

Transcript - ASU Remote 2022: Strategies for ensuring your course content is equity-centered

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PATTI O'SULLIVAN: Hello and welcome to Remote, the connected faculty summit. I'm Patti O'Sullivan, content manager with Every Learner Everywhere and I'll be moderating today's sessions. These sessions in this 90-minute block are sponsored by Every Learner Everywhere, a non-profit network that advocates for and supports institutions in achieving equitable outcomes in US higher education through advances in digital learning.

This block of the Every Learner Ask the Expert sessions focuses on equitable and inclusive teaching. In the last year, the Every Learner Everywhere network has developed a series of practical tools and guides to help faculty and department leaders evaluate and remediate inequity in policies, pedagogy and processes.

The newly published equity review tool guides faculty and evaluating and remediating course content. Two of the tools developers are going to walk us through the evaluation process and show us how we can use it to make our course content equity-centered. So I'm going to introduce our two speakers. Tynan Gable is a social impact strategist at Intentional Futures, where she solves problems and applies her business skills both locally and globally. She has experience in managing large scale education and social impact projects, focusing on improving equity and developing smart, clear strategies for a wide range of organizations.

She brings fresh perspectives, considerate solutions and thought-provoking questions to each interaction, and is known by her peers and clients to be a strong leader and partner in strategy work. Prior to working at International Futures, Tynan earned an MBA from Willamette University with an emphasis in marketing and non-profit management. Our second presenter is Rwanda Garth-McCullough. She's the director of programs at Achieving the Dream. Dr. Garth-McCullough leads the Every Learner Everywhere digital learning initiative at ATD. Her expertise in culturally relevant teaching guides her

professional development and coaching work and the diversity, equity and inclusion space. She has worked with K-12 schools and colleges to educate staff and instructors on the principles and methods of culturally responsive teaching and revise curriculum across disciplines. Rwanda approaches her work from an inclusive, culturally affirming, and asset-based perspective. She supports educators to define and create opportunities to invite and integrate their students' cultural knowledge and experiences as a cognitive tool in service of their achievement and success. Her workshops and coaching lead teams of educators to investigate equity for each element of their practice, from policies, syllabi, and instruction to assessments.

Previously, for 12 years, Dr. Garth McCullough was a faculty member at the School of Education at Loyola University of Chicago. Rwanda is a proud graduate of the University of Chicago and Wesleyan University. Rwanda and Tynan, welcome.

RUANDA GARTH-MCCULLOUGH: Thank you Patti.

TYNAN GABLE: Thanks, Patti. Hi, everybody. Hopefully you can hear us OK. Someone give us a sign. If not. But thank you all so much for being here. Following Sarah and Ray's presentation, we're excited to introduce a more tactical and practical resource for improving equity in the classroom. And as Patti introduced already, what we present today is going to zoom way in on one component of equitable teaching and learning, which is focusing on your instructional materials.

So the equity review tool is designed for educators like yourselves who are striving to create more validating and affirming learning experiences for students who are Black, Latinx, Indigenous, poverty-affected, first generation, non-male identifying, LGBTQIA+, and/or disabled. And we recognize that to do this well, it's critical to understand the intersectionality of all of these identities and how that can affect a student's experience. And the impetus of this tool is that we believe that one important aspect of creating a more validating learning environment is ensuring that the instructional materials being used are conceptualized and constructed using equity-minded processes and best practices. And we hope that using this tool will allow educators to be able to develop and evaluate resources as well as the language that you use in your courses to ensure that everything that you're doing is asset-based and supportive of equitable teaching and learning processes.

This tool does go beyond the basics to help educators explore the why of developing instructional resources that amplify marginalized voices, support optimal learning for students, and how to use asset-based language that privileges, empowers, and accurately represents students who have historically been excluded and marginalized. The tool poses critical questions that help surface, and confront privilege, bias, exclusion, and/or misrepresentation, and promotes the use of equity-minded language.

So with that introduction, we are going to move through, and we'll give you a deeper preview into the tool and the different sections. First, I'm going to pass it over to Ruanda to talk a little bit more about how this tool came to be.

RUANDA GARTH-MCCULLOUGH: Thank you, Tynan. And I just wanted to acknowledge that Ray and Sarah were also on the team that helped develop and review this tool. It was a collaborative effort with Intentional Futures, Achieving the Dream in many of our Every Learner, Everywhere partners.

So next I'll go to the next slide, Tynan please. An overview of how we're going to move through this next half an hour. So I'll provide a little background on Every Learner Everywhere. Achieving the Dream, and Intentional Futures. Then move us into a little history of the tool and the purpose and the process of developing it.

