



Equity Dispatch

Considerations for Professional Development in Equity-Oriented Practices

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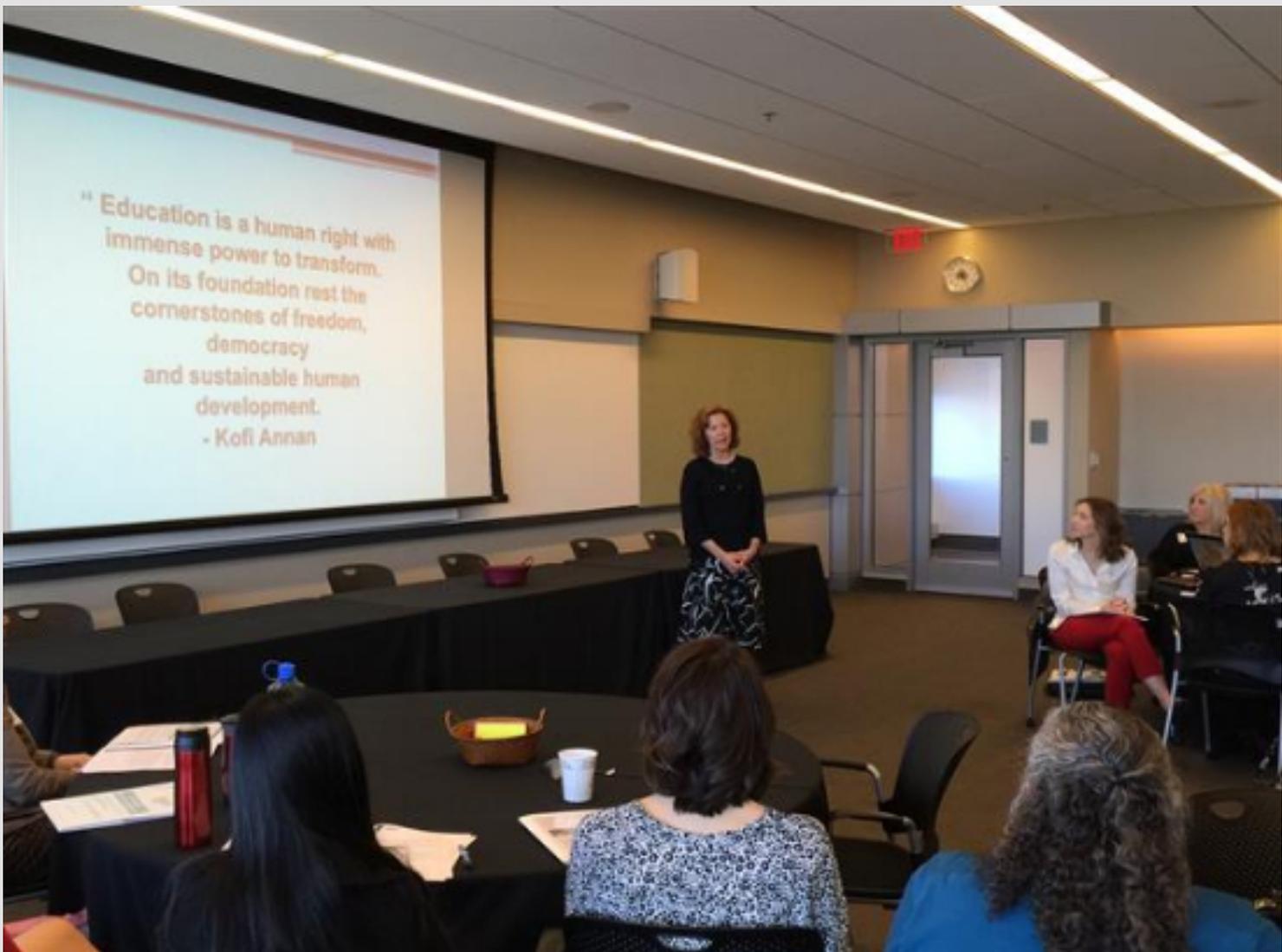
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"[P]reparing teachers to teach children of diverse racial, ethnic, social class, [religion, national origin, gender identity, sexual orientation], and language backgrounds is a pressing issue in teacher education today and will continue to be for some time to come."

-Villegas & Lucas, 2002, p. 20



Did You Know

Professional Development that Reinforces Technical Skills is Not Enough

Did you know that professional development is one of the primary strategies for supporting educators' professional growth and acquisition of new or contemporary teaching methods? Most traditional professional development focuses on technical skills that often miss other skills necessary to realize [educational equity](#) (King, Artiles, Kozleski, 2009; Kozleski & Suitly, n.d.).

Equity oriented professional development “is grounded in research on teacher learning that is mindful of the role culture plays in the knowledge that educators bring to their practice, as well as how educators learn and make sense of their daily practice. It also emphasizes how educators' biographies, professional identities, and awareness of the technical (e.g., how-to), contextual (e.g., how circumstances shape the ways things are), and critical (e.g., the social justice lens) aspects of education [that] impact their professional practice” (King, Artiles, & Kozleski, 2009, p. 2).

