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# Beyond Diversity: Achieving Racial Equity by Addressing Systemic Beliefs

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WEEAC Webinar #1

# About WestEd and the Culturally Responsive Systems Team



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## About WestEd:

WestEd is a nonpartisan, nonprofit agency that conducts and applies research, develops evidence-based solutions, and provides services and resources in the realms of education, human development, and related fields, with the end goal of improving outcomes and ensuring equity for individuals from infancy through adulthood.

## Culturally Responsive Systems:

Our work focuses on Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Education (CRSE) in order to promote systemic equity. We accomplish this by working with educators to identify solutions to the beliefs, policies, procedures, and practices affecting equity.



# Expertise of the WEEAC Team



Rawlin J. Rosario  
Senior Program Associate



Jackie Peng  
Program Associate



# Objectives

- Establish shared language, norms, and structures (e.g., three core tensions) necessary to support authentic and sustained engagement throughout the series of webinars.
- Recognize and learn how to work with the three core tensions that educators experience when discussing race and equity.
- Develop a foundational understanding of systemic beliefs, policies, procedures, and practices that contribute to racial inequities for students of color who are, or may be, identified as having disabilities.

# Session Agenda



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- Welcome and Introductions
- Setting the Stage
- Shared Language
- Core Tensions
- Rejecting Bias-Based Beliefs
- Closing and Survey



# Grounding Activity

What are 2 or 3 qualities of your favorite educator?

- Take 2 minutes to think it over
- Share your responses via Menti

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Mentimeter

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# Setting the Stage to Discuss Equity

# Our Starting Point



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- We center race!
- Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Education (CRSE) and equity are the plate.
- Refocus our gaze: We need to fix systems and adult practices, *NOT children and families/communities.*
- *This is a journey, not a destination.*



# Working Agreements



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Expect and accept nonclosure

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Notice patterns of power by interrogating self and systems

---

Focus on impact rather than intent

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Stay engaged even when uncomfortable

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Keep confidentiality

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Grant permission for collective breath



Which working agreement(s) can you commit to uphold in this session?

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# Building a Shared Language & Understanding



