus, Resolve, and Determination

The Midwest and Plains Equity Assistance Center's annual theme for 2020-2021 is **(re)claim**, **(re)vitalize**, **(re)imagine**, and **(re)commit**. Equity orientated educators realize that equity is a journey and not a destination. They understand that equity is a continuous process requiring us to **(re)claim** our agency and ownership of the work in which we are engaged. As equity-orientated educators we must strive to **(re)vitalize** our work and to bring to it new life and new energy. In **(re)imagining** what educational equity could be, we must work to innovate and establish new processes, structures, methods, and ideas. Finally, equity-oriented educators must **(re)commit** themselves to the pursuit of equity, devote themselves to the work, and embrace their roles in it.

What does it mean to (re)commit to equity in the current K-12 schooling context? Making the commitment to pursue equity is a [deliberate action requiring deep introspection and firm resolve](#) (Cole,1995). The need for educators newly engaged in the pursuit of equity to commit themselves to the work is evident. Commitment is a necessary part of developing a foundational awareness and understanding of equity. Such understandings are central to reflecting upon normative school and classroom practices that may result in inequities for marginalized students, or the ability to critically consider personal bias (Kohli et al., 2019). Less discernable, however, is the need for individuals long engaged in educational equity efforts to continually re-focus on their passion, and (re)commit themselves to ensuring equitable opportunities to learn for all students (Leea & Turner, 2017).

The act of (re)commitment intrinsically links critical self-reflection with critical self-transparency (Chen & Gorski, 2015). This means that even self-proclaimed equity-focused educators must take the time to thoughtfully consider their equity journey, goals, personal & professional motives, and purpose (Moore et al. 2019). At a time when educators are navigating additional challenges that may require even more intentionality and determination to address equity issues, it is more important than ever that equity-orientated educators reflect upon [some critical questions](#) (Radd, 2019). Equity-oriented educators [preparing themselves to (re)commit](#), may seek to answer both fundamental and philosophical questions that directly impact the students they serve (Radd, 2019). Educators may contemplate such questions as "What do I hope to change and why," and "How am I improving the lives of my student's daily?" (Radd, 2019). They may also reflect upon the reasons they chose to teach, and why they made the conscious decision to pursue educational equity (Scheurich &

Jackson, 2019) rather than to continue on in the traditional monolithic ways in which students have historically been educated (Balmer et al., 2012).

Engaging in authentic critical self-reflection and critical-self-transparency also means acknowledging and questioning the power and privilege educators possess in connection to the pivotal role they play in guiding the thoughts and opinions of students (Paris, 2017). As educators do this, it is imperative that they are candid with themselves about their answers to these important questions (Radd & Macey, 2013). Equity-oriented educators that (re)commit have a greater level of emotional involvement in equity work because they are professionally *and* personally invested in the success and well-being of all students (Leea & Turner, 2017).

(Re)committing to equity has the potential to improve educator's performance, motivate educators to advocate for shifts in policies and procedures, and more closely align educators' values, and beliefs to their practice (Richards et al., 2007). Moreover, it allows educators the opportunity to critically reflect upon incongruencies that may exist between what educators believe about equity and how those beliefs are reflected in the classroom (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Finally, (re)committing to the pursuit of educational equity means pledging to move forward with the work in spite of difficulties, or opposition (Moore et al., 2019). Historically, most fundamental shifts in ideology have been met with challenges (Dagli et al., 2019). Thus, equity-oriented educators should expect to encounter resistance to their work (Moore et al., 2019). It is only through the continual and sustained (re) commitment to equity, inclusive practices and ensuring that the perspectives of marginalized individuals are centered and valued as much as those of non-marginalized individuals that equity-orientated educators can persevere, transform systems, and create a more equitable and hopeful future for all students (Scheurich & Jackson, 2019).

...equity-oriented educators must (re)commit themselves to the pursuit of equity, devote themselves to the work, and embrace their roles in it.

Why It Matters
(Re)Commitment Disrupts Complicity

[Image description: Brown sign with crimson letters displays the phrase: "Your Silence Is Complicit."]

"Do not desire to fit in. Desire to oblige yourselves to lead."
--Gwendolyn Brooks

The Dangers of Complicity

Without a continual (re)commitment to equity and justice, even the most equity-centered educators can become complicit (Theoharis, 2007). Complicity resembles perpetuating inequities within an educational system designed to other and marginalize those that do not adhere to the dominant norm based on relatedness to white, middle class, cisgender, and heterosexual social constructions (DiAngelo, 2018). Complicity occurs for a myriad of reasons, and manifests via educator participation in schooling policies, practices, and pedagogy that limit equitable access (Paris, 2012), representation (Chen et al., 2014; Mulligan & Kozleski, 2009), meaningful participation (Fraser, 1998), and high outcomes across student learning groups (Waitoller & Kozeski, 2013). Educators' commitment to keeping equity at the forefront ensures they are avoiding "patterns of thinking and behavior that trap the possibilities for creating equitable schools" (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004, p. 603, as cited in Radd, 2019). To avoid said traps and (re)commit to equity, we ask educators to recognize the ways in which the educational system has potential to propel them back into being complicit.

