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Please enjoy this complimentary excerpt from *Serving Educational Equity*.

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INTRODUCTION

In many ways, this book is over 20 years in the making, initiated from a friendship and mentorship in St. Louis, Missouri. Our journey as veteran educators, who have coached, mentored, and taught countless school leaders, teachers, and students in districts across the country, led us to believe that we need to reimagine how we guide students to educational excellence. For years, educators have asked for a playbook of resources to help them better meet their students' academic foundational needs and help prepare them for a more inclusive society. Educators' desire for sound teaching practices and learning strategies fed our passion for creating a comprehensive book of evidence-based techniques, practical approaches, and effective methods to address unfinished learning and promote equity engagement. This book provides instructional leaders and coaches with a sound theoretical framework for addressing unfinished learning and teaching.

Serving Educational Equity is rooted in tenets of equity, accelerated teaching, and a “whole child” approach to student learning and engagement. We believe that to embrace equity as an avenue to learning acceleration our schools must provide systems, supportive environments, productive instructional strategies, and social and emotional development so that learners can persevere as they engage in meaningful learning experiences. Therefore, the book draws on the theoretical principles outlined in the Science of Learning Development (**SoLD**) principles (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). The *Science of Learning and Development (SoLD) Principles* serve as the theoretical framework for our work because they focus on the academic, cognitive, ethical, physical, psychological, and social-emotional development of the whole child. Furthermore, as we explore the connections between equity and learning, throughout this book, we embrace the following concepts on how people learn effectively from the Learning Policy Institute (Darling-Hammond & Edgerton, 2021):

The brain is always developing as a product of relationships and experiences.

- Learning is social, emotional, and academic.
- Students' perceptions of their own ability and their level of trust in their environment influence learning.
- Supportive, developmental relationships are the most effective antidote to trauma. (The Learning Policy Institute, 2021)

The National Equity Project (2022) defines *educational equity as helping each child receive what they need to develop to their full academic and social potential. Working towards equity in schools involves ensuring equally high outcomes for all participants within the educational system, removing the predictability of success or failures that currently correlates with any social or cultural factor. Specifically, it means interrupting inequitable practices, examining biases, creating inclusive multicultural school environments for adults and children, and discovering and cultivating every human's unique gifts, talents, and interests.*

Serving Educational Equity serves as a resource for persons interested in accelerating and advancing the educational needs of all learners. Acceleration may be defined as “preparing students for new learning and getting them ready for success in the present” and does not concentrate on a litany of items that students have failed to master (Pepper-Rollins, 2014). We discuss the importance of connecting our “why” to student equity, excellence, and acceleration.

To effectively accelerate student learning, educators will want to understand and address the needs of the whole child. The Learning Policy Institute (2022) defines a “*whole child*” education as *prioritizing the full scope of a child's developmental needs to advance educational equity and ensure that every child reaches their fullest potential. A whole child approach understands that students' education and life outcomes depend upon their access to more profound learning opportunities in and out of school and their school environment and relationships.*

Serving Educational Equity is needed because school officials desire to advance students' learning as a matter of educational equity. Our book is unique in that we connect equity and acceleration as primary elements in advancing students' learning. This book offers a practical approach to educational equity that starts with self-reflection and transitions to relevant action. We offer educators what they have desired: a clear approach rooted in scientifically based practices to advancing students' learning. In our experiences around the country, we have found that despite different locations and communities, the issues were the same; each educator at the school and leader level wanted strategies for helping students find success. Unfortunately, many educators sought the nonrealistic vision of quick fixes or silver bullets. Instead, it was apparent that careful consideration of evidence-based, situational strategies, data, and strategic planning can make a difference. As we worked alongside teachers and leaders, it became clear that the work of equity lies in assessing the school for situational awareness and in self-reflection on what is possible. It is for these reasons

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Serving Educational Equity was written. We wish to provide a menu for others interested in embarking upon the journey of educational equity for every child.

THE DRIVING FORCE: START WITH THE “WHY”

In 2009, Simon Sinek started a movement to inspire people to start with their “why” to embrace adaptive change. In his best-selling book, *Starting With the Why*, Simon Sinek reminds us that our “why” is the purpose, cause, or belief that helps us do what we need to do to make change (Sinek, 2009). Since then, millions of people have been touched by his theory. Traditionally, educators start with the “what” and the “how” of teaching and learning. Transformational change at the reimagined teaching and learning level must come from our “why” and a deep place within us, a place we hold close when the going gets tough. Our motivation for educational excellence is the driving force for our “why.” Every student deserves educators who want them to excel and achieve at high levels. That is why we wrote this book, to offer practical strategies that support educators as they engage in the work of equity and acceleration of teaching and learning.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Sonya Murray-Darden

My “why” has evolved throughout my experience serving students in numerous educational settings as a professional developer, classroom teacher, leadership coach, reading specialist, administrator, and researcher. But no experience shaped my why, like losing my former student who was shot and killed in Ferguson, Missouri. His death would spark public protests, social unrest, and outrage within my community and beyond, forcing much-needed conversations across the country about the role of social justice in schools.