And then Tynan will take us through an overview of the tool, looking at how it is organized to guide educators through the steps that prompt introspection of positionality and perspective, while centering students and learning and reviewing existing or developing equity-centered materials, and then the steps end with continuous improvement and gathering student feedback. So while aligned with the previous presentation.

So while we will end with plenty of time for you to ask questions of all of the presenters, we encourage you to use the chat feature or the Q&A features to ask questions as they arise, and our team members will respond as they are able. And then any question that we don't get to at the end, we'll make sure we address at during the full Q&A session.

So the creation of the equity review tool originated through a collaboration of the Every Learner Everywhere network and Achieving the Dream and Intentional Futures are partners in the network, which also include 11 other organizations who share our drive to advance equity by transforming post-secondary teaching and learning.

Our collective mission is to help institutions use technology to innovate teaching and learning with the ultimate goal of improving student outcomes for Black, Latinx, Indigenous, poverty-affected, and first generation students. Every Learner Everywhere works with colleges to build capacity to improve student outcomes with digital learning through services, technical assistance, and resource guides.

And I've been with Achieving the Dream for the past four years, and most of that, we have been working with Every Learner Everywhere, and I wanted to give a little history on-- a little background on our respective organizations. So Achieving the Dream is a national reform network with over 300 member institutions whose mission is to promote student success in community colleges, with a focus on low-income students and students of color.

And ATD's mission is to help our network colleges catalyze anti-racist, equitable, and economically vibrant communities through institutional transformation that advances community colleges as profoundly accessible hubs of learning, credentialing, and economic mobility that eliminate inequities in educational and workforce outcomes. And we've been so honored to partner with Intentional Futures through Every Learner, Everywhere. Intentional Futures is a strategy and design consultancy based in Seattle. They use human centered, collaborative approaches to help clients solve their most pressing challenges. And you'll see from what we discussed today the fruits of this wonderful partnership.

Very equity-centered collaboration has been afforded through the Every Learner Everywhere network with-- and it's just been our-- we've really appreciated working with like-minded organizations that are focused on impact and transformative change in the post-secondary space as Intentional Futures is.

So now I'll move to how this tool developed and what we were trying to address. So the history of how ATD and IF came to develop the equity review tool that we will be sharing with you today, it's not the straightest path but very interesting and shows how we have our-- both organizations are committed to addressing real needs and real time, and supporting educators to move from the why of equity to the how.

So, as you can imagine, when working with multiple organizations, as we do in Every Learner Everywhere network, the resource design process can be an interesting endeavor, to say the least. And Patti has the distinct pleasure to manage this all so she

can definitely speak to it. So most start with identifying an asset that we need to design for the field that can be used to assess, inform, or guide practice.

However, the development process for this tool took a different path. The equity review tool was originally developed for internal purposes only, in response to a need to define and articulate our expectations for equity within our tools and resources. So shortly after forming, the network developed equity principles as many of your organizations and institutions, I think have been through this process of developing equity statements and DEI statements and principles. So Every Learner was no different. We developed our equity principles to guide our internal and external work.

And we committed to these principles that include articulating a specific focus on racial equity and equity for poverty-affected students and optimistic anti-deficit and sustainable ways, while consistently reflecting on our own biases and positionalities, also broadening the participation of people, partners, and perspectives to reflect the students and institutions we serve, disaggregating data to the finest point possible, and resisting the erasure of Indigenous, Asian-American, and Pacific Islander students.

So once the network adopted these equity principles, the question became how can we put them into practice in real ways, in our own resource development process, to ensure that the toolkits and guides that we put out in the field on digital learning reflect our focus and commitment to racial equity clearly and purposefully?

So at first, an equity review round was added to the resource development process. And this round consisted of asking a few equity-minded network members, usually the same BIPOC staff from participating orgs to read over the asset, the resource. And a few days which, as you can imagine, only allowed time to flag the egregious issues or identify misuses of what I call equity glass or throw a little equity paint on fully formed text.

And I'm sure many of you can relate to this experience. And so needless to say, we became frustrated very quickly by this hurried and ineffective process. So when the network had the opportunity to experience Dr. Stella Ben Simmons document review process, it sparked the idea of developing a guide for our authors and reviewers to ensure that we were working from common standards in terms of approach, process, scope, framing and language.

And personally, I felt that what was developed for internal use was so strong and it needed to be shared with the field. It needed to be shared with the world. It was what I

think many of the colleges that I coach were asking for. How do we do this? How do we approach this? How do we know what we've done is in line with equity-minded practice?

So since we are all trying to figure out how to intentionally design equity-based resources in different forms, and so that is the history of this tool. And I will now turn it over to Tynan to walk us through the tool. And we will share the tool with you and very interested in your feedback and how it lands and how you can see it being used at your institution.