# Coming to a Shared Understanding of Equity

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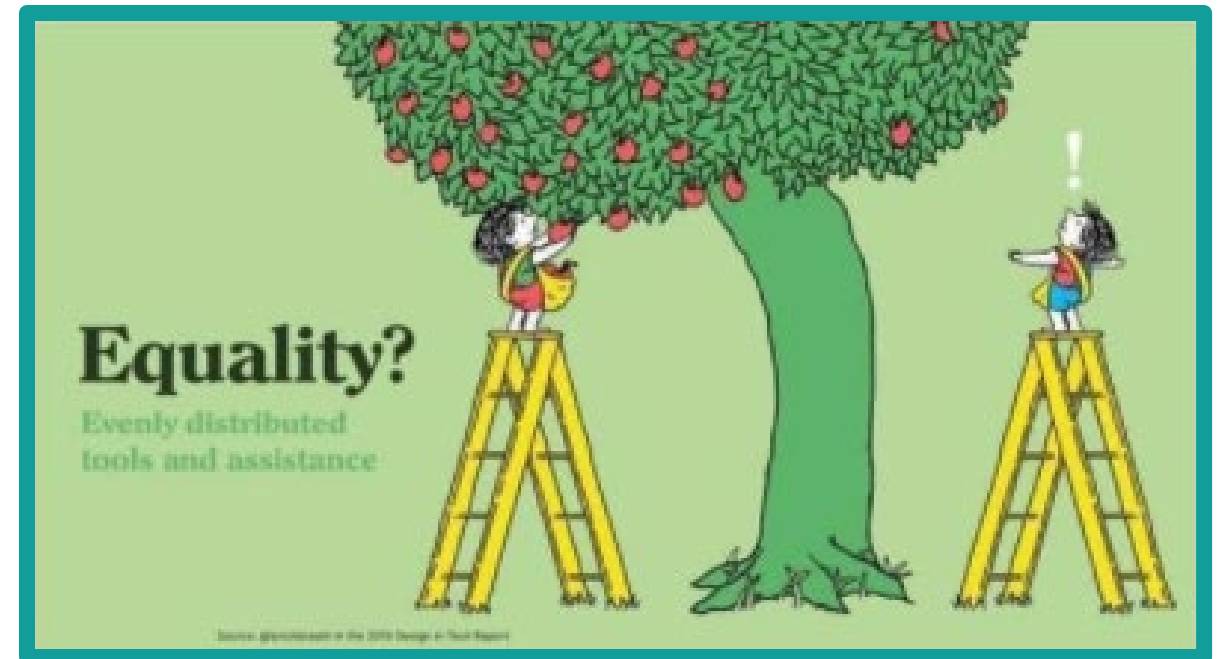
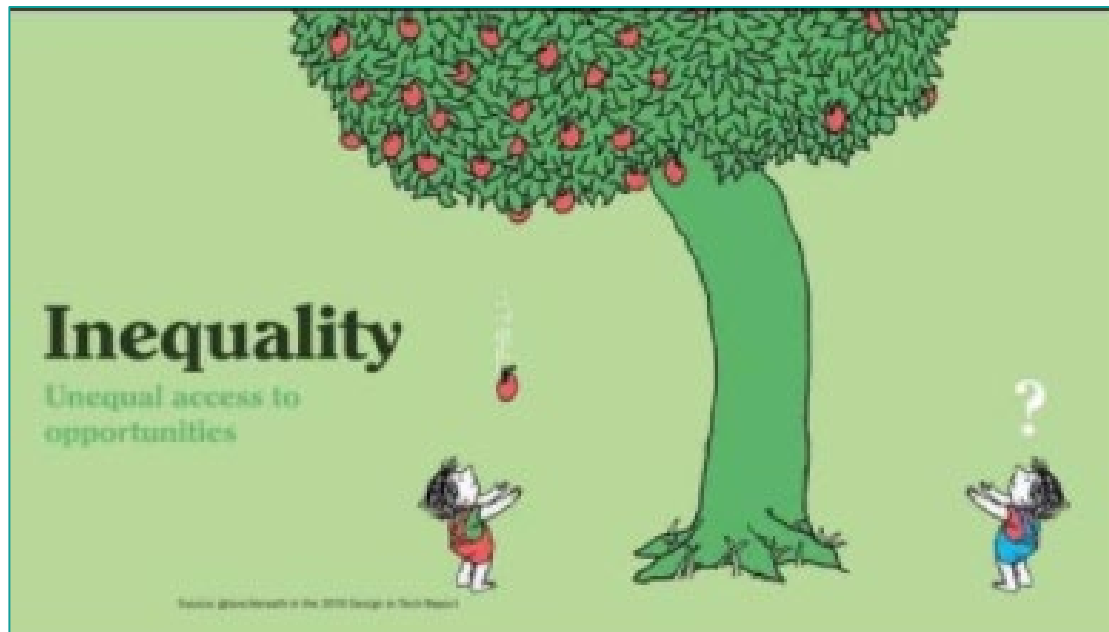


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- What does educational equity mean to you?
- Type your response in the mentimeter.

