

## BREAKING DOWN EQUITY-ORIENTED PROFESSIONAL LEARNING FOR THE NOVICE



Welcome to Equity Digest! This newsletter is for education stakeholders (e.g. community members, caregivers) who have an interest in supporting educational equity in their school communities. What is educational equity? Educational equity can be defined as beliefs, actions, and policies that enable all students to have access to and participate in quality learning environments and experience successful outcomes. Each Equity Digest explains the concepts and findings of the latest academic research surrounding a particular equity-focused topic. The intent of this periodical is to relay equity concepts and supporting research, “digesting” key findings so you can draw informed conclusions. The Digest also offers ways that you can advance equitable practices in your school community. Enjoy!

### Get Informed

#### What is Equity-Oriented Professional Learning?

Our [November Equity Dispatch newsletter](#) talks about centering equity in professional learning. Have you ever participated in equity-oriented professional learning? Some of us may have had a sexual harassment training, bullying/harassment training, or other kind of standard issue professional development activities, but these were pretty cookie-cutter, one-shot trainings.

So who cares, one-and-done, right? Because you are reading this, you are most likely delving into the realm of equity and what it means to be an equity-oriented educator. You are ready to move past the “one-and-done” mentality. You want to

*build capacity*, gain knowledge. But how do I do that?

ESSA (Every Student Succeeds Act) requires that state departments of education conduct professional learning. ESSA allocates funds specifically for professional learning centered around equity work. Equity-oriented professional learning assist stakeholders (educators, caregivers and community members) to move beyond the “achievement gap” conversation to conversations surrounding how we can work to ensure an equitable environment for all students (Dagli, Jackson, Skelton, & Thorius, 2017).

Our November Equity Dispatch newsletter states: “Peripheral engagement with equity principles in the design and delivery of professional learning opportunities (a.k.a.



“one-and done” trainings) contributes to **incomplete** and **inaccurate** understandings of the complexity of individuals’ identities and social and cultural contexts, and the effect of these on educators’ professional learning, growth, and development.” (Dagli et al., 2017).

What have we learned through research studies on professional development that claim to be focused on equity? Often, these professional learning opportunities don’t really center equity, but often are canned “training” that frequently contains some sort of diffuse and unclear equity concepts, not accomplishing the actual purpose of ALL equity-oriented professional learning, which is a **deep understanding** of educational equity, better situating you to provide every learner with access to a high-quality education in an inclusive environment (Battey et.al., 2007).

## Why You Should Care

### Making a Difference in Students’ Lives

So why is equity-oriented professional learning so important? Because you CAN make a difference in students’ lives by learning about educational inequities that disproportionately affect historically marginalized students (Moore, Jackson, Kyser, Skelton, & Thorius, 2016). By deeply understanding systemic inequities, you can start to **disrupt** those inequities, as well as create conditions that ensure students access to equitable learning opportunities that students should receive in order to succeed.

Sounds good, but where do I start?

1. Work on developing **critical consciousness**, which is an awareness of your own identities, power, and privilege, and how they inform your practices and the educational system as a whole (Radd & Macey,

2013).

2. Think about and understand the complex identities you and your students hold. Your identity makes a huge impact in the classroom, on teaching AND learning (Rimmer, 2016).
3. You’re not done. Ever. Learning about equity and disrupting inequitable policies and practices are a life-long mission. But we know you’re up for the challenge!

## Moving Forward

### Designing Equity-Oriented Professional Learning

Moving forward, we recommend the design of robust equity-oriented professional learning experiences. ESSA defines professional learning with five criteria, and we’re going to lay out each of them for you, centering equitable professional learning practices.



#### 1. Sustained

Like we said, learning about equity never stops. ESSA works to move away from “one-and-done” or short-term professional learning. Research suggests that your in-depth professional learning about equity can improve educational outcomes for all your students, especially those who have been historically marginalized.

#### 2. Collaborative

Equity-oriented professional learning encourages you to take an active role in your learning, especially by interacting with your peers who are also learning. Collaborative learning encourages people to ask questions beyond the superficial, and also helps you question and explore your own identities, working to develop that critical consciousness we talked about earlier (King, Artiles, & Kozleski, 2009).

#### 3. Job-embedded

This means that professional learning applies to your personal world, the classroom in which YOU teach, the students YOU directly interact with every day, with an emphasis on students who have been historically marginalized (Learning Forward, 2017). YOUR society and culture makes a huge impact on student involvement and performance, in and out of the classroom.

#### 4. Data-driven

Data helps determine the efficacy of professional learning, helps point out learning needs, as well as future direction and goals (Educators for High Standards, 2017). Also, how do you know of tangible inequities in your school? Data. How do you formulate valuable professional learning experiences around equity? Data. It tells a story, and makes suggestions on what areas of inequities and exactly what groups are being marginalized.

#### 5. Classroom-focused

Everything that happens in your classroom- student learning, teaching, context- should be organized and examined with an equity lens. Effective, equity-oriented professional learning should consider (a) learners, (b) learning tasks and outcomes, (c) instructional methods/ conditions, and (d) the context in which learning takes place (Dagli et al., 2017). Let’s explore those further in depth.

**(a) Learners:** Learners come to the table with their own unique set of lived experiences and culture- their own personal context (Dagli et al., 2017). Diversity is **always** a strength; ensuring every learner succeeds in professional development must be based in this belief.

**(b) Learning tasks and outcomes:** Our learning means nothing if we can’t apply it to the real world (Merrill, 2013). Equity-oriented professional learning takes the cultural identities and values of the learners to **inform** the design of professional learning activities (King, Artiles, & Kozleski, 2009).

**(c) Instructional methods/outcomes:** The assumption that every learner is the **same** results in the **same** old instructional methods (Dolan, 2000). And you see how that has gone in the past; equity-oriented professional learning and instruction has a long way to go. The principles of universal design take into account that all learners are different, and have different styles of learning (Mcguire, Scott, & Shaw, 2006). By recognizing and appreciating our differences, universal design encourages educators to **redesign** their instructional conditions (Dagli et al., 2017).

**(d) Context:** Since each learner is unique, each learner has a different social and cultural context (Vygotsky, 1978). You are **embedded** in this context, and it influences your learning (Dagli et al., 2017). Equity-focused professional development means that instructors have adopted learning strategies and conditions that consider your sociocultural context in the learning process (Watson, 2013).

## Summary

Through this newsletter, you've learned about equity-oriented professional learning, why it's important, and how to effectively design equity-oriented professional learning. Now get out there, actively participate in your professional development, and see how **your** development affects your students. Because that's truly why equity-oriented development matters. Please read the [November Equity Dispatch Newsletter](#) for more information.



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## Meet the Authors

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## About the Midwest & Plains Equity Assistance Center

The mission of the Midwest & Plains Equity Assistance Center is to ensure equity in student access to and participation in high quality, research-based education by expanding states' and school systems' capacity to provide robust, effective opportunities to learn for all students, regardless of and responsive to race, sex, and national origin, and to reduce disparities in educational outcomes among and between groups. The Equity by Design briefs series is intended to provide vital background information and action steps to support educators and other equity advocates as they work to create positive educational environments for all children. For more information, visit <http://www.greatlakesequity.org>.

## Disclaimer

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