TYNAN GABLE: Awesome. Thanks Ruanda. We have dropped the link in the chat a couple times and we'll do that a couple times more to make sure that everyone has access. You can also just find it through the Every Learner Everywhere website as well. But going to spend a little time here to give you an overview of what you'll find in the tool. It's broken into three main chapters, and each chapter has a different focus for this process of creating equity-minded tools and going through a full review process of the resources that you're creating for your classroom.

The first chapter is called critical introspection and learning, and the purpose of this chapter is really to provide an intentional process to ensure that educators enter into this iterative cycle of developing resources with a foundational understanding of their own positionality and the other institutional and environmental factors at play that might affect their students experience.

So this is really about reflecting and ensuring that you, as an educator, understand the lens that you're bringing to this work and the perspectives that different students in your classes might have, and how those varying perspectives may contribute to different understandings about the experience in the classroom and the interpretations of language and things and materials.

So it's really a deep self-work. And this is critically important and a step that we include in our own internal process, as Ruanda was explaining, and has been really transformative for the way that we approach the development of our own resources. So definitely not a chapter to just skip over. It's put at the beginning because we think it's the most critical and first step to doing this work correctly.

The second chapter is about actually developing the resources. So this can include creating new instructional materials from scratch. It could also be updating materials that you already have and use in your classroom. There's three main steps involved in

this second phase of creating materials. The first is developing the materials, then evaluating them, and then making sure that they are designed in a way that's intentional and accessible for all of your students. The resource goes into detail for each of these steps, of course, and there's a lot of things baked in. And I'll go over some of those a little bit later as well. But chapter 2 is really focused on that development of the resource or instructional material in question. And then the third and final chapter is continuous improvement. And again, this is something that we practice. It's something that as Ruanda alluded to even for this tool that we've published, we plan on updating it in the future. It's intended to be a living document. We crave feedback on how it's working for you and your institutions, and ways that we can make it better, both for ourselves and for instructors who are using it. And so we feel this step is also super important, making sure that you're constantly getting feedback from folks in your department, from students, from peers, and just making sure that the work that you're doing isn't in a silo, that you're getting lots of feedback and doing that in a continuous way.

Just to dive a little deeper into what you'll find in each of the chapters. So as I said, there's a series of steps in each chapter, and each step has a bunch of context and resources associated with it. There is application strategies. So these are really specific tactics for how you can apply the guidance that's provided in each of the steps. There are critical reflection questions as a double check to make sure that after you've gone through a certain phase of the tool, that you're hitting all of the key points and making sure that you didn't skip over anything.

And then we've included a lot of resources that we have leveraged in our own learning as a network, and that we feel are helpful supplements to the guidance that we provide. So in each chapter this is what you'll find in the tool.

And then I just wanted to highlight a couple of the key pieces that we think are super helpful, that are more tactical specific tools within this larger resource. The first one is at the beginning, we have a pretty large and in-depth glossary, and we did this intentionally and spent a lot of time writing up the definitions and making sure that we were using language that's consistent with our collective understanding of how these terms are used.

And this is super important. We think that making sure that you have accurate definitions and definitions that everyone is agreeing on for some of this language is

critical to doing this work well. If there's misalignment on what these words mean, like what does equity mean, what do we mean by inclusion, that is going to create misalignment in how you execute on any of this stuff. So it's important to start with a foundational understanding and alignment around terms.

And then in that second chapter where it's really about developing your resources, we have included this equity language guide. And the goal here is to provide really specific guidance because we have received feedback several times in past presentations and things about well, I've been told over and over, don't say x, y, z, but I don't really know what to say instead that works better.

So this table is intended to be from our perspective and based on our learning and collective knowledge. Here are the things that you should maybe try to refrain from saying or move away from. And here's some recommendations of what you can say instead, with some more context as to why that is and opportunities for you to learn a little bit more about that. So that's in chapter 2 and something that you can use as you're developing instructional materials to make sure that your language is aligning with what we're recommending.

So with that, that concludes our introduction and overview of the tool. And we will move into a group Q&A that will include Ray and Sarah as well with Patti moderating. If you didn't get the link in the chat or it didn't work for you, there's a QR code here. You can scan it with your phone. Also, Ruanda and my emails are on the screen, so if you have questions about the tool, how to use it. If you want to follow up with us about anything, we are here and available to answer questions and connect with any of you as needed. Ruanda any last words before we hand it back over to Patti?

RUANDA GARTH-MCCULLOUGH: No. Thank you so much. I'm looking forward to the discussion.