Building and Sustaining Safe, Equitable, and Culturally Responsive Learning Spaces

Abigail Amoako Kayser, Ph.D
Brian Kayser, Ed.S
Learning Targets

By the end of this session, I will have a better understanding of:

- What it takes to create equitable in-person and virtual learning environments
- Action steps I can take to implement and sustain an equitable in-person and virtual learning environment

Resources are embedded in the PPT. You’ll have the link to slides at the end of the presentation.
Why is this work important?

“Teacher concerns about building a classroom community are exacerbated when “students’ language, experiences, ethnicities, religions, and abilities’ are not shared by the teacher.” (Milner, 2006, 2008)

- Discipline disparities
  - Subjective interpretations of student behaviors
    - “She’s so quiet/loud that I don’t even think they want to learn.”
    - “Talks back = defiant = disrespectful”
    - OR “Talks back = precocious or inquisitive”
  - Cultural misunderstandings
    - “I can’t recommend Luis for Honors English because he’ll have no one at home who can help him.”
Why is this work important?

The consequences of inequitable learning spaces can lead to:

- Missed opportunities to learn and achieve
- Withdrawal from learning
- Frequent suspensions
- Dropping out and not graduating (Davis & Jordan, 1994; Raffaele-Mendez, 2003; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986).

- Pushed Out: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools (Morris, 2016)
- Cradle-to-Prison Pipeline
  - 3rd and 4th grade reading scores predict future prison capacity (Allen & White-Smith, 2014)
Know Your Equity Dashboard

What does the equity dashboard of your school district say about the experiences of marginalized students?

How are we countering/contributing to this narrative?

---

**Equity Table**

The following table contains a high-level dashboard of examples that typify equity gaps persistent in ACSPS, in spite of our current levels of resourcing and support. These data samples are representative of opportunities that some of our demographic groups are not accessing; insufficient mentoring and accountability for lack of participation of some of our demographic groups in school and the learning process; and particular outcomes.

The following table contains...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2016 - 2017 Equity Table</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Demographic Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Framework

We are all products of our environment!
“Do the best you can until you know better. Then, when you know better, do better.”

Maya Angelou
Our goal as teachers is “to create an environment in which students behave appropriately from a sense of personal responsibility, not from a fear of punishment or desire for a reward. As such, the environment must acknowledge and be responsive to who the students are (cognitively, socially and emotionally), and create a safety net that equitably responds to what teachers know about their students.” Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke, and Curran (2004)
Guiding Framework for Today

Culturally Responsive Classroom Management (or Culturally Responsive Classroom Facilitation)

1. Recognition of One’s Own Cultural Lens and Biases
2. Knowledge of Students’ Cultural Background
3. Awareness of the Broader, Social, Economic, and Political Context
4. Ability and Willingness to Use Culturally Appropriate Management Strategies
5. Commitment to Building Caring Classroom Communities

1. Recognition of One’s Own Cultural Lens and Biases

“Too often students are looked upon as the sole problem when teachers actually contribute to conflicts that occur in the classroom. Consequently, punishment and referrals persist.” (Milner et al., 2019)

- Implicit bias tests
  - Everyone has biases, but how do we address them?
    - Take the Harvard Implicit Bias tests
- Identity work
  - Identity wheel
  - Critical Reflective Practice
    - “In what ways do your race and socioeconomic background shape your worldview, what you do, how you experience the world, and what/how you teach?” (Milner et al., 2019)
    - Common Beliefs Survey: Teaching Racially and Ethnically Diverse Students
1. Recognition of One’s Own Cultural Lens and Biases

- Assessing understanding of cultures (own and others’)
- Listening stance
  - Open, non-judgmental listening
- Collaborative sense-making
  - Working with others to discuss realizations, successes, challenges, and more
- An ongoing and iterative process
  - Scaffolded Anti-Racist Resources
2. Knowledge of Students’ Cultural Backgrounds

Teacher–student relationships is one of the most essential elements of classroom culture that promotes learning (Gay, 2010, Howard, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Milner, 2010).

- Build and sustain relationships (teacher–student, student–student)
  - One-on-one check-ins with students
    - Feelings Chart to help students process current stress/trauma
  - Virtual lunch bunch/group
  - Host a virtual game night or movie night with students and families through Zoom
2. Knowledge of Students’ Cultural Backgrounds

- Family home visits
  - Can be done through Zoom
  - If students are comfortable, ask them to show you their favorite room, where they do homework, where they play, etc
  - Consistently throughout the school year

- Informal ethnographies of students
  - Learn by talking to students, families, previous teachers, counselors, and community members
  - Adopt a listening stance
2. Knowledge of Students’ Cultural Backgrounds

