5 Shifts to Co-Create Equity

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RACE & EQUITY IN EDUCATION
formerly The Discovery Center

1. Mainstream → Margins

Educational systems—like all systems in the U.S.—were designed by, and for, individuals with 'mainstream' identities: *white, male, English-speaking, middle class+, Christian, neurotypical, able-bodied, heterosexual, cis-gender, etc*. Upholding the policies, practices, and culture that best serve students with mainstream identities, systemically creates and reinforces marginalization. Transforming educational institutions requires centering the experiences of people living through marginalization and oppression; they understand their experiences best and hold the greatest potential to envision new systems and generate solutions. Systems designed to serve students in the margins will serve all students well.

2. Colorblind → Color Conscious

The myth of *colorblindness* functions as a tool to avoid confronting issues of race, racism, and white privilege and makes it difficult to examine implicit bias, structural racism, and to celebrate differences. Statements like, "I don't see color," are scientifically and experientially inaccurate, and erase important aspects of an individual's identity while denying that racial differences exist and impact people's lives and access to opportunities. Sustainable changes to the inequitable policies, practices, and patterns that create and maintain racially disparate outcomes become possible when individuals and systems commit to being *conscious* about racial differences and the impacts of racism.

3. Deficit → Systemic*   *Adapted from Five Shifts of Consciousness for Multicultural Educators. Gorski, 2010

Instead of addressing the root causes of inequities, initiatives to fix the 'achievement gap' rely on a *deficit* framework which places blame on students of color, low-income students, and students with other marginalized identities for their lack of educational attainment (i.e. there's something wrong with the culture, values, or motivation of under-performing students and/or their families). A *systemic* approach examines the structural barriers—like access to safe and affordable housing, health care, and living wages—created by racism, classism, sexism, etc. along with the policies, practices, and cultural patterns that reinforce marginalization. Addressing the 'opportunity gap' requires us to remove those barriers to academic achievement. Where the problem is positioned matters, because it will determine how solutions are generated.

Example: *Deficit:* The problem is that <u>these parents</u> don't speak English
          Systemic: The problem is that <u>our school</u> isn't prepared to accommodate our linguistically diverse community
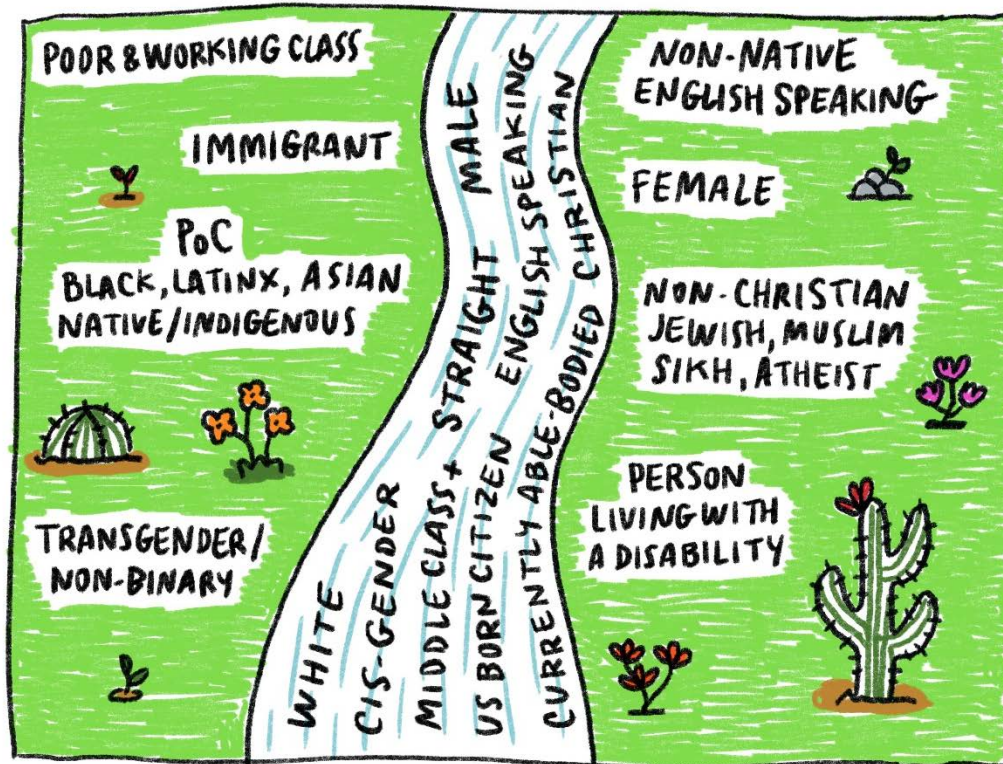
4. Equality → Equity

<u>Equality:</u> everyone gets the same thing. <u>Equity:</u> everyone gets what they need to grow and thrive. In a society where injustice is present, equity may not feel 'fair.' The legacies of indigenous genocide, slavery, colonization, white supremacy, patriarchy, etc., have shaped the systems and institutions that uphold our current inequitable society. People are born into different geographic locations and social positions with the mechanics and cultural patterns of oppression already in place. Given this context, shallow commitments to *equality* and a desire to "treat everyone the same" will produce disparate outcomes because the current status quo is inherently unequal. Instead, there must be a commitment to repairing, mitigating, and transforming the histories and current realities of inequity and injustice.