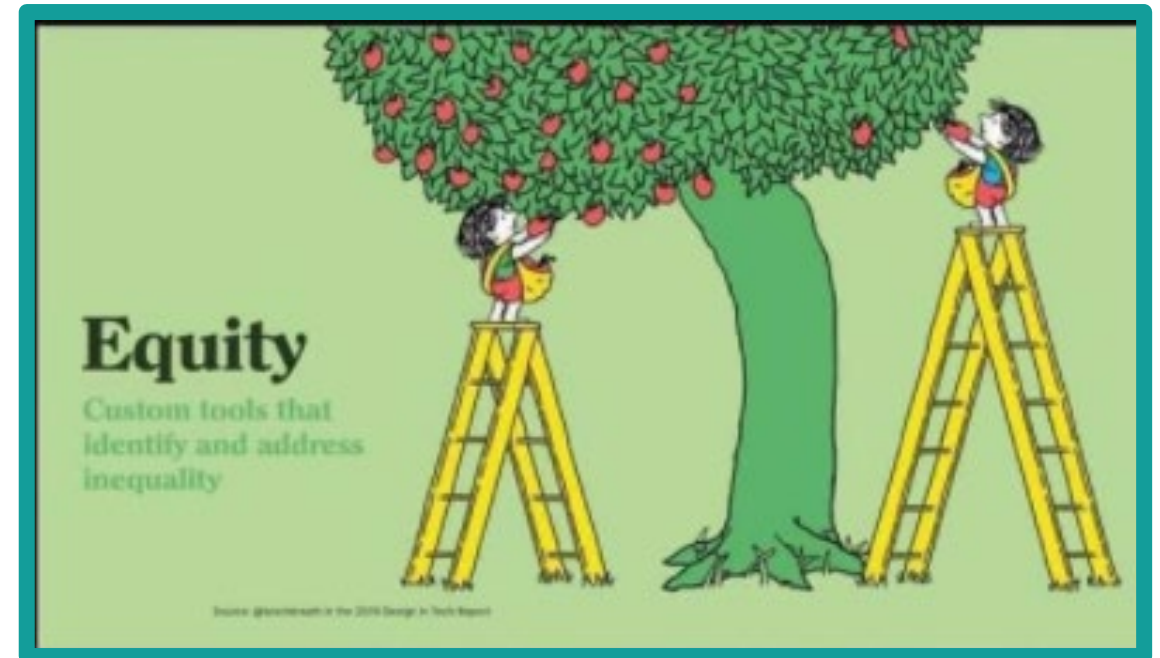
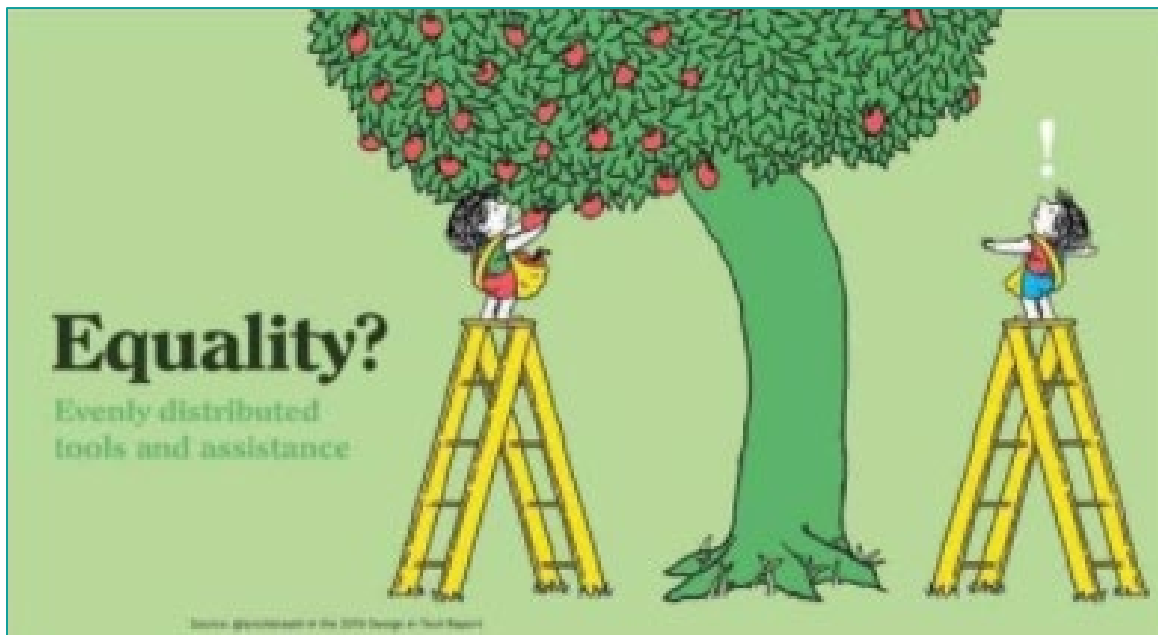