Mike was a gentle soul who loved mathematics and was part of my reading club. There was much in the news media about his tragedy, but what I knew as his former teacher was that he loved mathematics even after graduating from high school. I wanted to think the teaching and learning he received and the information I poured into him as a student influenced his love of mathematics. Ironically, his tragedy occurred the same day I graduated from college with an advanced degree, causing me to reflect deeply on the external and internal influences of teaching and learning and my personal “why.” As I pondered the many sacrifices of my parents and teachers and Mike’s tragedy, I concluded that equity is about using education as a vessel to change lives. The educators I encountered influenced my life trajectory and educational experiences. My path began as a student in an urban school district with teachers who cared and provided the foundational learning I needed to succeed, but I didn’t live in an area where schools were “considered” the best. My parents decided to transition my siblings and me to a desegregated school by eighth grade, riding a school bus for nearly an hour each way to a new school community. This community was very different from where I was raised and was considered “a better educational opportunity.”

As I traveled across town to a school that offered more opportunities and access, the program offerings were better, but I felt isolated. I was invisible. The experience helped me understand the difference between “intent” and “impact.” The school was challenging and rich in experiences, intending to diversify educational experiences for all students by offering more opportunities, yet the impact was a stifled voice. I quickly learned that serving equity requires elevating the voice of the underserved, choosing the right curriculum, understanding the impact of external influences, building relationships, and reflecting on the instructional decisions we implement when we elevate students’ possibilities.

Ultimately, I founded Equity Matters Consulting, a consulting company focused on helping educators advance education by giving students a voice and a seat at the table. Our team focuses on adult learning theory to disrupt the status quo in schools and organizations using a practical, inspirational approach. I began testing parts of the serving educational equity framework with practitioners over the past few years. I assembled strategies from our recent day-to-day consulting experiences with schools and organizations to offer as best practices in this book.

Educational equity shines a spotlight on our expectations and asks us to reflect on how we hinder or elevate opportunities for students to have a better life. We should center a vision of excellence for every child, no matter their zip code, background, or linguistic ability. Our book supports practitioners with resources to operationalize educational equity using actionable practices that ensure educational equity for all students.



Gwendolyn Y. Turner

As an educator who has worked in numerous educational settings: classroom teacher, substitute teacher, reading specialist, adult educator, administrator, educational consultant, teacher educator, college professor, and researcher, I have learned to respect both the teaching and learning process. One can expect culturally, linguistically, and academically diverse students in any educational setting. My career as an educator started in a rural area and later with migrant populations, where very few economic advancement opportunities were

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available for families. These families taught me the importance of resiliency and the timeliness of quality, relevant educational experiences that allowed students to acquire problem-solving, reasoning, and critical thinking tools. These tools are essential in both academic and general life. We did not have time to waste on meaningless or irrelevant learning activities because a quality educational experience would be a ticket to greater life opportunities. When I started working with educators and visiting classrooms in Bolivia and Brazil, I realized that quality education does not just prepare students to complete school assignments but prepares them for all of their life experiences as adults, parents, employees, and citizens. In America, we take education for granted, but my experiences in schools and classrooms in South Africa and Thailand reinforced my belief that education changes lives. We serve students best by honoring their voices, acknowledging their identities, and valuing their life experiences. Students who receive quality education have many more life opportunities than those who receive an inferior education. Too often we provide the best educational resources, activities, and experiences for those already advantaged students. Equity is a lens that educators can use to ensure all students reach their full potential. I respect the teaching and learning process. I believe that quality education improves the quality of one's life. Lastly, I believe that as an educator, I can help students improve their life trajectories.

As I worked in suburban and urban educational settings, I realized that students enter a classroom expecting to learn, be engaged, and have their opinions and voices heard. My beliefs, practices, and actions can profoundly impact the learning success of students regardless of their academic abilities, cultural background, or linguistic ability. We are not helping students complete assignments for class; we are assisting students with the tools they need for success in their lives. This is why I have embraced educational equity throughout my career. I believe that educational equity provides opportunities for all students to soar academically.

