Creating Culturally Affirming Spaces: A Systems Orientation

Presenters:
Erin Browder
David Lopez
Rawlin Rosario
Lori Van Houten

Panelists:
Dr. Ayana Allen-Handy
Dr. Ayanna Cooper
Jabari Lyles
Dr. Rosa Perez-Isiah
Reed Swier
Using the Zoom Platform

A few helpful tips…

If you cannot hear audio, call 669-900-6833 and enter the code 913 9359 7805#

When you post into the chat, set it to send to “Everyone”

Closed captions are available

Technical questions? Tag @DelpheanQuan in the chat
Check Your Email

• We’ll be sending a survey link and the slides shortly after the webinar

• The webinar recording and list of resources will be available in a few weeks
Regional Educational Laboratory West

- Conduct applied research
- Provide technical support around data collection, evidence use, and research
- Facilitate dissemination of actionable research evidence
Objectives

• Deepen understanding of culturally affirming school and classroom cultures and climates and how they shape student and staff outcomes

• Explore systemic approaches for embedding culturally affirming spaces and practices at the school and district level

• Learn about promising leadership practices and adult behaviors that foster culturally affirmative schooling experiences from practitioners in the field
Agenda

- Culturally Affirming Systems – What They Are and What They Aren’t
  - Review of Session 1 Core Concepts
  - School and Systems Culture
  - Culturally Responsive Leadership Competencies and Behaviors
  - Transformative/Equitable Systems
- Panel Discussion: Creating systems and systemic culture that are culturally affirming for culturally, racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse students
- Q&A
- Closing and Survey
Today’s Presenters

Erin Browder
Senior Program Associate
REL West

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WestEd

Rawlin Rosario
Program Associate II
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Lori Van Houten
Senior Program Associate
REL West
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Dr. Ayana Allen-Handy
Researcher, Drexel University; Director, Justice-Oriented Youth Education Lab

Dr. Ayanna Cooper
Author and Consultant

Dr. Rosa Perez-Isiah
Director of Elementary Education, Equity & Access: Norwalk-La Mirada Unified School District

Jabari Lyles
LGBTQ Inclusion Consultant, Director of LGBTQ Affairs for the Office of the Mayor, Baltimore City

Reed Swier
Associate Director of Training and Development, NYU Metro
Who is on the webinar?

Polls:

- What is your role?
- How familiar are you with systems, policies, and practices that create culturally affirming spaces in schools and classrooms?
Working Agreements

- Keep confidentiality
- Focus on intent v. impact
- Knowing when to step forward and step back
- Stay in the room (struggle together)
- Interrogate self and systems
- Accept lack of closure
Culturally Affirming Practices: What They Are and What They Aren’t
Culturally Affirming Spaces: Webinar 1 Recap
Culture in Schools
Culturally Affirming Spaces

Schools and classrooms where adult practices, behaviors, and policies thoroughly acknowledge and proactively seek to affirm students’ cultural identities and multi-faceted cultural assets as integral to students’ positive self-concept, academic and social well-being, while working to reduce harm and microaggressions experienced by students and families of color.

Price-Dennis et al., 2017; Alim & Paris, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2014; Ferlazzo, 2017
Cultural assets are resources for new learning and meaning making
## Types of Microaggressions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verbal</th>
<th>Behavioral</th>
<th>Microassaults</th>
<th>Microinvalidations</th>
<th>Microinsults</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A comment or question that is hurtful or stigmatizing to a certain marginalized group of people. For example, saying, “You’re so smart for a girl.”</td>
<td>Someone behaves in a way that is hurtful or discriminatory to a certain group of people. For example, a <strong>teacher ignoring a Black student</strong> who raised his hand first and instead calling on a white student.</td>
<td>A person intentionally behaves in a discriminatory way while not intending to be offensive. For example, a person <strong>telling a racist joke</strong> then saying, “I was just joking.”</td>
<td>A person’s comment invalidates or undermines the experiences of a certain group of people. For example, a white person telling a Black person that “racism does not exist in our school.”</td>
<td>A comment or action that is unintentionally discriminatory. For example, a person saying to an Indian graduate student, “Your people must be so proud.”</td>
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Allen et al., 2013; Nadal, 2014; Goodman, 2011; Harrison & Tanner, 2018
What is the impact of culturally harmful experiences and daily microaggressions?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Internalized Devaluation</th>
<th>Assaulted Sense of Self</th>
<th>Internalized Voicelessness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Feelings of unworthiness or undeserving</td>
<td>• Unhealthy worldview</td>
<td>• Not speaking up for themselves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Feeling unaccomplished or that have little to no talent or skills</td>
<td>• Inability or struggle towards goal setting</td>
<td>• Limited demonstration of agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Low self-esteem and confidence</td>
<td>• Narrowing sense of time</td>
<td>• Appeasement or fawning as a stress response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Increased arousal</td>
<td>• Limited emotional expressions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Mistrusting</td>
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Hardy, 2013
Creating Culturally Affirming Spaces: A Systems Orientation
In what ways do we experience the culture of schools and school systems?
Systems Culture