# What's the distinction here?



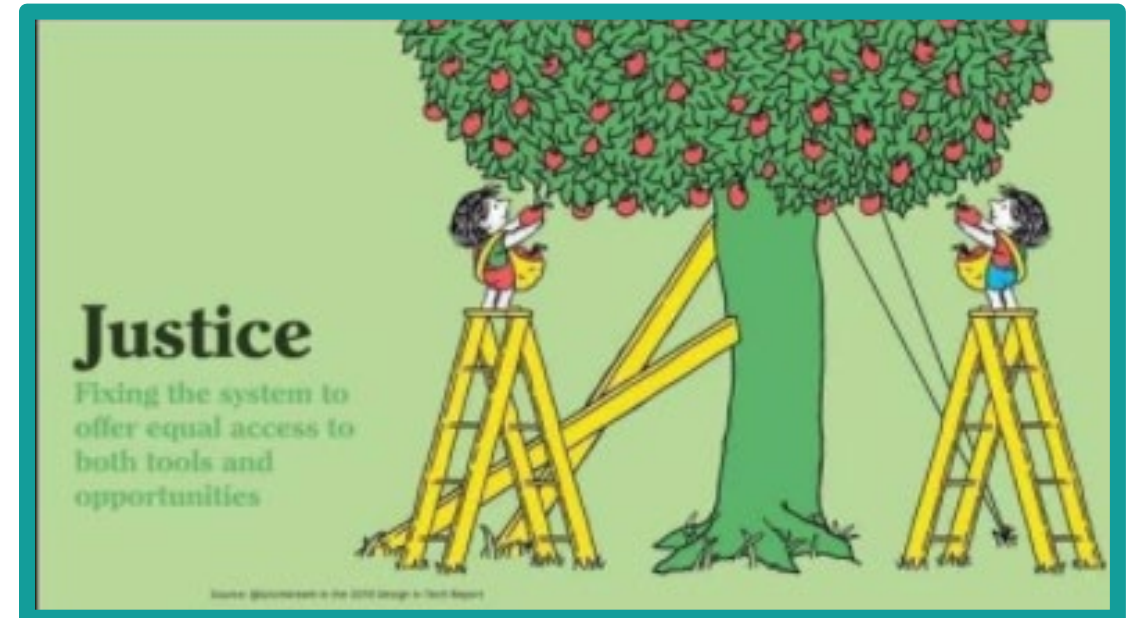
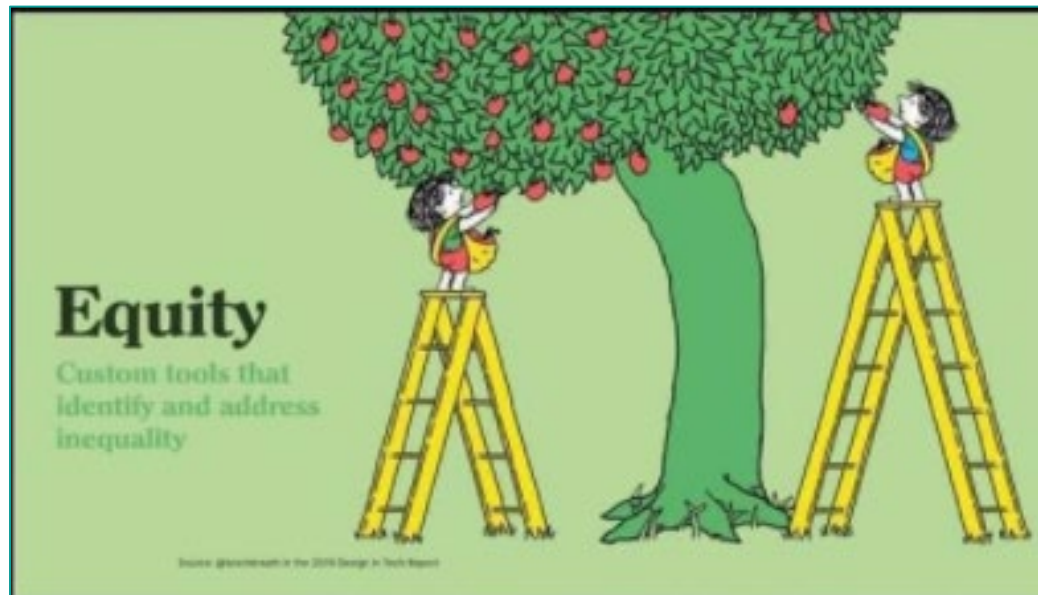