Professional development is more than ensuring that educators receive the technical skills (e.g. crafting lesson plans, developing an assessment, implementing cutting-edge instructional techniques, etc.) necessary to function in the classroom. Educators must also acquire a foundational understanding of equity-oriented practices via developing and cultivating [critical consciousness](#) and [critically reflecting on their professional growth and practice](#) in order to create effective learning opportunities for all students (Cole, 2008; Bay & Macfarlane, 2011).

Equity oriented practices are those which critically examine all aspects of the learning environment including educators' beliefs and attitudes about difference as well as instructional practices and materials (Jackson et.al., 2015); in this way educators become responsive to, inclusive of, and sustaining of all students' cultural identities (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Paris, 2012, Jackson et.al., 2015). Although traditional professional learning experiences may be very specific in building educator's content knowledge or expanding instructional strategies, most fail to incorporate or emphasize the need for greater critical consciousness for the educator, particularly as it relates to instruction. Equity oriented instructional practices (see [Equitable Science Instruction](#), [Equitable Mathematics Instruction](#), [Critical and Inclusive Practices in Literacy](#)) centers the discussion of students' identities and examines and redresses the power dynamics in play in teaching and learning that privileges and oppresses students along various identities (e.g. race, gender, sex, dis/ability etc.).

Equity oriented leaders provide professional development experiences that focus specifically on the importance of honoring, appreciating, and including students' and educators' personal identities and histories, community practices and cultural repertoires (Paris & Alim, 2014; Richards, Brown, & Forde, 2007). There is benefit

in teaching technical skills in order to stay abreast of new instructional methods within a discipline, however to do so without incorporating [culturally responsive and sustaining practice in professional development](#), quality, safe and inclusive learning opportunities for all students will not be realized (King, Artiles, Kozleski, 2009, p. 4).



Why It Matters

Equity Oriented Professional Development is Fiscally Responsible & Transformative

Examining how we think of and benefit from professional learning matters because it is one of the primary ways districts and schools develop in-service educators' capacity. It is one of the main avenues in which resources are framed and used to support educators in their pursuit of serving all students. It is also one, if not the most significant area, where school communities allocate their time and fiscal resources.

When leaders miss opportunities to be intentional about the types of professional learning experiences they provide, educators are deprived of access to knowledge, approaches and practices capable of transforming systems of inequity and addressing isolative, biased, and exclusionary practices (Kea, Campbell-Whatley, & Richards, 2006). Equity orientated professional development provides educators new information, helps them to develop new perspectives on power, privilege, and access, challenges them to critically examine their practices, materials, and the ways in which they implement lessons.

In addition, strong leaders are expected to be good stewards of resources including funds and time. It is expected that leaders utilize the resources entrusted to them in the most ethical and fiscally responsible way possible. Because the average expenditure for professional development is equal to 5% of the total classroom costs or about \$4,600 per teacher (Odden-Archibald, Fermanich, & Gallagher, 2002) it is imperative that education leaders invest in experiences that will be most beneficial to staff and students alike. If educational transformation is to become a reality, educators must have professional development experiences that support, mentor, and critically examine their ability to practice culturally relevant and sustaining teaching practices (Brown, 2007).

Furthermore, professional development is often conceptualized as a vendor-focused enterprise. Meaning school leaders are frequently in search of speakers to present on a new topic, system, or strategy. When it comes to issues of educational equity, diversity, or culture in education there is no shortage of vendors who espouse expertise. Therefore, it is important that educators become critical consumers in the selection of speakers, as well as be intentional on how any professional learning experience fits within their larger professional development plan.

When leaders provide professional development experiences that are deliberate about teaching equity oriented practices, they astutely invest their resources in building the overall capacity (Newmann, King, & Youngs, 2000) of their school communities (e.g. educator knowledge, skills, and dispositions, program coherence, technical resources, enhanced professional community, coherent curriculum framework, etc.). Equity oriented leaders understand that professional learning experiences should utilize a multi-modal approach; thus, equity orientated professional development must be more than a set of “sit and get” experiences—placing educators in passive roles—toward engaging educators as active participants in the co-construction of learning.



For Equity Now

Professional Development That Is Intentional About Teaching Equity Oriented Practices Can Transform The Learning Community

Equity orientated educators must be equipped to recognize that not all professional learning experiences are equal. Although on the surface some professional development experiences appear to have a critical and equity focus, upon closer inspection many do not. The following three principles will support leaders in their pursuit of leveraging equity oriented professional development to prepare **culturally responsive and sustaining** educators.

Establish An Equity Vision: The development of a clear equity vision as well as core principles will assist in the planning of professional development experiences towards equity.

Be A Critical Consumer of Professional Development: Educators should be equipped to interrogate the ideologies, merit, evidence base, and credibility of their professional learning experiences to ensure they are of high quality and aligned to their equity vision. This includes selection of speakers, resources, materials, and use of and/or cultivation of language).

Commit to Continual Learning: Professional learning should engage educators in “joint, productive activity through discourse, inquiry, and public professional practice... [and afford] continuous, collaborative interaction with colleagues through discussion, knowledge development and understanding, and directed inquiry around professional practice” (King, Artiles, Kozleski, 2009, p. 6).

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