Our work as educators is to help students acquire the tools they need for both careers and life. Therefore, we must provide instruction that meets students' academic and social needs. Respecting the rights of students to experience rich, meaningful learning experiences has been the cornerstone of my work as an educator. This is a lesson I have embraced in my work in this country and as a visiting instructor in Bolivia, Brazil, Thailand, and South Africa. Students want to learn and experience success while learning. All students deserve intellectually challenging, relevant, and engaging learning activities in a supportive environment. Education is still the key that unlocks opportunities for students now and in their futures.

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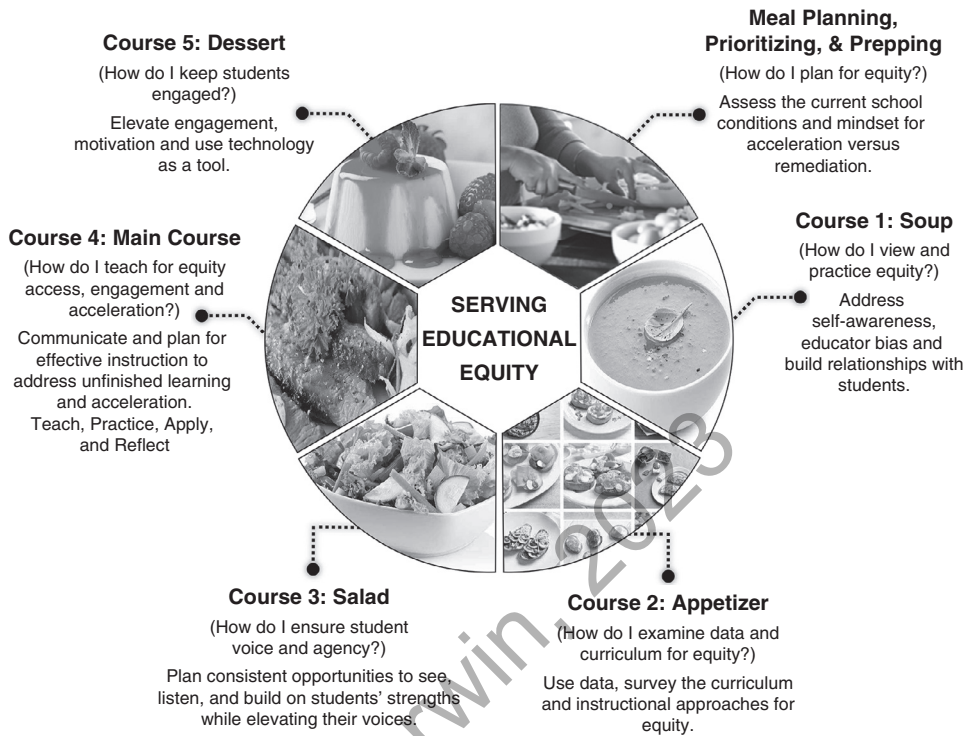
OUTLINE OF THE BOOK

The analogy to planning a multicourse meal is used as the book's organizational format, offering comprehensive resources and multiple entry points for readers desiring educational equity. See Figure I.1. The design presents the authors' recipe for reimagining teaching and learning, ensuring students' educational equity and accelerated learning by utilizing an analogy for meal planning. Each chapter begins with a real-life scenario or issue that educators face in providing effective instruction and educational support for their students. In addition, each chapter is arranged so that the reader reflects on instructional and organizational challenges that serve as barriers to advancing academic excellence. We recognize the real-world complexities of schools and classrooms.

The multicourse framework to Equity and Acceleration we offer provides educators with a simple, memorable menu to accelerate all students' learning as a matter of equity. Each chapter summarizes the content as a course or phase, offers research and best practices, a scenario, and reflective questioning for readers that concludes with planning resources. Lists of resources are included at the end of each chapter and in the appendix. The content can be utilized at the classroom, building, and system levels. The multicourse approach functions: (a) To guide reimagination and instructional recovery efforts through a lens of educational equity. (b) To push the acceleration of students' learning as a more practical approach for addressing unfinished learning rather than remediation. (c) To aid efforts in meeting the academic needs of *all learners*.