# What's the distinction here?





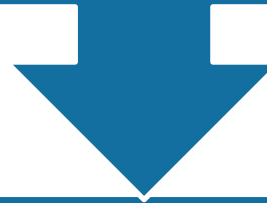
# Systemic Equity → Justice





# Educational Equity

“Raising the achievement of all students while (1) narrowing the gaps between the lowest and highest performing students and (2) eliminating the racial predictability and disproportionality of which student groups occupy the highest and lowest achievement categories” (Singleton & Linton, 2006).



Addressing racial inequities requires **moving beyond** acknowledging gaps or disparities between racial groups and toward creating a deliberate and intentional racial equity strategy aimed at combating racism in all of its forms” (Singleton, 2015).





# Collective Equity

“**Collective equity** is a shared responsibility for the social, cultural, academic, and emotional fortification of students and adults that enables learners to achieve their goals and aspirations on their own terms.”

(Hollins-Alexander et al., 2022, p. 13)

# Collective Equity



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“**Collective equity** enables learners to achieve their goals and aspirations on their own terms. It addresses systemic barriers, historic racism, educational disparities, and levels of oppression by fostering culturally fortifying experiences.”

(Hollins-Alexander et al., 2022, p. 13)



# Collective Equity: What It Is and What It Isn't

## What It Is

- Sharing accountability
- Challenging deficit thinking and replacing it with asset-framed thinking and asset-based actions
- Embracing the diverse cultural representations of the members
- Building partnerships with families and other members of the community
- Cultivating opportunities to accelerate learning by removing barriers that produce learning gaps

## What It Isn't

- Personal accountability for dismantling inequities
- Normalizing biased behaviors, language, and practices
- Believing that the members of the learning community must conform to the “way of school”
- Designing traditional parent–student activities without including the voices of all members of the community
- Remediating learning by focusing on the gaps rather than the strengths of the students



# Enabling Conditions for Collective Equity



(Hollins-Alexander et al., 2022, p. 9)

- Removing **barriers** that impede growth
- Generating **open communication**
- Creating **relational trust**
- Enacting high levels of **engagement**
- Providing **equitable opportunities** and **resources** for each learner's success



# Answer in mentimeter

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What are some challenges you face as you try to address educational inequities?



# SYSTEMIC RACISM

Systemic racism refers to a form of racism that is embedded in the structures, institutions, and policies of a society:

- patterns of discrimination and disadvantage faced by certain racial or ethnic groups
- consequences of long-standing historical and societal factors
- permeation of education, employment, health care, and the criminal justice systems
- persistent and predictable racial inequalities and disadvantages

(Feagin & Bennefield, 2013)



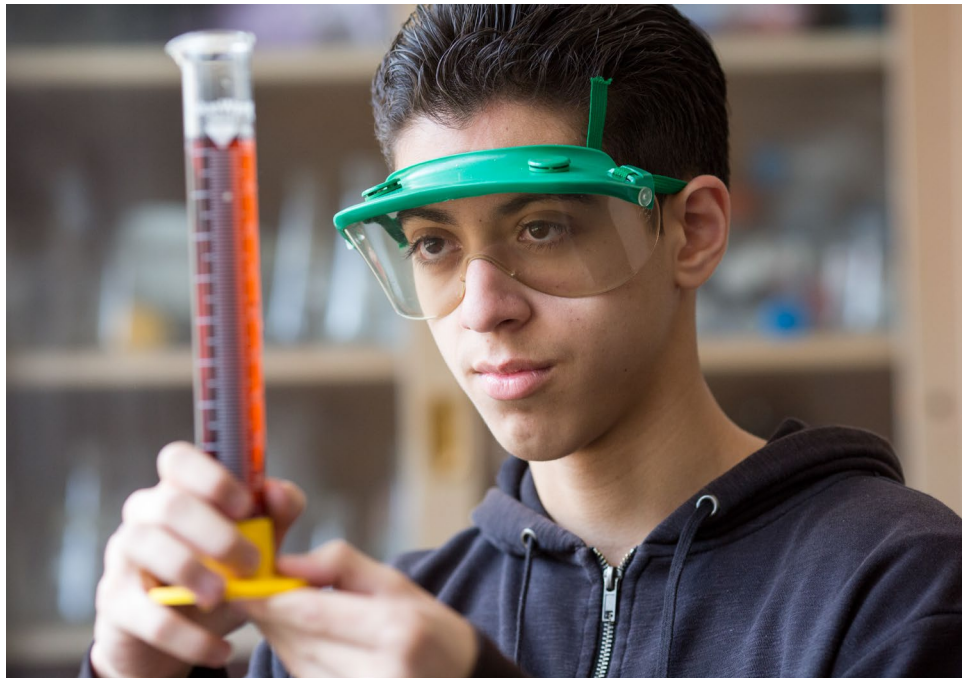
# Identifying Root Causes of Educational Inequities



