

## Chapter 12

# Living Into Our Shared Commitments: Creating Professional Learning Communities to Address Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

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### ABSTRACT

*This chapter highlights the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Fellowship Program in the College of Education at Butler University. The chapter examines the work of the fellows as they led professional learning communities (PLCs) focused on DEI related topics. Data include written reflections produced by the fellows as well as survey responses from colleagues who took part in the PLCs. The chapter captures individual stories of the authors as well as a collective story that examines the implementation of the professional learning communities. Successes are captured, and areas for growth are explored.*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Founded by 19th century abolitionist Ovid Butler (Childs-Helton, 2016), Butler University houses a College of Education (COE) committed to dismantling “systems and policies which have historically been used to marginalize and which persist in denying full educational access to all learners” (Butler University College of Education, n.d.). In doing so, the college carefully attends to McDonald and Zeichner’s (2009) concerns related to a “lack of clarity” and “a lack of knowledge regarding practices that support such an effort” (p. 595). While there is an awareness within the college of the importance of dismantling inequitable systems and policies, there is also an acknowledgement of mistakes and areas for growth. Together the COE faculty and staff work to honor the legacy of the university’s founder while pushing to address inequities in our college, the university, various educational systems, and additional communities of which we are a part. This chapter highlights one such effort: the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Fellows (DEI Fellows) program within the COE. Research has indicated an ever increasing need to focus on diversity, equity, inclusion, and social justice as a way to address the systemic inequity and privilege within K-12 and educator preparation (Ladson-Billings, 1992, 2014). The Blaker DEI Fellows program was implemented as an intentional strategy in response to the ongoing challenges and injustices within our programs, schools, and communities.

## **BACKGROUND**

The Butler University COE DEI Fellowship was named after the mid-1800’s Indianapolis educator, Eliza Blaker, who was a champion of early education for all people, not just those who could afford it (Yesterday’s America Editorial Team, 2020). The stated purpose of the Blaker DEI Professional Learning Community Fellows Cohort was to, “create communities of trust and mutual support for the challenging work of identifying and unlearning systemic inequities inherent in our own education(s), and then build our collective capacities to identify and disrupt systemic inequities inherent in our COE pedagogies and curricula. Explicit attention will be directed to unpacking and interrupting racial inequities but will also include examination and interrogation of any systemic barriers or practices that prevent student access and success” (DEI Application, 2023).

Each applicant from the COE answered questions such as “ Please tell us what specific skills, knowledge, or perspectives you hope will be strengthened, challenged, shifted, or deepened. Why is this important to you? Why is now the right time to pay attention to this?” and “ What existing skills, experiences, talents, or training can you contribute to this PLC? Why are these important to you and to our shared practice?” (DEI Application, 2021).

The COE DEI Director and Dean reviewed and selected the six applicants for the first DEI cohort. Fellows were charged with leading PLCs during year two. A subsequent applicant was approved for the second year. During the year under study, the college consisted of 33 faculty and staff members. These individuals were split into four PLC groups that ranged in size from five to eight members.

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