

# Equity Dispatch

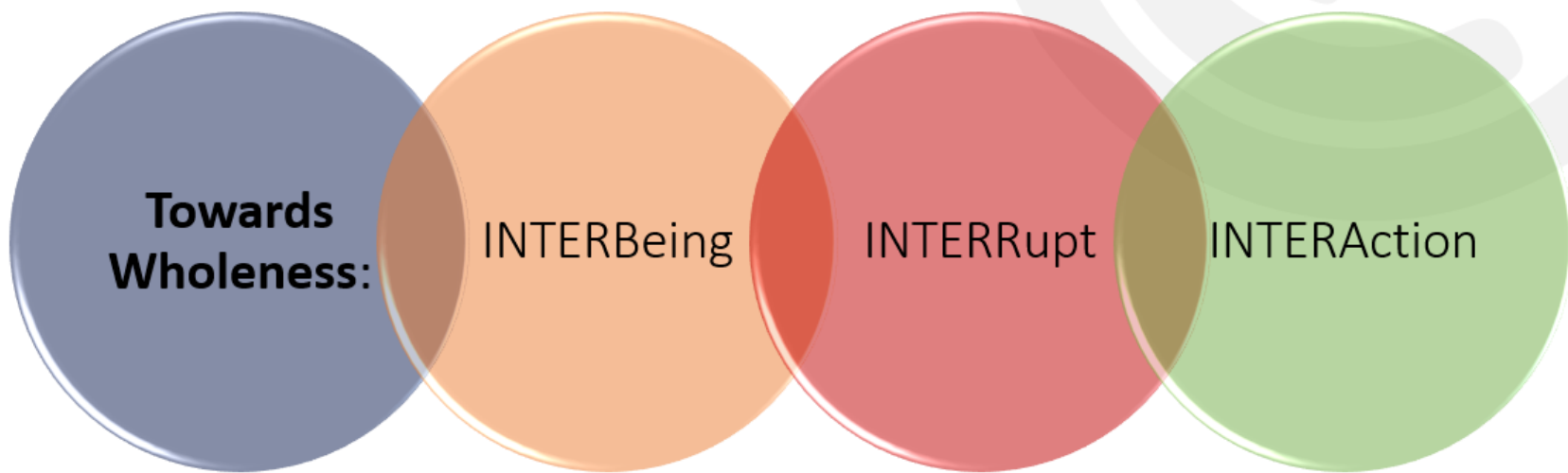
## Special Issue

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**Did You Know | Why It Matters | For Equity Now**

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### Centering BodyMindSpirit in Equitable Education: Towards Pedagogies of Wholeness



*[Graphic image description: Four overlapping circles representing the MAP Center's Pedagogical Framework of Wholeness. Each circle has a phrase or word in it, from left to right: Towards Wholeness; INTERBeing; INTERRupt; and INTERAction.]*

**[Educators] who embrace the challenge of self-actualization will be better able to create pedagogical practices that engage students, providing them with ways of knowing that enhance their capacity to live fully and deeply.**

**- hooks, 1994, p. 22**

# Centering BodyMindSpirit in Equitable Education: Towards Pedagogies of Wholeness

## Did You Know?

### Cumulative, Collective Trauma Matters in Schools



*[Image description: People of various racial/ethnic backgrounds, ages, and gender expressions having a group conversation.]*

Daily, educators and students experience harm from cascading and collective trauma (Skelton, personal communication, 2022) via the **COVID-19 global pandemic, economic recession, race-based violence against BIPOC and religious minoritized communities, and extreme weather catastrophes** (Silver et al., 2021). For example, educators across the country have lost jobs for lessons linked to discussing race/racism, or efforts to address educational racial inequities (Elbeshbishi, 2021). BIPOC educators report mistreatment at work by their white colleagues, and being undercompensated for additional labor they are asked to take up (Dixon, 2021). Educators who identify as LGBTQ+ felt as though their jobs were at risk if they were out, reported experiencing harassment, and perceived their school community was unsafe (Wright & Smith, 2015). Finally, dis/abled teachers have been discriminated against, isolated or excluded because of their disability (Hauk, 2010; Manderson, 2018).

