


Chapter 15

Relating, Reckoning, and Reconciling: Sustaining Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging Through a Professional Learning Community

Catherine McTamaney
Vanderbilt University, USA

Eve Rifkin
Vanderbilt University, USA

Hasina Mohyuddin
Vanderbilt University, USA

Nicole Joseph
 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3455-1594>
Vanderbilt University, USA

ABSTRACT

This chapter describes the work of a professional learning community of higher-education faculty and staff launched to support and probe more expansive thinking about issues of equity, diversity, inclusion, and belonging (EDIB). As participant-observers, the authors describe the preparation, enactment, and reflection upon a pilot program using structured protocols to curate opportunities for faculty to engage authentically in EDIB work. Building on research into the development of professional learning communities and the contexts of transformational learning and tempered by the needs for psychological safety in the process, a professional learning community (PLC) of 13 faculty and 3 facilitators was launched to support more expansive thinking about EDIB issues. While most often EDIB efforts to address in higher education are reactive to an inciting event or crisis, this project seeks to create sustainable transformative learning centering inclusion and disrupting systems of dominance and white supremacy in a more proactive way.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-6684-7270-5.ch015

INTRODUCTION

A medium-sized, private, predominantly white institution (PWI) in the southern United States has made concerted efforts to address equity, diversity, inclusion and belonging (EDIB) by supporting students, faculty, and staff with resources and programming. These efforts are part of a broader strategic initiative intended to create learning environments that are “inseparable from institutional excellence and to model intentional practices that respect the humanity of all” (university website). While there has been some success, many of the efforts have been reactive when issues of equity and justice arise.

In the spring of 2023, with the support of the Dean of the College of Education and Human Development, we invited 13 faculty and staff and 3 facilitators to participate in a Professional Learning Community (PLC) and action research project. Two of the facilitators are the Associate and Assistant Deans of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion for the college; the third facilitator is a full-time faculty member in the Leadership, Policy, and Organizations department and has extensive background in facilitating professional learning communities.

Our design included four in-person sessions focused on EDIB challenges identified by our participants. During these two-hour sessions, we relied on protocols drawn from those designed by the School Reform Institute (SRI), a nonprofit organization serving educators and schools across the US that seeks to create, “transformational learning communities, fiercely committed to educational equity and excellence,” (SRI Website). The PLC used these protocols to support and probe more expansive thinking about EDIB issues.

This chapter will illuminate the complex work of our PLC as we seek to provide evidence-based research on the effectiveness of this model for building capacity and creating change around EDIB that can be applied across institutional settings.

LITERATURE

We draw on the work of key scholars from organizational and educational perspectives to identify essential literature on sustaining transformative learning spaces that center inclusion and disrupt systems of dominance and white supremacy. Diversity scholars suggest that traditional efforts toward diversifying organizations have largely stopped at just that: creating more diverse populations with less evidence to suggest that those populations are equitable or inclusive (Wong, 2019). Additionally, organizations continue to rely on the “business case” for diversity, making claims about diversity’s capacity to lead to more complex ideas and more innovation (Ely & Thomas, 2020). Many organizations see diversity as an achievement in itself or as a means to a more elevated profile or greater profits (Steele and Bolduc, 2020). As a result of this limited thinking regarding diversity, we experience in higher education (and in organizations more generally) is an increase in diversity without the culture to support equity, inclusion and belonging. There is evidence that, despite widely adopted diversity efforts, lived experiences are increasingly challenging. In the face of the rise of white nationalism in the US, people of color, particularly Black employees, report increases not only in micro aggressions, but in acts of blatant racism (Roberts & Mayo, 2019). While many of these incidents are reacted to through unconscious bias trainings intended to reduce incidents of discrimination, trainings alone are not having their desired impact and may, in some cases, may even hamper EDIB efforts (Kalev et al., 2006; Georgiac & Rattan, 2023). A recent study found that amplifying the commitment to attracting underrepresented groups can

20 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage:

www.igi-global.com/chapter/relating-reckoning-and-reconciling/333888

Related Content

Presidential Leadership and Building a Pipeline to Increase Diversity: Considerations for Community Expectancy

David V. Tolliver, III, Michael T. Miller, G. David Gearhart and David M. Deggs (2021). *Handbook of Research on the Changing Role of College and University Leadership* (pp. 175-185).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/presidential-leadership-and-building-a-pipeline-to-increase-diversity/276605

Inducing Long-Term, Positive Behavior Change: Leveraging Student Empowerment to Effect Long-Term Change

Derek Tranchina, Charles Terenfenko and Tracy Mulvaney (2021). *Redesigning Teaching, Leadership, and Indigenous Education in the 21st Century* (pp. 219-226).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/inducing-long-term-positive-behavior-change/263254

The Critical Success Factors in Higher Education: Ranking Systems and Industrial Context

Tuncer Asunakutlu and Kemal Yuce Kutucuoglu (2021). *University-Industry Collaboration Strategies in the Digital Era* (pp. 84-108).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/the-critical-success-factors-in-higher-education/271526

Investigating School-Based Support Teams' Roles in Supporting Children With Cerebral Palsy During the National Lockdown

Nkhensani Susan Thuketana (2021). *Investigating the Roles of School Management Teams in Curriculum Delivery* (pp. 127-144).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/investigating-school-based-support-teams-roles-in-supporting-children-with-cerebral-palsy-during-the-national-lockdown/285755

Is Epistemology Gnoseology?: Arguing Within Walter Dignolo and the Body as Focus

(2024). *History and Educational Philosophy for Social Justice and Human Rights* (pp. 163-194).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/is-epistemology-gnoseology/342633