



HERE WE GO

Suzanne Bouffard

To know who our students and colleagues are — what they value, what they hope for and fear, what moves them — we have to listen.

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LISTENING IS A POWERFUL TOOL TO DISRUPT INEQUITY

As you read the articles in the following pages, it is my hope that you will not think of this as an “equity issue” of the journal. That’s because equity is embedded in every issue of *The Learning Professional*.

According to columnist Baruti Kafele, equity means meeting every student where they are, as they are. We strive to continually provide resources and reflection tools to help you fulfill that vision for all students. And we believe that educators are students, too — lifelong students — so we also strive to meet each of you where you are, as you are.

Looking back through recent issues of the journal, some themes recur frequently about dismantling inequity. One of them, which really shines through in the current issue, is about a seemingly simple but surprisingly complex skill: listening.

This issue’s authors challenge us to step back and really listen to others’ perspectives, especially when their words are hard to hear, and they give us some tips to help us do just that.

Deep listening is essential for the asset-based approach several authors encourage us to take with students and colleagues. An asset-based approach means seeing strengths, rather than deficiencies, and building from them. We can’t do that work without listening and learning. As Kafele said in his keynote at our recent Annual Conference, we can’t meet students where they are and as they are if we don’t know who they are. The same is true for staff and colleagues. And to know who our students and colleagues are — what they value, what they hope for and fear, what moves them — we have to listen.

Discomfort is a common and often necessary part of confronting inequity and redressing it, as many authors in this and previous issues point out. It can be tempting to revert to defensiveness and dismissiveness instead of listening to understand. Jacobē Bell encourages us to avoid that temptation and lean into the discomfort. She shares specific strategies for how to navigate difficult conversations, including receiving student feedback, such as taking an equity pause and using an Oops and Ouch protocol.

Requesting and listening to feedback is an essential part of upending the status quo. Kimberly Hinton and James T. Schwartz describe feedback for growth as one way to engage in deep listening, and they include it as one of four pillars for anti-racist leadership. George S. Perry Jr., Joan Richardson, and Tiffany Shockley Jackson point out that it is an essential strategy for equity-focused professional learning.

Aaliyah Baker and Nina F. Weisling show us how stories and narratives, even hypothetical ones, can help us hone our listening and reflection skills. They provide vignettes with reflection questions designed to help educators develop cultural competence.

Bruce King and colleagues talk about how they have created a space for educators to listen to Indigenous voices about how to tap into cultural wisdom and teach Indigenous history accurately.

On the topic of listening and learning, I want to express the deep gratitude of *The Learning Professional* staff and readers to the 2022 guest columnists — Nader Twal, Jennifer Abrams, and Baruti Kafele. They have opened our ears, minds, and hearts to invaluable perspectives about equity, leadership, growth, and other aspects of professional learning. They have modeled collaboration and commitment to growth and encouraged the same in all of us.

In this issue, they prompt us to keep listening and learning: to seek understanding in the service of “rewriting false narratives” (p. 14), to ask “Am I honoring the experience and wisdom of our African American educators?” (p. 17), and to “stretch at our edges to be in conversation” with one another to ensure humanity in our work (p. 16). We look forward to ongoing collaboration and continuing to learn from them — and all of you. ■