- Language used to describe students and families
- Shared beliefs
- Communication behaviors
- Policies
- Shared norms
- Practices
- Acceptable behaviors
- Who is being held accountable, etc.
- Professional learning
- Partnership
Every system is perfectly designed to get the results it gets.
District Systemic Focus

- Teaching and Learning
- School Culture and Schoolwide Policies
- District and State Policies
- Family and Community Partnerships

ovide oversight and leadership

BELE Framework, n.d.
Common Systems Barriers

• A culture of compliance
• Implicit and explicit bias and incongruent beliefs
• Overreliance on structural changes
• Siloed or departments working in isolation
• Not regularly looking at disaggregated data and addressing challenges
• Lack of systemwide organization around identified approach or strategy
• Focusing on one aspect and not examining system as a whole
• Political and relational challenges
• Failing to acknowledge blind spots and not having a plan for addressing obstacles

Elrod & Kezar, 2017; Childress, Elmore, & Grossman, 2006; Theoharis, 2010
Much of the System is Beneath the Surface

THE ICEBERG
A Tool for Guiding Systemic Thinking

EVENTS
What just happened?

PATTERNS/TRENDS
What trends have there been over time?

UNDERLYING STRUCTURES
What has influenced the patterns?
What are the relationships between the parts?

MENTAL MODELS
What assumptions, beliefs and values do people hold about the system? What beliefs keep the system in place?

Practices
Procedures
Policies
Beliefs

Nishizuka, 2018
The ways we experience culture: The Culture Tree

**CONCRETE:** Observable elements
- food, dress, music, holidays
- Low emotional charge

**BEHAVIORAL:** Unspoken rules, social norms
- Nonverbal communication, eye contact, personal space, parenting, handling emotions, concepts of time
- Strong emotional charge

**SYMBOLIC:** Abstract, values, core beliefs
- Worldview, spirituality, fairness, concepts of self, decision making, cultural archetypes
- Intense emotional charge

## Three Types of Bias-Based Beliefs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Color Evasiveness</th>
<th>Deficit Thinking</th>
<th>Poverty Disciplining Belief</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A racial ideology where one’s social identities are ignored, frames commonalities between individuals, and neglects the prevalence of racism and other social bias as it omits race, gender, and other social identities from an individual’s existence and experience.</td>
<td>An ideology used within all levels of educational systems to explain academic performance as a result of deficiencies within an individual and group. It discounts the presence of systemic inequalities as the result of race-based processes, practices, and policies. The foundation of deficit thinking is—genetic pathology and culture of poverty.</td>
<td>Focuses on changing the behaviors and thinking of individuals from low-income backgrounds so that they adopt behaviors as necessary/required for social mobility. A second component of this belief involves the premise that poverty causes compromised development among children and family units.</td>
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*Quotes*

“I try not to notice a child’s race or skin color in the classroom setting.”

“Sometimes I wonder why we can’t see each other as individuals instead of race always being an issue.”

“Students of color from disadvantaged homes just seem to show a lack of initiative.”

“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.”

“Poor people don’t know the value of education and need to be educated about its value. Poor kids are not exposed to the type of grit necessary to be successful in school.”

“Discipline and structure are important tools when working with poor kids.”

“They need to pull up their pants; otherwise they won’t get jobs.”
We focus on shifting adult practices, we don’t fix kids.
Culturally Responsive Leadership (Khalifa, 2016)

- Build equity mindsets and address bias-based beliefs
- Unpack social identities and racial narratives
- Build teacher capacity through professional learning on and modeling of culturally affirming behaviors

Develop culturally responsive teachers

- Commit to continuous learning of cultural knowledge and contexts
- Use qualitative and quantitative data to identify existing inequities in student inclusiveness, policy, and practice
- Seek the voices of students and teachers to understand how culture is being hindered and/or validated in the hallways, in student programs, on the school yard, etc.
- Explore the supporting and restraining factors focused on adult practices

Critically reflect on culturally affirming leadership

- Establish a shared language and vision for culturally affirming practices
- Use data to identify disparities and challenge exclusionary policies, practices, and beliefs
- Identify and plan for systemic, sustainable, affirming changes that center and respect the identities of culturally, linguistically, and racially diverse students

Promote culturally responsive school environments

- Develop meaningful and positive relationships with the students and families
- Elevate and honor student and community voices to identify needs and shape culturally affirming responses
- Serve as an advocate for students and the neighborhood community