These traumas impact students, too. We know that schools serving mostly students of Color have lower quality or fewer resources than schools serving largely white populations, even within the same district (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Students of Color who identify as LGBTQ+ experienced higher frequencies of victimization than white LGBTQ+ students, based on race/ethnicity (Kosciw et al., 2016). Finally, the pandemic has exacerbated longstanding disparities along class, race, and access to resources in disinvested communities, including during extreme weather events (Youki, 2020).

### Trauma Related to the COVID -19 Global Pandemic

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic rapidly spread globally, overwhelming hospitals,

overtaxing healthcare workers, and resulting in over 1 million deaths worldwide in 10 months. In the same period, within months, severe restrictions to limit the spread of infection left thousands of businesses closed and over 40,000,000 Americans unemployed. These crises hit low socioeconomic status and minoritized communities especially hard, highlighting economic and racial inequities in healthcare and essential services provision (Silver et al., 2021).

### **Hate-Based Trauma**

As a country, we have faced a confluence of collective traumas, compounded by race-based historical traumas and intergenerational trauma (Administration for Children and Families, n.d.) in the form of brutal killings of unarmed Black people. Further, increases in hate crimes and racially motivated acts of aggression against Black people, Asians, Jewish, Muslim, Latina/o/x, and other POC, LGBTQIA+ communities, as well as racist and sexist sociopolitical rhetoric have led to marginalizing legislation and policies, book bans, violent school board meetings, bomb threats at HBCUs, and mass shootings.

### **Extreme Weather Trauma**

Simultaneously, the U.S. has faced extreme weather events, including devastating hurricanes, record heatwaves, and disastrous wildfires requiring evacuations made more complicated during an unrelenting pandemic that required physical distancing. There are several characteristics of the current milieu that facilitate a perfect storm of stressors. These traumas are chronic events with an ambiguous endpoint. We do not know how bad things will get, nor when recovery can truly begin. Individuals must grapple with intense direct exposure to cascading events (e.g., personal illness or loss, social isolation, economic loss, violent policing), with varying and sometimes conflicting policies dictating public response (Silver et al., 2021).

Additionally, many of these events have been broadcast in real time, as they unfolded, on traditional and social media, with individuals watching news coverage repeatedly and across multiple mediums, compounding their exposure. The overlay of sensationalized media coverage, in the context of repeated direct exposure to adversity, is likely creating an additional crisis for public mental health (Silver et al., 2021).

### **School-Based Trauma**

Further, these traumas are amplified and/or compounded in schools—the sites where trauma should be addressed (Alim et al., 2017; Kosciw et al., 2016), but often are themselves a site of violence, where young people become disembodied from their own righteous rage and resilience (Duncan-Andrade, 2009), and teachers learn to silence their own needs to fully serve their students (Hydon et al., 2015), resulting in school-based trauma—and disproportionately impacting educators and students who are minoritized (Ginwright, 2015). School-based trauma, or when educators and students can be traumatized in school by

oppressive policies, instructional and curricular practices, and structures (Gafney, 2019; Kumashiro, 2015) is deeply prevalent in the U.S. educational system, and is designed to benefit some and oppress others (Jones, 2017).

For example:

- Policy:
  - ◇ Schools with a larger percentage of Black students are more likely to have more punitive discipline policies, and use harsher disciplinary practices, than other schools—regardless of levels of misbehavior and delinquency (Welch & Payne, 2010).
  - ◇ Students in schools located in dis-invested communities are less likely to receive coursework targeted at grade appropriate standards, reflect higher-level cognitive demand, and are meaningfully engaging and relevant (Santos & Haycock, 2016; U.S. Department of Education, 2016).
  - ◇ U.S. history textbooks offer a romanticized view of the Europeans' experience in the United States, whereas most of the experiences of Native Americans and/or Africans are either misrepresented or underrepresented (Loewen, 2007).
- Practice:
  - ◇ Oppression originates in discourse (i.e., verbal, written, and graphical), and in the citation and repetition of harmful discourses about minoritized groups, which frame how people think, feel, act, and interact (Kumashiro, 2015).
  - ◇ Black middle-school and high-school boys are more likely to be thought of as troublemakers, and their misbehavior more severe, than white peers for exactly the same behavior (Jarvis & Okonofua, 2020).
  - ◇ Experimental research has found that the “achievement gap” discourse contributes to racial bias and to overall stereotypes regarding academics and race (Quinn, 2020).
- Structure:
  - ◇ Tracking, also referred to as ability-grouping, stratifies opportunities to learn, limiting the more beneficial opportunities to high-track students and thereby denying these benefits to lower-tracked students, and generally plays out in a discriminatory way, segregating students by race and socio-economic status (Mathis, 2013).
  - ◇ Oppression originates from the promotion and reinforcement of partial knowledge/story due to exclusion, invisibility, and silence, or distorted because of disparagement, denigration, and marginalization of the histories, cultural practices, and identities of minorized groups in both the formal (e.g., planned lesson, objectives, textbooks, workbooks, and resources) and hidden curricula