Each chapter presents the planning, instruction, background, concepts, theoretical framework, methods, approaches, techniques, and evaluation strategies for implementing change and accelerating learning in the classroom. The chapters are organized as a menu of phases for planning, instructing, evaluating, and reflecting. Chapter 1: We ask the reader to embrace acceleration by assessing their current state of educational equity using a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis of learning acceleration. Chapter 2: The reader reflects on best practices and the role relationships play in addressing trauma and socioemotional awareness in children. Chapter 3: The readers think about their curriculum and data strategy to address learning acceleration. Chapter 4: We raise the importance of recognizing students' voices for diversity and equity. Chapter 5 is analogous to the main course in meal planning, suggesting effective research-based

Figure I.1 • Murray and Turner’s (2021) Five-Course Framework for Accelerated Learning



instructional strategies and pedagogy for implementing effective instruction. The SoLD principles serve as the research base for our suggested ideas. We share pedagogical practices to ensure foundational readiness, address unfinished teaching and learning, and implement effective instruction. Chapter 6: The dessert chapter asks leaders to promote, expand, and reflect on engagement and to motivate all students in the digital world. We provide readily available digital applications and tools that educators can immediately use in classrooms for 21st-century readiness. Finally, in the Epilogue, we think together about how we can ensure the framework serves as a menu for equipping educators with equitable practices within the school and classroom. We chronicle a leader’s experience in real-time as he navigates the complexities of ensuring educational equity in his school community.

SCENARIOS

We provide short anecdotes and scenarios to help others see themselves and their school situations within the complexities of ensuring educational equity in

real time. They are composites of the teachers, principals, and others who have invited us into their learning spaces over the years. Their names and identifying characteristics were changed.

- **Stop and Reflect**—a set of reminders, situations, and reflections on how educators can use these practices in their own classrooms
- **Take Action**—a set of applications that teachers and instructional leaders can use and apply in their own classroom and school settings
- **Chapter Summary**—a set of major ideas from each chapter
- **Time to Dig In Tools**—a set of resources and tools for implementing educational equity

WHO IS THE BOOK FOR?

We wrote this book for two main audiences:

Classroom teachers: Most teachers are challenged by the recent disruptions in teaching and learning. The book provides teachers with resources, evidence-based strategies, and pedagogy to promote educational equity and address unfinished teaching and learning. In addition, we offer practical methods for connecting theory to on-the-ground teaching practices grounded in effective research-based practices. *Serving Educational Equity* is designed to support teachers' desire to address educational equity and student achievement as culturally responsive educators. An individual teacher can use the book as part of a professional learning community. This book is designed for educators, whether teachers, curriculum specialists, principals, or counselors. We are referring to all educators when using the term "teacher."

Instructional leaders and coaches: Instructional leaders and coaches are responsible for providing ongoing professional development, coaching, and instructional support in addressing the teacher challenges in real time. They are charged with delivering evidence-based, authentic practices and approaches to address unfinished teaching and learning issues. In addition, they serve as instructional experts who introduce teachers to quality resources, techniques, and methodology.

WHAT THIS BOOK IS AND WHAT IT IS NOT

This book is not a how-to guide with a prescriptive methodology; instead, it is written to provide multiple entry points to educators as they embark on a journey of equity and excellence for every child. The *Serving Educational Equity*

frame is not a prescriptive program; it should instead be situated within the school or district context, allowing the data to speak to an educator's course of action to serve educational equity for instructional recovery.

The book embraces a mindset shift and a way of thinking that involves personal reflection on ensuring success for every child while removing biases and previous notions that could influence teaching. We agree with Barbara Blackburn (2020) that we must create learning environments that support rigor by ensuring that (a) each student is expected to learn at high levels, (b) each student is offered the support needed to achieve at high levels, and (c) each student actually demonstrates learning at high levels. As educators, we must provide classrooms where high expectations and the support needed for students to achieve at high levels should be offered to all children, no matter *their* ability level. Because low expectations turn into self-fulfilling prophecies of low academic performances, we must start with our mindsets and perceptions about the students we serve. For example, teachers who stigmatize certain students may modify how they teach, evaluate, and advise them, leading to poor educational outcomes for stigmatized students (Ferguson, 2003). Barbara Blackburn (2008) contends students believe in themselves when we, as teachers, believe in them. *Serving Educational Equity* offers organized tools, resources, and principles that provide a resource toolkit and menu of opportunities. Further, the text focuses on helping educators understand the principles that govern educating and stimulating students' abilities.

SUGGESTIONS FOR GETTING THE MOST OUT OF THE BOOK

- **Read with intention and purpose. Ask yourself guiding questions as you read.**
How am I ensuring educational equity for all students? What do I want to know more about, or what questions or concerns do I have?
- **Read the book with a highlighter and a notebook.**
As you read, determine the small nuggets of information for implementation. Make explicit connections to your current context and encourage conversations about mindset, bias, grade-level expectations, and scaffolding of learning. Utilize data team meetings to best meet the needs of students while making data decisions situational and responsive to students' socioemotional needs. Discuss ways to build lasting relationships with students that make them want to learn.
- **Customize tools and strategies.**
Assess how you might adjust strategies and tools to fit your current context (grade level, school context, personality, and style).

