

Introduction to the Special Issue: Equity in Professional Development School

Partnerships

Drew Polly
University of North Carolina at Charlotte

Christie Martin
University of South Carolina

Abstract: This article is the introduction to the Special Issue of *School-University Partnerships* entitled Equity in Professional Development School partnerships. The authors provide context as well as their own personal experiences related to equity and PDS work.

KEYWORDS: equity, professional development schools; school-university partnerships

NAPDS NINE ESSENTIALS ADDRESSED:

1. A comprehensive mission that is broader in its outreach and scope than the mission of any partner and that furthers the education profession and its responsibility to advance equity within schools and, by potential extension, the broader community;
2. A school–university culture committed to the preparation of future educators that embraces their active engagement in the school community;
3. Ongoing and reciprocal professional development for all participants guided by need;
4. A shared commitment to innovative and reflective practice by all participants;

Introduction

In 1999 I (Drew) was a first year teacher in Williamsburg, VA, in a fifth grade classroom and found myself frequently frustrated, annoyed, and at times angry at the behavior of my students. I had very little training on culturally relevant teaching, students experiencing poverty, and how to handle students who had experienced traumatic experiences. My grade level teammates insisted that students were placed in separate classes by ability for mathematics. As a first year teacher for an hour of mathematics, I worked with sixteen (often less due to absences and tardiness) who had not yet met grade level expectations for third or fourth grade concepts. Nearly all of those students were children of color, while the classes with students who performed better in mathematics were full of mainly White children. While I recall having an uneasy feeling about this I said nothing as a first year teacher and just taught my students. For that I am truly sorry

In 2002 I (Christie) began my career in education in a 4th grade classroom in lower Manhattan. I was a career changer jumping into the classroom while pursuing my masters. I would leave my evening course and immediately be trying to implement what I learned in my class the next day. I often reflect on those years in several ways. My first thought is how much I loved spending each day with my class, I gave all I could in the best way I knew at that point. My second thought goes to what I did not know at that time. Finally, as is often in life, I envision all the things I would have done differently. The last 18 years transformed my understanding and many times produced a mixture of negative emotions as I deconstructed privilege, racism, and falsehoods embedded in my own K-12 education. This work is ongoing, I continue to read texts, listen to presentations, movies, and podcasts to deepen my knowledge of the historical context that systematically produces inequity, how culturally relevant pedagogy is used to bring equity to the classroom, and find colleagues to engage in this work.

Points to Consider

Equity is not Equality

It seems intuitive, but for the longest time the narrative in education was to treat students equally and not to show bias or unequal treatment to any students. While that concept has shifted dramatically in the past two decades there is a need in both professional development and teacher education programs to operationalize what that looks like. While education continues to focus on the ideas of differentiation and using data to drive instruction, teachers need to consider what equity looks like in terms of students' cultural and personal strengths and backgrounds as well as their academic strengths and backgrounds. In your own context, how are you promoting equity-based approaches to teaching?

Advocate for Access to High-Quality Education

There is a need for educational leaders, especially those working in the context of school-university (PDS) partnerships to consider how to ensure that all students from Pre-Kindergarten through College have access to high-quality education. At times schools and universities may lower the expectations for specific groups of students, which in the end has more of a negative impact on them. The National Council for Teachers of Mathematics statement on Access and Equity contends that all students deserve access to a "high-quality...curriculum, effective teaching and learning, high expectations, and the support and resources needed to maximize their

learning potential (NCTM, 2014).” For all of us involved in education that should be a goal for all of us in all subject areas.

Our Own Learning is a Journey

Both of us share a passion for education and recognize this path is a journey. We also value the need to provide ourselves with opportunities to discuss issues related to equity and anti-racism. In both of our cases we appreciate the words of Dr. Richard Milner’s book *Start Where you are but Don’t Stay There* (2010). We feel that our learning about issues related to equity and anti-racism are in fact a journey and we do not and may never not be experts in these areas.

Drew: My journey in learning about equity has led to a lot of guilt and shame about my privileged background as well as reflection about how I could have been a more equity-based teacher during my time in the classroom. As I continue to read, watch videos, and reflect on ideas related to equity-based teaching, I continually feel the need to think about how I can apply what I have read or learned into my daily work. For example, after reading Lisa Delpit’s *Multiplication is for White People* (2012) with my seniors last fall I was struck with her concept of a “warm demander” which describes how teachers need to be warm and loving towards their students, yet simultaneously demand that students work hard and give their best effort. As I work with future teachers, current teachers, and students weekly, I continue to think about whether my actions are warm and demanding in terms of keeping expectations high for everyone who I work with.

Christie: My journey also includes guilt and shame about the ways in which I could have and should have created space for difficult conversations and made a more equitable classroom. When I begin to overwhelm myself with these thoughts, I take comfort in Maya Angelou’s quote “Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better.” On this journey, I have committed to continue the work of knowing better and doing better. Social justice and creating an equitable classroom means knowing better in a number of areas. For me, it has meant interrogating our history with multiple sources and questioning why so much of what I consider critical information for social justice was left out of my own education. It is reading Ijeoma Oluo’s *So you want to talk about race* (2019) for guidance and understanding. This process of knowing better causes me to consistently pause, reflect, and research. I share this process with my students, colleagues, and family as we collectively seek to do better.

The Benefit of Talking and Collaborating about Issues of Equity

In the spirit of the NAPDS 9 Essentials (NAPDS, 2008) there is a need to consider who is on your team as you strive for and advocate for equity-based teaching and address issues in your context that are inequitable. When we talked about putting this special issue together one of our goals was to provide a place for educators to visit to learn about how school-university partnerships are working on topics related to equity. Our hope is that you may use these articles as a springboard to continue to examine how you could infuse more principles related to equity-based teaching into your own context.

References

Delpit, L. (2012). *Multiplication is for White people: Raising expectations for other people's children*. New York: The New Press.

Milner, H. R. (2010). *Start where you are but don't stay there: Understanding diversity, opportunity gaps, and teaching in today's classrooms*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

National Association for Professional Development Schools (2008). *What it means to be a Professional Development School*. Retrieved from: <https://napds.org/nine-essentials/>.

National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (2014). *Access and equity in mathematics education*. Retrieved from: https://www.nctm.org/uploadedFiles/Standards_and_Positions/Position_Statements/Access_and_Equity.pdf.

Oluo, I. (2019). *So you want to talk about race?* New York: Seal Press.

Drew Polly is a professor in the Department of Reading and Elementary Education at UNC Charlotte. His work focuses on supporting and examining teachers' and teacher candidates' use of learner-centered pedagogies in mathematics and the effective use of technologies.

Christie Martin is an associate professor in the Department of Instruction and Teacher Education at the University of South Carolina. Her work focuses on examining the integration of literacy concepts in mathematics classrooms. She teaches graduate courses focused on action research and teacher inquiry, as well as mathematics education courses.