- Awareness of stereotypes
  - What cultural stereotypes exist/have existed and how have they been used?
  - Microaggressions (examples of microaggressions)
- Taking an asset-based or strengths-based approach to classroom interactions
  - Applies to interactions with students and families, behaviors, student work, and more
- Welcoming families to class to share culture
  - Incorporate families through Zoom
  - Create projects, like interviewing a family member, to help develop students’ critical consciousness
3. Awareness of the Broader Social, Economic, and Political Context

- Understanding the institutional and systemic barriers
  - Disparities in funding
  - Redlining
    - “The Case for Reparations” by Ta-Nehisi Coates
    - *These Kids Are Out of Control* by Rich Milner
- Classrooms are not apolitical spaces
  - Movement of racial justice
  - “They’re Not Too Young to Talk About Race”
  - *This Book Is Anti-Racist* by Tiffany Jewell
- Curriculum audit
  - What perspectives and people are given a prominent voice in your curriculum? What perspectives and people are excluded?
  - How can you center other voices and perspectives?
  - *Culturally Responsive Curriculum Scorecard*
3. Awareness of the Broader Social, Economic, and Political Context

- It is not enough to be racist—we must be anti-racist
  - The difference between being "not racist" and anti-racist
  - How To Be an Anti-Racist by Ibram X. Kendi
  - “What Anti-Racist Teachers Do Differently” by Pirette McKamey

  “They disaggregate data such as grades and attendance by ethnicity, look for patterns, and problematize their own practice—rather than assume that their students weren’t motivated or sufficiently prepared to engage with challenging material.”
4. Ability and Willingness to Use Culturally Appropriate Management Strategies

- Building positive, asset-based relationships
- Co-creating in-person and virtual class norms
- High behavioral expectations (Ladson-Billings, 1995) vs. Strict behavioral rules
- “Equitable access to learning requires multiple entry points. This might include via phone calls, texts, broadcast television and radio, paper packets, asynchronous and synchronous interaction with teachers” (Heinrich, Darling-Aduana, and Annalee Good, 2020)
4. Ability and Willingness to Use Culturally Appropriate **Management** Strategies

- **Restorative Discipline** - “A disposition, a mindset, and an approach to discipline that builds upon the foundational idea that schools are places where students are expected to make errors and learn from them—instead of removing and excluding students from their educational setting as punishment, a restorative discipline approach supports students coming to terms with how their actions may have affected others, **taking responsibility of these actions**, and **continuing to learn and grow**. Moreover, a restorative discipline approach allows teachers and other educators to learn and grow from conflict—does not only focus on “correction” on students” (Milner et al., 2019)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Punitive Approach</th>
<th>Restorative Approach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School rules are violated.</td>
<td>People and relationships are violated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justice focuses on establishing guilt.</td>
<td>Justice identifies needs and obligations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountability is defined as punishment.</td>
<td>Accountability is defined as understanding the effects of the offense and repairing any harm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justice is directed at the offender; those harmed are ignored.</td>
<td>The student who may have caused harm, those harmed, and school staff all have direct roles in the justice process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rules and intent outweigh the outcome.</td>
<td>Students who may have caused harm are held responsible for their behavior, repairing any harm they’ve caused and working toward a positive outcome.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No opportunity is offered for the offender to express remorse or make amends.</td>
<td>Opportunities are offered for offenders to express remorse or make amends.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. Ability and Willingness to Use Culturally Appropriate Management Strategies

Methods of Restorative Discipline

- Affective Language
- Affective Statements
- Affective Questions
- Circle Process (Morning Meeting)
- Conferences

The Tools for Restorative Justice Practices
5. Commitment to Building Caring Classroom Communities

- Build community within the classroom
  - Sense of belonging and inclusion
  - Weekly face-to-face conferencing
    - Student-led
    - *No Teaching, Let’s Chat*
- Recognize threats and trauma students and their families are feeling
  - Grief, financial hardships, and racism
    - Why building trust with students is so important
  - Knowing when to refer students to others
  - Foster a safe space for discussions, questions, and action steps
    - *Feelings Chart* to help students process current stress/trauma
    - Teach and modeling *Critical Reflection* with students (Milner et al, 2019)
5. Commitment to Building Caring Classroom Communities

- Build community outside of the classroom
  - Support students to identify/support/foster their assets
  - Assess community needs and take social action
    - Importance of students having a sense of purpose and optimism in these times

- Flexibility in online spaces
  - Home responsibilities can change in an online environment
  - Comfort in offering both synchronous and asynchronous settings
  - Technology/connectivity issues
  - "College Made Them Feel Equal. The Virus Exposed How Unequal Their Lives Are." by Nicholas Casey

- Clarity and consistency
- Monitoring and responding to discussion boards, comments, and chats
  - Spelling, sarcasm, public chats meant to be private, etc.
Engage w/ us

Please reach out if you have any questions, want feedback, or just want to check in!

Abigail - aaa5w@virginia.edu

Brian - brk3m@virginia.edu

Access the slides at: http://tinyurl.com/ynec2020learningspaces