(e.g., implicit academic, social, and cultural messages, unwritten rules and unspoken expectations, and unofficial norms, behaviors and values of the dominant -culture context in which all teaching and learning is situated) (Boston University Teaching Writing, 2021; Kumashiro, 2015).

- ◇ Deficit-based discursive themes dominate informal “teacher talk,” or casual, everyday teacher discourse about students perceived to be racially or culturally “different” (Pollack, 2012).

Together, the combination of medical, economic, racial and climate-based catastrophes, coupled with the recurring trauma in schools, highlights the need for attention to the meaning and implications of cumulative, compounding trauma exposure, and the impact on both our educators and our youth’s *bodymindspirit* health. Bodymindspirit refers to the intricate and often inseparable relationship between the body and the mind, and how these two units act as one. The term bodymind [and/or bodymindspirit] considers the physiological, psychic, and spiritual connections between the state of the body and that of the mind (Price, 2011).

# Why it Matters?

Pedagogies of Wholeness Provide Direct Responses to Our Cumulative, Collective Trauma



***[Graphic image description: Eight hexagonal shapes with words and phrases in them. They are: a photo of a sign on a door that says “closed due to COVID-19;” racism and heterosexism; the COVID pandemic; sign that says “I stand for justice,” with other signs around it that say, “Black Lives Matter,” “We stand against racism,” and “enough injustice;” state and local education policies protest against anti-racism and gender discrimination efforts; mass shootings; a photo of a protest with one perceivable sign reading, “facts not feelings;” and a photo of a protest, with a person holding a sign that reads, “prevent mass shootings.”]***

Asset pedagogies such as student-centered learning (Felder & Brent, 1996; McCombs, 2001; Weimer, 2002), universal design for learning (National Center for Universal Design for Learning, 2011; Waitoller & Thorius, 2016), culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogy (Alim et al., 2017; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2014; Paris & Alim, 2014), social justice education (Bell, 2007), and abolitionist teaching (Love, 2019) all frame teaching and learning as deeply contextual, combat systemic structures of harm and power differentials, and demand shifting one’s gaze away from student performance, to adult behavior and belief sets. This change starts with the educator critically reflecting on their own practices, beliefs, biases, and identity. When an educator can do this, they are not only able to refine their practices through a lens of personal truth, but they invite the student to do the same. They serve as a role model of personal acceptance and give permission to and, in some instances, demand the same high level of self-knowledge and love in those around them (Filkins, 2016). This then serves to more authentically rehumanize students—particularly those who have been historically dehumanized in the endeavor of teaching and learning—by starting with



changing oneself in relation to changing one's education system. To counter these effects, we can employ Pedagogies of Wholeness, which are a form of asset pedagogies that provide direct responses to the cumulative and collective traumas both educators and students are experiencing both in and outside the classroom.

Pedagogies of Wholeness explore approaches to take back the many ways of knowing we hold in our bodies, minds, and spirits, and channel them into new ways that embrace the full humanity of young people at the margins, and the teachers who serve them, to heal from personal and collective pain (Rendón, 2012). As hooks (1994) asserts, wholeness is “the action of being ‘whole’ human beings, striving not just for knowledge in books, but knowledge about how to live in the world” (pp. 14-15).

