

Guest blog by Elizabeth Denevi



When considering diversity and how it impacts academic achievement, many schools rely on binary thinking: the placement of girls vs. boys in higher level math and science classes or the number of Black students in a predominantly white school. While we certainly need to address the gender and racial inequities that still exist, we also need to complicate our thinking. Growing numbers of Gender fluid and multiracial students mean that our typical binaries of boy/girl and white/Black will not tell us the full picture. Identity development occurs over time and across contexts, and as we watch this generation of students move through our schools, we need tools that will embrace the range of identities that exist *between* our traditional binaries.

[Equity as Excellence](#) is a unique professional development space in that we seek to help educators become “diversity responsive,” able to address any issues of difference that impact teaching and learning (Hawley & Wolf, 2012). We begin with an overview of relevant theories and research that set the stage for two days of intensive study of race and gender. By beginning with a framework that can be applied across difference, we then take a deep dive into the social construction of gender. Through our partnership with Joel Baum and Gender Spectrum, we give educators the opportunity to think expansively about Gender identity/expression and how schools can be attentive to stereotypes and bias that may limit achievement. We then utilize the research of Dr. Howard Stevenson to understand how we can not only cope with our own racial stress, but support students with comebacks and micro-interventions (D.W. Sue, 2010) to resist racial bias and stereotypes that get in the way of healthy relationships. This also allows us to think about the intersection of gender and race and how the relationship *between* these identities creates a more nuanced understanding of achievement and school belonging (K. Crenshaw, 1989).

Teachers and administrators learn how to leverage their sphere of influence to anticipate, practice, and assess strategies for affirming students across a range of identities. We embrace the value of *not* defending our intentions - we have done that for too long. Our goal is to live in a world of outcomes, where despite our best intentions, things are happening to children and adults that are not fair and will not promote academic excellence or achievement. So, we have created a space where educators can roll up their sleeves and think together on how we can be both knowledgeable about particular aspects of identity and have skills to eliminate barriers to success that often exist in either/or approaches.

Finally, we have developed a collaborative leadership model where we approach our work to make our schools more equitable with great humility. And we use some humor along the way — challenging the stereotype of diversity work as somber, heavy, and punitive. While the

issues we address are quite serious, our approach emphasizes curiosity, love of learning, and directness of purpose and strategy. Our process is not to blame or shame schools into challenging prejudice and discrimination. Our purpose is to merge the best research in the field with practitioners who sit side by side with children every day. In doing so, we know we will not only affirm the spectrum, but be effective advocates for change and growth.



Elizabeth Denevi is the Associate Director for Mid West Educational Collaborative, a non-profit agency that works with schools nationally to increase equity, promote diversity pedagogy, and implement strategic processes for growth and development. Previously, she served as Director of Studies & Professional Development at Latin School of Chicago. She is the program director for the CATDC's summer institute, [Equity as Excellence](#), a unique three-day program for California educators to receive concrete tools, research-based strategies, and guided practice to support equity and inclusion work in their schools.

References:

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Willis Hawley & Rebecca Wolf, "[Diversity Responsive Schools.](#)" Southern Poverty Law Center, 2012.