(Fergus, 2017; Hernandez et al., 2022)



# The “Inside-Out” Process



“The term inside-out represents the connection between **inward reflection** that results in **outward behaviors (practices)** that become nestled within **organizational policy and procedure.**”

(Krownapple, 2017, p. 144)





# Profound Change



“[Organizational] change that combines inner shifts in people’s values, aspirations, and behaviors with the ‘outer shifts in processes, strategies, practices, and systems’”

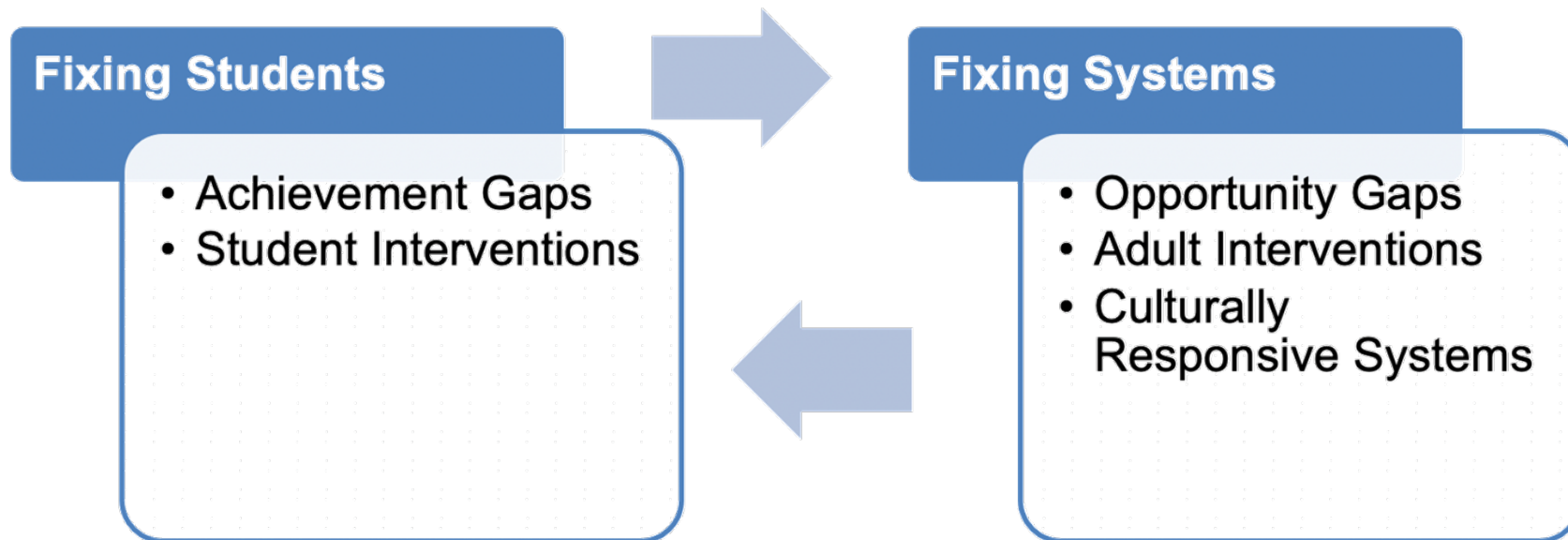
(Senge, 1999, p. 5)



# Refocusing Our Gaze

*Fixing Students*

*Fixing Systems*



(Hernandez, et al., 2023)



# What Can I Do?

## Three Core Tensions

# Core Tensions: What Can I Do?



**Personal Tension—Beliefs:** Each educator routinely questions their own personal readiness to become the type of professional who can successfully engage issues of race and racism in their life and practice.

