In moments of crisis, our communities sustain us. For 25 years, the Institute for Learning’s commitment to fostering equitable high-quality education and strong learning communities has guided our work. Embedded in our approach are ways that we build and maintain the connections that are at the heart of our work and our impact. The new challenges we all face make our work together more critical than ever.

We are very fond of the work we do together and especially proud of how you have been supporting your students and families in response to the COVID-19 crisis. We are collaborating with our community to bring you digital resources that support students, teachers, and leadership until we can work together again on the ground. The IFL is now fully engaged in adapting to our new reality. We, too, are working remotely until further notice and are building ideas and content to share through digital platforms.

We are continuing the work that is core to our mission by designing an online forum in lieu of our annual gathering in Pittsburgh. Sessions will focus on equity, improvement science, and online work.

Getting Better at Getting Better will occur online June 2–5. Dr. David Kirkland, NYU; Dr. Ramón Antonio Martínez, Stanford University; Dr. Tony Petrosky, University of Pittsburgh; and Dr. Amanda Godley, University of Pittsburgh will be joined by the fellows with many new sessions. We will send an email with registration details very soon, and you can always find us at ifl.pitt.edu.

Thank you for your belief in the mission and work of the IFL. You are the focus of our attention. Please reach out to us for your online needs as we work together to carry out our common mission. We get better at getting better together.

Our best wishes to you and yours,
Rosita Apodaca
Executive Director, Institute for Learning

Resnick knows that, in practice, it is proving hard to meet the twin goals of equity and higher achievement. This is because schools are trapped in a set of beliefs about the nature of ability and aptitude that makes it difficult to evoke rigorous academic effort from students and educators.

Students who have not been taught a demanding, challenging, thinking curriculum do poorly on tests of reasoning or problem solving, confirming many people’s original suspicions that they lack the talent for high-level thinking.

Students cannot learn what they are not taught, and depriving them of high–cognitive-demand instruction continues on page 6

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instruction does not need to be labor-intensive; it is about making decisions while teaching a well-designed lesson. Teachers focus on the goal of the lesson and find ways for every student to meet that goal. Knowing and building on the students’ assets should serve as a guide to making the small modifications to support students. Simple supports, such as offering a student the text in a language the student understands or allowing a student to write the argument about something familiar, are ways to make modifications that allow for access. We can begin by abandoning deficit thinking and keeping our minds open to see our students’ situations as opportunities to try ways that will support them where they are and enable movement toward the goal.

Martínez (2018) argues that for emergent multilinguals, we may have to “learn to see students anew—to imagine them as competent readers and writers and to treat them accordingly.” The labels students are given in school, more often than not, are not helpful. Martinez thinks that for us to “recognize the richness of bi/multilingual students’ linguistic repertoires requires that we think beyond the convenient labels that serve to mask their brilliance, their competence, and their tremendous potential.” Martinez’s recommendation may serve us well once we decide that high-cognitive-demand work will be made available to every student.

In a similar vein to Gutiérrez and Martínez, Dr. David E. Kirkland reminds us “rigor in education cannot be about broken students but about supporting students who are vulnerable to broken systems.” Before we can address the systems that support inequitable practices, we need to acknowledge systemic root causes: “Rigor often codes a set of hierarchical social and cultural values that reinforces a narrow concept of learning and achievement. Too often, rigor is about who is recognized and who is not. By flattening rigor in the image of the seen, a narrow version of us gets baked into educational success—a version that is incomplete, favoring an intersection of cis, heteronormative, White, abled, English-speaking, monied, and Judeo-Christian—or, put simply, privileged—identities. I’ve learned the farther away students are from this identity, the less likely they are seen to be ‘rigorous,’ the less likely the classroom works for them.”

While being keenly aware of systemic disparities in equity and rigor, Kirkland aims for a hopeful solution. “…teaching and learning must be about preservation—the incredible acts that help people preserve our languages and cultures, to tell history on our terms, to preserve it too, to preserve ourselves by preserving the congregation of ideas that will make the world better, that will free our bodies and heal our souls. Thus, academic rigor comes close to equity when it connects teaching and learning to acts that are meant to sustain us.”
