

SUCCESS BY DESIGN, NOT BY CHANCE

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Everybody loves a success story. In education, tales of students who overcome tough backgrounds and then go on to succeed are used as proof that our system is working. Growing up in inner city Boston, I was considered one of those success stories, but my success was by chance rather than by design. I was lucky enough to be assigned Mr. John Regan as my eighth grade English language arts teacher and he changed my life.

Mr. Regan was the most serious, funny, demanding, thoughtful, kind, strict, and hard-working teacher I ever had. He engaged and challenged each student in his classroom. He made us feel like we belonged, treating each of us with dignity and respect (something that was sadly lacking in most of our other classes). We all ran into Mr. Regan's class each day. On one of those days, Mr. Regan pulled me aside and told me that I should go to college. I did, and in 1973, I graduated with my license to teach. I was determined to be an educator just like him. I haven't regretted the decision for one minute.

“**EQUITY OF ACCESS HELPS THE TEACHER BUILD THAT SENSE OF BELONGING AND DIGNITY THAT ARE CRITICAL TO A LEARNER'S GROWTH MINDSET.**”

My success was definitely because of chance and not a result of the design of the education system. Up until eighth grade, I was at best a below-average-to-average student. I could have



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been assigned any of three other English teachers that year and things would probably be different for me today. I was incredibly lucky to get a powerful classroom teacher who created active engagement in learning, held high expectations for student work and discussions, and built a culture where all students felt a strong sense of belonging.

How can we ensure our educational system provides powerful learning experiences through which all students feel that they belong and can succeed, not by chance but by design? In today's classrooms, the rich and growing diversity of our student population and the constraints of conventional texts and curricula have created challenging environments for educators who want to engage all students and ensure they gain access to the same standards-aligned information and ideas. Many students in academically diverse classes feel left behind or not challenged enough by their work.

Beyond Human Limits

Ensuring students get what they need to learn and be challenged equitably presents a significant, ongoing time and materials effort for teachers. I see their frustration through my work in school districts; educators share how overcome they are by the need to find content that is relevant and at the appropriate level to match the readiness of each student they serve. The time required to find and/or prepare on-topic material at a wide range of reading levels means our professional educators regularly reach their human limits!

Educators want each student they teach to achieve and feel a sense of engagement in and control over their learning. This wish is not out of reach in today's educational systems, but it does require a change. This is where "by design"

THE POWER OF EQUITY IN PRACTICE

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“ I observed a Gifted & Talented (G&T) class that was partnering with a Basic Skills Instruction (BSI) class—kids reading two grade levels above and kids reading one and two grade levels below. They worked together through an Achieve3000 article on Oprah Winfrey and her school for girls. Talk about equity! During the conversation at one table, I couldn't tell who the G&T student was and who the BSI student was. They were presented with the article at their level and it allowed all the students to hold an intelligent conversation and generate questions about the text. I really think they learned from each other.”



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comes in, and it's directly connected to the use of educational technology.

Machines (technology) have frequently helped us overcome our human limitations and expand our potential. Both technology and artificial intelligence are proficient at doing “human tasks” that can otherwise cause us to feel overwhelmed in our work. It almost goes without saying that this doesn't mean technology in education can or will take the place of human educators; machines are not at all practical around activities like coaching the learner, developing social skills, offering divergent thinking challenges, and pushing for higher levels of rigor. But educators who use machines will likely replace educators who do not, specifically because of the ways that machines can solve time and materials issues for teachers, thus helping them support learners of ALL profiles.

Differentiated Content Serving Equity in the Classroom

By example, using a technology-fueled solution like Achieve3000's, the educator doesn't have to manage the significant task of finding appropriate content for every student. The software delivers high-interest informational text to each student at his or her individual reading level—one of 12 Lexile® levels in English and eight in Spanish. Even in an academically diverse general education class (and even in social studies or science classrooms), where you might find students reading several grade levels below and above expectations, all students can learn together, thus building a culture of collaboration in the classroom.

Equity of access helps the teacher build that sense of belonging and dignity that are critical to a learner's growth mindset. The teacher can engage groups of students in deep conversation and discussion around specific topics and challenge students to think creatively at a higher level of rigor. This shift to using differentiated content doesn't make the work of the teacher easier; rather, it allows for the focus of teachers' work to be better balanced between the strengths of humans and those of machines.

Working with technology like Achieve3000's, teachers describe incredible success for


students of all learning profiles, like a third grade teacher from an elementary school in Texas, who stated: "I started out with two students approaching grade level and ended the year with 16 out of 22 students in college readiness including my three dyslexia students, my special education student, and my two Spanish-speaking students. My students have had up to a +490 Lexile increase!" This teacher is why this significant change happened, but he was supported by the precision-differentiated content Achieve3000 delivers and its patented methodology for accelerating literacy gains; behind the scenes, the Achieve3000 technology uses ongoing embedded assessment and analytics to automatically adjust students' Lexile levels when they are ready to access more complex text.


The software keeps ALL students reading "just-right" text all year long, always getting the appropriate amount of challenge without the teacher needing to revise or reorganize the materials they provide to each learner as s/he grows. Because of the powerful combination of differentiated content and ongoing Lexile adjustments, across all grades and learning profiles, Achieve3000's solution is proven to accelerate Lexile gains by up to 3X when students hit research-defined targets for quality and quantity of use (based on statistical analysis of data from more than 1.2 million students).


Too Important to Leave to Chance


We cannot leave important aspects of our work in education—like creating equitable learning for all students—to chance. We need to build models of learning that by design align to the needs of the student and the strengths of the teacher. The idea of educators collaborating with technology seems scary for some because it means giving up a piece of something we have always done on our own. However, considering the equity that technology-enhanced instruction can bring to a diverse classroom, it's clear that embracing change offers tangible and measurable benefits.


6 WAYS TO DELIVER EQUITABLE INSTRUCTION BY DESIGN WITH ACHIEVE3000


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1 Differentiate content by reading level so every student can access text on the same standards-aligned information and ideas
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2 Provide need-specific scaffolding so students who require intervention or enrichment or are English language learners get the support they need to access content and instruction
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3 Enable all students to learn collaboratively through debate and discussion about the same content
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4 Offer age-appropriate materials and ensure that students work within the same respectful learning environment as ALL their peers
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5 Give students anytime, anywhere, any-device access (even offline) so they can continue learning outside of class time, getting more time on task as needed
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6 Empower teachers to group students flexibly and implement blended learning to create a classroom culture where students take responsibility for their learning and feel a sense of belonging