**Structural Tension—Policies:** Educators routinely question the power of the individual educator to counteract structural or societal problems of racial and race–class inequality via their practice.

**Strategic Tension—Practices:** Educators routinely search for concrete, actionable steps they can take in their classrooms and schools, questioning how abstract ideas or theories about racial inequality and difference can help them.

(Pollock et al., 2010)



# What Can I Do?



## Personal Tension

Each practitioner routinely questions their own personal readiness to become the type of professional who can successfully engage issues of race and racism in their life and classroom practice.



# What Can I Do?



## Personal Tension

Questions to Grapple With:

- Do I feel (un)comfortable incorporating topics of race, racism, ethnicity, power, and privilege explicitly?
- Do I understand my own identity and work to be aware of what I do not know as it relates to racial equity?
- Have I thought about the potential biases I bring to the communities I serve?



# What Can I Do?



## Structural Tension

Practitioners routinely question the power of the individual educator to counteract structural or societal problems of racial and race-class inequality via the classroom.



# What Can I Do?



## Structural Tension

Questions to Grapple With:

- Do I find myself focusing on structures outside of my control, or do I refocus to what is in my locus of control?
- Have I thought about how educational institutions create or reproduce racial inequities?





# What Can I Do?



## Strategic Tension

Practitioners routinely search for concrete, actionable steps they can take in their classrooms and schools, questioning how abstract ideas or theories about racial inequality and difference can help them.



# What Can I Do?



## Strategic Tension

Questions to Grapple With:

- Am I using the strategic tension to avoid the personal tensions that I might be experiencing?
- Are the strategies I seek aimed at fixing children, families, and communities, or do they aim to support changing adult beliefs, practices, and systemic policies?



# What tension(s) might this educator be experiencing?

- “We have been talking about race for a long time; what are we going to do about it?”
- “Inequities are about poverty, not race.”
- “We cannot change the state exam; how am I supposed to incorporate a culturally responsive–sustaining curriculum if they do not change the test?”
- “Having this conversation in my school/district is too divisive.”

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# Key Takeaways

- Feelings of uncertainty, fear, or even helplessness are normal and to be expected
- Practice critical reflection; surface, name, share, and grapple with tensions
- Apply the multidimensional approach to your work
  - Personal (e.g., beliefs, stereotypes, knowledge)
  - Structural (e.g., school/district policies)
  - Strategic (e.g., skills, practices)



# Understanding Our Own Tensions

1. In your small group, discuss your understanding of each core tension.
2. Discuss times you might have experienced this tension when advancing equity in your context.

Personal

Structural

Strategic



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# 5-Minute Break



# Rejecting Bias-Based Beliefs & Manifestations of Explicit Bias

# Bias-Based Beliefs



Color Evasiveness	Deficit Thinking	Poverty Disciplining
<p>“A belief that promotes the idea that the best way to remove racism is to omit race, gender, and other social identities as a descriptor. Instead, it involves treating individuals as individuals and does not consider social identities and focuses on discussing and framing the commonalities between individuals. The default identity in this ideology is Whiteness.”</p> <p>(Bonilla –Silva, 2003)</p>	<p>“An ideology used to explain academic performance and at times cognitive abilities as result of deficiencies within a cultural group. It additionally minimizes the influence of systemic patterns on abilities and behaviors.”</p> <p>(Valencia, 1997)</p>	<p>“A belief that considers changing the behavioral and psychological dispositions of low-income individuals as paramount to fixing their low-income condition. In other words, deficit-thinking bias is focused on a set of beliefs about ability, while poverty disciplining bias is focused on changing behavior and thinking of low-income individuals.”</p> <p>(Fergus, 2017)</p>





# Identify the bias-based belief in each example

1. “I don’t see color; I see behavior.”
2. “They need to learn how to dress professionally; otherwise, they won’t get jobs.”
3. “Students of color from disadvantaged homes just seem to show a lack of initiative.”
4. “Low-income students need SEL to learn how to behave in schools.”

