Chapter 13
Overcoming Barriers to Equity Through Intentional Learning Communities

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ABSTRACT

This chapter describes effective ways for educational intentional learning communities to harness time, focus, and adult learning practices to ensure that they increase equity. Five key practices to develop equity-focused ILCs are described. These include (1) aiming for equity, (2) focusing efforts on the core of learning and teaching, (3) using key leadership practices and continuous improvement methodology, (4) using tools to develop community and transformational learning, and (5) walking the talk. The chapter begins with a short description of how one organization iterated these practices and ends with areas in which the organization is evolving their work. The intent of this chapter is to not be a polished recipe book, but rather an opportunity to share a learning journey of the five key practices, how they were developed, and how the organization has learned to enact them in their practice. The intention is for this chapter to be used to help ILCs reflect on their own improvement journeys to guide them into their next steps in leading for equity-focused improvements.

ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION LEADING THE LEARNING

The Center for Leadership and Educational Equity (CLEE) is a non-profit organization that drives student success by developing shared leadership to address the root causes of educational inequities and transform instructional practices and systems. CLEE fosters shared leadership through numerous programs and services that build the capacity of participants to engage in and lead transformative learning experiences within Intentional Learning Communities (ILCs). The programs all aim to increase equitable student learning outcomes in the schools they serve. At CLEE, we define equity as giving students what they need in order to unleash their unlimited, unknowable potential. This vision includes eliminating disproportionality in student learning outcomes between historically marginalized groups of students and their peers.

The journey to develop the methodology, practices, and programs to reach toward this vision of educational equity began over two decades ago when CLEE's Principal Residency Network (PRN), one of the longest-running principal residency-based preparation programs in the country, was created to develop creative and innovative school leaders through intensive residencies with mentor principals (Braun et al, 2013). Over the years, each cohort of the PRN formed an ILC that set the groundwork for a broader ILC of mentors and graduates of the PRN that were serving in schools across the state of Rhode Island and beyond. To nurture this growing community's focus on creating a more equitable and just public education system, CLEE developed a variety of services and supports to the field of education.

Over the last 13 years, CLEE expanded programming to support every stage of equity-focused educational leaders and systems. As is demonstrated in CLEE's Equity Statement (CLEE, 2020), leadership is broadly conceived and needed:

At CLEE, we believe that leaders at every level and in every facet of education—from teachers, resource providers, and administrators to students and parents—can be leaders for increasing equity of voice and excellence for all learners. We believe that skilled leaders are not born, but developed through powerful learning. That such complex learning and leading is not a solo act. That working together we can do better than the best one of us alone on their best day. (p. 2)

The CLEE community has learned and grown with and for the field, iteratively applying theory and practice to evolve research on how to design and facilitate transformative professional learning that increases equitable outcomes for students. This chapter will describe the key practices CLEE has honed to develop equity-focused ILCs, how it was learned, and the ways CLEE is aiming to improve in the future.

KEY PRACTICES FOR EQUITY-DRIVEN ILCs

As an organization, CLEE is also an ILC dedicated to continuously learning, evolving, and amplifying the impact of key practices that overcome barriers to increasing equity in education. This section describes five of the most effective ways we have found for educational ILCs to harness time, focus, and adult learning practices to ensure that their communities increase equity: (1) aiming for equity, (2) focusing efforts on the core of learning and teaching, (3) using key leadership practices and continuous improvement methodology, (4) using tools to develop community and transformational learning, and (5) doing the work.

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