Engaging families in community contexts

Students must see themselves in learning.
## Addressing Systemic Barriers

<table>
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<th>Challenges</th>
<th>Anticipatory Action</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Culture of nice</td>
<td>• Practice Courageous Conversations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lack of self-awareness</td>
<td>• Provide real-world examples of leaders and systems engaging in this work</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Race-neutral conversations and approaches</td>
<td>• Establish norms and working agreements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Sticking to a protocol no matter what</td>
<td>• Modifying a protocol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lack of partner inclusion</td>
<td>• Using strategies to build an “on ramp”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Not having a clear idea of problem</td>
<td>• Establishing a shared language with commonly held definitions and terms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>seeking to address</td>
<td>• Facilitate vigorously and vigilantly (e.g., mindful of microaggressions)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Avoiding beliefs, mindsets work</td>
<td>• Identify patterns of participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Understating race</td>
<td>• Establishing shared/collective responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• White silence</td>
<td>• Setting up safe spaces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Defensiveness</td>
<td>• Asking questions and use paraphrasing to clarify what was heard</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Roegman et al., 2019
Starting Points

- Building a task force, team to initiate this work in your district
- Learn your data for places to start—root cause analysis, equity review
- Utilize self-assessment tools as a team to calibrate and help you identify
- Motivational, interviewing, youth-participation action research (YPAR) to learn the lived experiences of your constituents
- Implement equity-centered protocols, resources
- Engage regularly with critical questions that help to refocus and recenter the work at hand, such as these focusing questions (Garmston & Wellman, 2016)
  - Who are we?
  - Why are we doing this?
  - Why are we doing this this way?
The 4th grade teacher started using poetry and hip hop to get him to fall in love with writing and to find his voice. He starts getting fours in writing and I’m just like, oh my God! And now he’s so arrogant about his writing as if he’s always been good at it. But it’s like that’s just an example of being able to bring in curriculum that is relevant and that is culturally relevant and means something to kids. That’s been really important for us.

Parent
Baldwin Hills Elementary School
Los Angeles Unified School District
Personal and Professional Reflection:

Of the research and information presented, what resonates with you the most and why? How might that piece be used in systems change work at your school, district, or organization?
Panel Discussion
Creating systems and systemic culture that are culturally affirming for culturally, racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse students
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LGBTQ Inclusion Consultant, Director of LGBTQ Affairs for the Office of the Mayor, Baltimore City

Reed Swier  
Associate Director of Training and Development, NYU Metro
Ayana Allen-Handy, PhD

• Researcher focused on justice-oriented urban education

• Directs the Justice-Oriented Youth Education Lab, which seeks to equalize traditional research methods and center them on lived experiences, cultural knowledge, and expertise of our youth and community members
Ayanna Cooper, EdD

• Educational consultant, author, professor, and advocate for culturally and linguistically diverse learners

• Held positions as an English as a Second Language teacher, ELL Instructional Coach, Urban Education Teacher Supervisor, ELL/Title III Director, and ELL/Bilingual Program Specialist
Jabari Lyles

• LGBTQ inclusion consultant and first-ever Director of LGBTQ Affairs for the Office of the Mayor in Baltimore City

• Former elementary and middle school teacher and a K–12 education advocate who draws on a history and career as an educator, community leader, and public administrator to teach others how to create safe, affirming spaces for LGBTQ youth in schools
Rosa Perez-Isiah, EdD

• Social justice educational leader, advocate for equity, author, speaker

• Director of Elementary, Equity, and Access for Norwalk-La Mirada USD in California who is passionate about equity and access, multilingual education, leadership, and closing opportunity gaps for historically underserved students
Reed Swier, MEd

- Promotes equity and opportunity in education as the Associate Director of Training and Development at The Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools, an NYU Steinhardt department

- Former teacher and administrator with a focus on building the capacity of educational institutions to understand the systems of inequality that disproportionately impact students
Discussion Prompts

• In your line of work, please share an example of what culturally affirming practices look like from a leadership perspective and/or systems level.

• How do we work to reduce and transform systemic harm in schooling and school systems?

• What does it look like for groups and systems to embrace this work on a collective level? What does accountability look like at different levels of the system?

• How do we engage power holders such as school boards and other key decisionmakers?

• What is the next avenue or focus in your work?

• Share an insight or *pearl of wisdom* for our audience.
Questions and Answers
Let’s Hear From You…

Type into the chat box

Questions? Reflections? Insights?
Closing activity:
Name one action you will take following today’s webinar
Check Your Email

- Survey link
- Webinar 2 slides
- Facebook livestream recording
- Webinar 2 recording and resources

Watch for emails from relwest@wested.org
Thank You!

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References


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