Explicitly, **Pedagogies of Wholeness** aim to:

- Reclaim the bodymindspirit over solely privileging the mind
- Stay present in the bodymindspirit as both a knower of harm, and channels healing for teachers and students
- Value and make room for contemplation and deep examination
- Design learning experiences for interconnectedness of self & others
- Advance communication and interaction that supports erasure of binary thinking and organizing to embracing hybridity
- Actively collapse roles of student and teacher
- Honor and reward individual and collective agency for deconstructing oppression and colonization (Asher, 2003, p. 238)
- Consistently connect the past, present, and future
- Consistently connect classroom and life experiences
- Collectively work to create conditions for deep connection toward being fully acknowledged, perceived, and understood across multiple and intersectional identities
- Center the identities, cultures, and locations of both educators and students
- Demand educators take up a self-reflexive posture
- Create conditions for shifts in consciousness in and out of the classroom (hooks, 1996, p. 292)

Cariaga's (2018) definition of Pedagogies of Wholeness is instructive here:

[P]edagogies of wholeness are not just about teaching. Rather, it is a way of being, relating, learning, teaching, and knowing that embraces our wholeness—of bodymindspirit, of our collective bodies in the classroom and beyond, and the inextricable connection between the past, present, and future. It is a willingness to stay present in the body, to a full range of pain, numbness and joy, and to build deep relationship with others, so that we can uncover a reservoir of wisdom and power.



Honoring care for the self and community, it is an interdependent, reciprocal kind of teaching and learning that makes space for the needs of students and teacher. Pedagogies of wholeness are founded on a critical compassion that holds concern for young people's suffering, while holding a critique of the systems of oppression that lies at the root of their pain. Healing comes from not just fighting against the material violence and dominant narratives we seek to dismantle, but more importantly from creating a world of freedom and possibility we seek to live in. From the way we relate to students, to the curriculum we design, to the kinds of knowing we draw from, to the way we show up in our classrooms, pedagogies of wholeness create the right connections and understandings to feel fully seen, heard, and understood. (p. 145)

Pedagogies of Wholeness integrate critical literacies (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008), socio-emotional literacy practices, and critical healing literacies to help educators and students shift from being subjected to false dominant narratives, to becoming the subjects of their own life-affirming narratives. In turn, educators and students are able to lessen the weight of grief and anger, and ultimately move in the world—not from habits of fear, shame or lack, but from a deep sense of knowing, conviction, and compassion for themselves and their communities.



# For Equity Now!

## Mending the BodyMindSpirit: Toward Pedagogies of Wholeness



*[Image description: People of various racial/ethnic backgrounds, ages, and gender expressions having a group conversation.]*

*The MAP Center's Pedagogical Framework of Wholeness*<sup>1</sup> may be instructive for you, your teams, and school community specifically in everyday, moment-to-moment interactions, as well as broadly in considerations of systems change via people, policy, and practices (Skelton, 2012). Please leverage the three components of the Framework, with corresponding reflective prompts and resources, to begin and/or continue systems change for wholeness in your school community:

**INTERBeing** – Developing and cultivating knowledge of the self and community | Building awareness of the self as connected to the community | Caring for the self and the community | Transforming systems towards deep knowing of self | Transforming systems towards deep engagement and noticing of self | Fundamentally shifting manifestations of power

### Reflective Questions

- What are my identities?
- What identities do I take pride in?
- What identities am I cautious about?
- What identities have most dominantly impacted my sense of self?
- What identities have had less impact on my sense of self?

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<sup>1</sup>The MAP Center's Pedagogical Framework of Wholeness pulls from contemplative practice (Hanh, 1992); interbeing (Asher, 2003); the bodymind (Price, 2011, 2014); sentipensante (sensing/thinking) pedagogy (Rendón, 2012); engaged pedagogy (hooks, 1990, 1994, 1996); connected teaching (Alim et al., 1986; Miller, 1997; Palmer, 1988); cosmic pedagogy (Stephenson, 2013); educator wellness and student mental health (Cox et al., 2018; Dillard, 2019; Kumashiro, 2015); ten principles of disability justice (Berne et al., 2018); Red Pedagogy (Grande, 2004); rightful presence (Tan et al., 2019; Yeh et al., 2021); and anti-oppressive education (Freire, 1982; Kumashiro, 2000).

- How do my identities shape the way I approach and value community?
- How do my identities impact my experiences of teaching and learning?
- What identities are valued in my school community?
- What identities are not valued in my school community?
- What identities in my school community experience the most harm? The least?