- **Take bite-sized action.**
Start small. Begin with one or two strategies to build relationships with students and colleagues. If you are beginning to explore educational equity, start with self-reflection techniques and address your own mindset about the students you serve. Think about your lived experiences and how they impact how you see your colleagues, students, and world. If you are a veteran of equitable best practices, focus on one or two areas to strengthen your practice.
- **Practice action research.**
Utilize the *Strength-Weakness-Opportunities-Threats* (SWOT) tool to construct guided questions and think about places to leverage the strengths and opportunities. Then, put your bite-sized actions into practice. Think about areas of growth and where threats could thwart your efforts. Understand that implementing equitable methods is cyclical and ongoing, and it creates space and time for interpretation. Finally, reflect and adjust your practices while keeping an open mind for new techniques and unique ways of thinking.
- **Invite others to join you on the journey.**
Utilize opportunities and form book study groups to keep the conversation, accountability, and collaboration open within your school or district.

Take Action

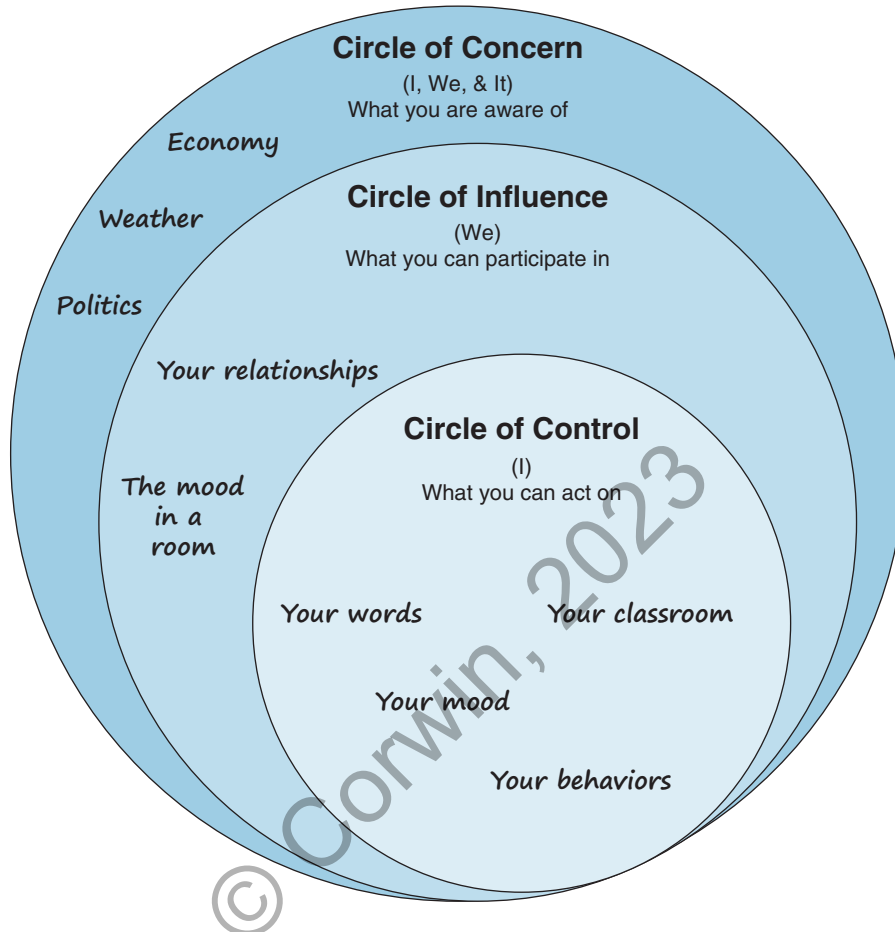
In *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* (1990), author Stephen Covey distinguishes between proactive people who focus on what they can do and influence and reactive people who focus their energy on things beyond their control. The rationale for starting here is that many educational influences can make us feel overwhelmed, but we are more in control than we may think. We agree with Barbara Blackburn (2008) that we should focus on the things we can control and quit worrying about the things that are out of our control. As you savor parts of our book, take a moment to assess your mindset, which means examining the areas in which you have control and can take action. As educators embrace learning acceleration and educational equity, we should be reminded of our power and influence in the classroom.

Examine your mindset using Covey's Circle of Control diagram to determine your current mindset in addressing equity and learning acceleration (see Figure I.2).

Take a moment to ask yourself, "Do I have the power to make changes in my classroom?"

"Is this something I can decide to implement in my classroom?" (Blackburn, 2008, p. 2).

Figure I.2 • *Circle of Control and Influence*



Source: Adapted from Covey (1990).