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# The Exceptional Negro: Fighting to Be Seen in a Color [Evasive] World

Dr. Traci Ellis



<https://youtu.be/xqvZRO2LPmw?si=tPSxFo5q18TcSHoz>



Share one word to  
describe what you just  
watched or what you  
are feeling.

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“There is no such thing as being race-neutral. Race is either intentionally included and addressed, or if left absent, it perpetuates erasure and systemic exclusion.”

—Dr. Erin Browder

## Color Evasiveness to Color Consciousness

Color evasiveness is often seen as a way to be nonracist.

However,

by denying the impact that race plays in the lives of individuals and institutions, we fail to respond to and address racial inequities.

And

we increase harm by placing blame on those impacted by systemic racism instead of fixing the conditions and systems that contribute to racial inequities.

Instead,

Let’s move to becoming color conscious so we can address racial inequities head-on by fixing the beliefs, policies, and practices in our systems.



@sassy4socialjustice

## HOW DOES DEFICIT THINKING MANIFEST IN SCHOOLS?

When asked why they thought a student was misbehaving, the majority of teachers said things like:

"FAMILY BACKGROUND"

"LACK OF STRUCTURE AT HOME"

"DOMESTIC ISSUES AT HOME"

"NO PARENTAL SUPPORT"

"LEARNING DISABILITY"

"FATHER NOT PRESENT"

"LACK OF EDUCATIONAL SKILLS"

"CHAOTIC HOUSEHOLD"

"SPOILED AT HOME"

"NOT GETTING ATTENTION AT HOME"

(Reed, 2020)



# Poverty-Disciplining Belief Statements Often Heard in Schools

- “Disciplinary action should be taken against students who wear sagging clothes in school.”
- “Latinx students who speak English should refrain from speaking Spanish at school so they assimilate into American society.”
- “Low-income students who qualify for special education are probably in home environments with limited reading and language.”
- “The values and beliefs shared by those in disadvantaged neighborhoods tend to go against school values and beliefs about what makes up a good education.”

(Fergus, 2017)



How do deficit  
thinking and poverty  
disciplining show up  
in your context?

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# Bias-Based Beliefs (BBBs)

In breakout rooms:

- In your own words, define the BBBs.
- How do they contribute to inequities in your context?
- What is the impact on students and families?
- How can we begin to reject these beliefs in our policies, procedures, and practices?

Color Evasiveness

Deficit Thinking

Poverty Disciplining





# Impact of Bias-Based Beliefs

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Biased evaluations of students' academic performance or potential

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Negative influence on teacher demeanor and warmth when interacting with students and families from minoritized communities

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Challenges that include avoidance, disidentification with school, and rejection of teacher feedback

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Racial disparities in school discipline and special education outcomes



# Ignoring and devaluing students' cultural capital leads to...

## Internalized Devaluation

- Feelings of unworthiness or undeservedness
- Feelings of lack of accomplishment or of possession of little to no talent or skills
- Low self-esteem and confidence

## Assaulted Sense of Self

- Unhealthy worldview
- Inability or struggle toward goal setting
- Mistrust

## Internalized Voicelessness

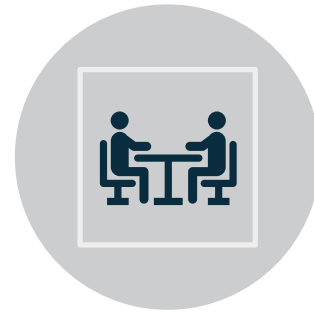
- Lack of speaking up for themselves
- Limited demonstration of agency
- Limited emotional express



## Theory of Change: Connecting a Culturally Responsive Self to a Culturally Responsive System



STAGE 1  
AWARENESS



STAGE 2  
UNDERSTANDING



STAGE 3  
PRACTICES



STAGE 4  
SUSTAINED BEHAVIOR



# Share a takeaway from today's session



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