### Resources

- [Equity Dispatch: Becoming an Equity-Oriented Educator Through Critical Self-Reflection](#)
- [Equity Digest: Transforming the Concepts of Community and Self-Care](#)
- [Equity Express: Radical Self and Community Care](#)

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**INTERRupt** – Disrupting deficit narratives and mis/disinformation | Re-inserting asset-based narratives and perspectives | Welcoming and honoring the complexity of ideologies | Surfacing longstanding erasures of nondominant knowledges, histories, languages, religions, and cultures | Rejecting the hierarchy of mind as dominant | Reinserting the bodymindspirit as whole

### Reflective Questions

- Within conversations in my school community:
  - ◊ How are people classified?
  - ◊ What (or whom) is being opposed or contrasted?
  - ◊ Who or what is higher or lower in status?
  - ◊ Who is the insider or outsider (Adapted from Briscoe et al., 2009)?
  - ◊ Who is the subject of contempt and pity and who is not (Paris & Alim, 2014)?
- Am I using people-first language and/or identity-first language in asset-focused ways?
- Am I using deficit-based language to define people and groups?
- Do I place the purpose of my work around closing “gaps,” or around improving policies, capacities, and practices to be more responsive to all students?

### Resources

- [Equity Dispatch: The Transformative Power of Language](#)
- [Equity Digest: Recognizing Difference ≠ Being Divisive: Why Disrupting Oppression is Necessary](#)
- [Equity Lab: Interrupting Microaggressions: A Professional Learning Study Lab](#)
- [Equity Tool: Key Actions for Transformative Leadership in K-12 Athletics](#)
- [Equity Tool: Key Superintendent Actions for Staying the Course Towards Equitable Outcomes for All](#)

**INTERAction** – Advancing collective decision-making and leadership | Centering those intersectionally closest to the issue | Realizing cross-movement solidarity and collective liberation (Berne et al., 2018)

### Reflective Questions

- When making decisions in my school community:
  - ◊ Are team configurations considered?
  - ◊ Are there discussion on who will participate, and how recruitment will occur?
  - ◊ Is there consideration on how will visibility and awareness of the opportunity for all stakeholders be ensured?
  - ◊ To what extent do we value diverse representation of the learning community on decision making teams?
- Are our governing boards reflective of the demographic of our student bodies? If not, why not?
- What repair and restoration may need to take place for stakeholder groups that the school community has historically and systematically harmed in decision-making practices?
- Are there responsive and diverse ways for all stakeholders to make their ideas and voices known?
- Are we intentional about removing barriers in communication, dissemination, location and time selection, accessibility, and physical and digital interaction?
- Have we developed group norms, roles, consensus building, and transparent decision-making protocols?
- How have we ensured the voices and perspectives of historically under-represented groups are central in decision-making?

### Resources

- [Equity Brief: Promoting Socially-Just, Evidence-Based Practice](#)
- [Equity Tool: Including All Stakeholders in Critical Collaborative Inquiry Cycles](#)
- [Equity Dispatch: Parents/Caregivers as Authentic Partners in Education](#)
- [Equity Brief: Critical Language Styleguide](#)
- [Equity Tool: Equity-Oriented Policy Review Process Guide](#)

In closing, by: 1) developing and cultivating knowledge of the self and community, 2) building awareness of the self as connected to the community, 3) welcoming and honoring the complexity of ideologies in one's school community while surfacing longstanding erasures of nondominant knowledges, and 4) advancing collective decision-making and leadership centering those intersectionally closest to the issue, we better position and authentically engage our respective school communities to recognize, surface, and sustain equitable change through a prism of love, dignity, trust, belonging, and wholeness.

This *Equity Dispatch* is dedicated to all educators and education stakeholders who have been displaced, and their lives and labors towards educational equity fundamentally interrupted, due to the COVID-19 global pandemic, economic recession, race-based violence against BIPOC and religious minoritized communities, and extreme weather catastrophes (Silver et al., 2021).

**This Special issue of Equity Dispatch was written and edited  
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## **About the Midwest & Plains Equity Assistance Center**

The mission of the Midwest & Plains Equity Assistance Center is to ensure equity in student access to and participation in high quality, research-based education by expanding states' and school systems' capacity to provide robust, effective opportunities to learn for all students, regardless of and responsive to race, sex, and national origin, and to reduce disparities in educational outcomes among and between groups. The Equity by Design briefs series is intended to provide vital background information and action steps to support educators and other equity advocates as they work to create positive educational environments for all children. For more information, visit <http://www.greatlakesequity.org>.

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## **Disclaimer**

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