When (re)committing to educational equity, it is important to note that the United States public education system is currently operating the way it is intended by transmitting traditions, beliefs, and values of the white, middle-class, non disabled, cisgender, heterosexual, and protestant dominant norm (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012, as cited in Sanborn et al., 2019). To address and redress systemic inequities, educators must attend "to the deeply entrenched systemic oppression that marginalized students are left to navigate" (Jackson et al., p. 3). By acknowledging privilege within public education, educators can begin to increase critical consciousness, and take individual onus of how and when individual values and beliefs are being upheld via policies, practices, pedagogies and how their actions within perpetuate inequities (Radd & Macey, 2013). This realization is a departure from deficit ideology which typically situates historically marginalized students and families as problems needing to be saved/fixed to function within an inherently dysfunctional system (Valencia, 1997).

Beware of Isolation and Exhaustion

With knowledge regarding the historical and contemporary functioning of public education, educators can either remain complicit, or work to actively disrupt and dismantle inequitable praxis. However, intentional disruption of public-school legacies of inequity and injustice can leave educators feeling isolated and ignored, leading to exhaustion and defeat (Gorski & Chen, 2015). Within this stress, even the most equity-oriented educators feel pressure to maintain the status quo. Examples of areas that have potential to lead to exhaustion, stress, isolation, and defeat include, but are not limited to:

- Racial battle fatigue amongst teachers of Color in a predominately white profession (Pizarro & Kohli, 2020).

- The persistent stress of the education profession and a need to perform within accountability structures, such as high stakes testing, rooted in white racism and the ideology of white supremacy (Leonardo, 2009).

- White educators might avoid disruption and seek comfort within familiar characteristics of whiteness and white supremacy that flourish in K-12 schooling environments (Zembylas, 2003).

- A desire to consciously and subconsciously maintain unearned privileges rooted in whiteness and white supremacy to preserve membership and acceptance and being treated as an outsider amongst colleagues, peers, and families that identity as white or subscribe to the ideology of whiteness and white supremacy (DiAngelo, 2018).

(Re)commitment to equity and an understanding, analysis, and interrogation of the ways in which our educational system warrants complacency, is necessary. Otherwise, students who have been historically kept on the margins will continue to be silenced, excluded, and exposed to harm and violence in a schooling structure privileging the dominant norm. Thereby, we ask educators to continually engage in critical reflexivity and critical action, ensuring congruence between their language and actions in the name of equity and justice. (Re)committing and centering equity should take form through educators actively centering the perspectives, funds of knowledge (Moll et al.,1992), and lived experiences of the students, families/caregivers, communities they are serving, moving from critical reflection to critical action (Jemal, 2017).

For Equity Now
(Re)Commitment Requires Action

"Commitment is the foundation of great accomplishments."
--- Heidi Reeder

[Image description: Eleven hands form fists and connect in the shape of a heart. The hands are varying skin tones of brown and white.]

Some consideration for equity-oriented educators as they shift from thinking through what (re) commitment means to developing the tools needed to support them in the work are:

- **Welcome Vulnerability**: See vulnerability as an opportunity for growth and embrace being transparent with self and others about your equity work. (Singleton & Linton, 2006).

- **Be Courageous:** Be willing to recognize, name, and disrupt, characteristics of white supremacy no matter where you find them (Singleton & Linton, 2006).

- **Co-construct:** Be willing to work with others with whom you share a mission and vision. Allow the voices of multiple and diverse stakeholders to be centered and drive the production and enactment of policies and practices (Radd & Macey, 2013).

- **Find Community:** Reach out to other equity-oriented colleagues, create a community and sustaining process as means of encouragement and rejuvenation (Haskins et,al., 2020).

- **Consider Roles:** Move towards greater autonomy in equity leadership roles. This may mean that equity leaders use their autonomy to collaborate with students around classroom rules, or by encouraging students to share their personal and cultural perspectives and stories (Lundy & Swartz, 2013).

- **Prioritize Self-care:** Practicing critical self-care is an act of resistance. Critical self-care helps mitigate the risk of educator burn-out (Lazzell,et,al., 2019).

- **Practice Radical Love:** (Re)commitment includes centering radical love (Freire, 1970; hooks, 2000; Matias & Allen, 2016; Yancy, 2019). Acknowledge and allow feelings of anger, sadness, and discomfort move towards critical practices of reflection, healing, and action towards transformative change.

A (re)commitment to equity means being intentional not only about considering the future, but also being intentional about the need to critically examine the past. This may mean re-examining and re-adjusting personal and professional goals, being transparent about one's equity journey, and being self-reflective about the barriers encountered while engaging in the work. Re-commitment also

means understanding that equity work can be challenging and sometimes isolating therefore, equity focused educators must seek out a community as part of their commitment to critical self-care and to moving their equity work forward.

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