5. Racism requires INTENT to harm → IMPACT that disproportionally harms people of color is racism

Many understandings of racism inaccurately require an *intent* to harm a person because of their race or skin color; seeing racism as a moment, rather than a system. Racism does not require an active *intent* to harm people of color; instead, many racial inequities are unintended and remain in place by not acknowledging that racially disparate *impact* is an indicator of racism. Upholding specific policies or defending actions which create inequity, even if they were based on good intentions, contributes to marginalization and oppression. Educational systems marginalize Black and Brown students—by design and by default—a reality made invisible by colorblindness, reinforced by deficit thinking, and hidden behind an inadequate commitment to equality. In an equitable environment, all members of the community must take responsibility for the ways they contribute to patterns of racism while committing to address the many ways racism affects people of color, even when there was no intention to harm them.

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Shift 1: Mainstream → **Margins**

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This shift leads us to believe that:

1. Our current educational system is producing exactly the outcomes it was designed to produce.
2. We must fix the system that creates marginalization, **not** fix those individuals who are marginalized by the system.
3. In the margins, people experience repression and cultivate resistance and resilience.
4. Those most directly impacted by marginalization must be centered in the creation of new approaches to teaching and learning.
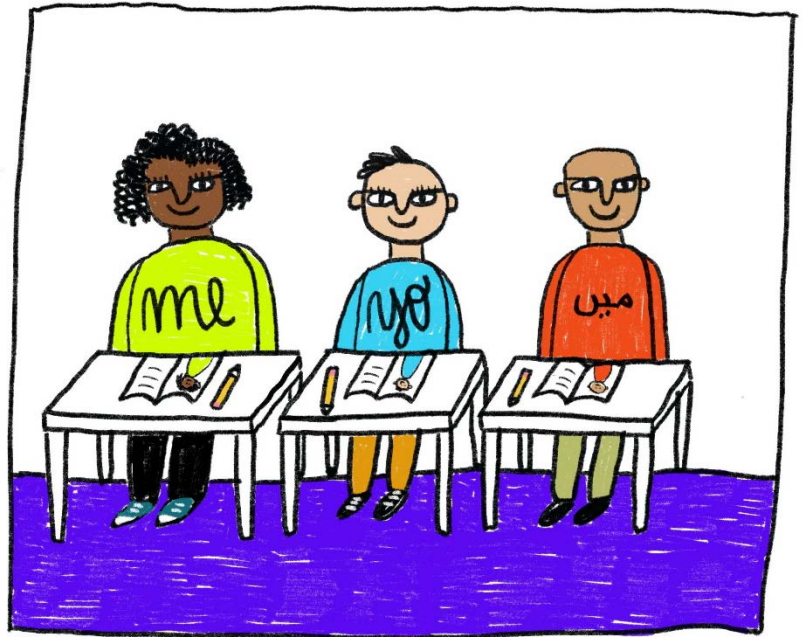5. _____

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5 Shifts to Co-Create Equity

Shift 2: Colorblind → **Color Conscious**
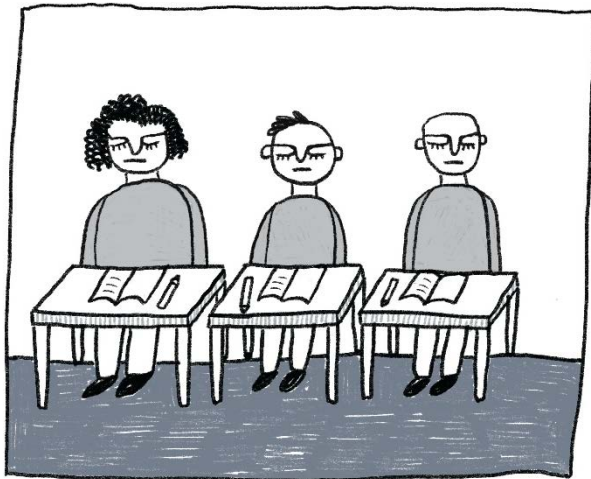
Colorblind...   ...to Color Conscious

The myth of *colorblindness* functions as a tool to avoid confronting issues of race, racism, and white privilege and makes it difficult to examine implicit bias, structural racism, and to celebrate differences. Statements like, "I don't see color," are scientifically and experientially inaccurate, and erase important aspects of an individual's identity while denying that racial differences exist and impact people's lives and access to opportunities. Sustainable changes to the inequitable policies, practices, and patterns that create and maintain racially disparate outcomes become possible when individuals and systems commit to being *conscious* about racial differences and the impacts of racism.

This shift leads us to believe that:

1. Saying things like: "I don't see color," and "I treat all my students the same regardless of race," dehumanizes and erases the racialized experiences of Black and Brown students.
2. Being 'colorblind' will not solve racism; instead, it allows racism to grow unchecked and unexamined.
3. Our inability to see the impacts of racism doesn't mean they don't exist in our classroom and workplace.
4. We can, and must, develop the skills to effectively identify and respond to racism through self-examination and believing the experiences of people of color.
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Shift 3: Deficit → **Systemic**

Deficit...

...to Systemic

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Example: Deficit: The problem is that <u>these parents</u> don't speak English.

         Systemic: The problem is that <u>our school</u> isn't prepared to accommodate our linguistically diverse community.

This shift leads us to believe that:

1. Blaming students of color for a lack of educational achievement, while ignoring the racist system which determines the kinds of opportunities they have access to, is a form of racism rooted in a deficit ideology.

2. We should not feel pity for our students who experience racism, poverty, and trauma; nor should we simply encourage them to develop the grit necessary to endure or escape. Instead, we should equip them with the skills to critically examine and transform the very systems which create and maintain oppression.

3. Educational systems, and the individuals who hold authority in them, must take responsibility for creating greater equity within their spheres of influence.

4. We'll need to develop intersectional and interconnected movements for liberation and justice to create equitable learning environments within a larger inequitable society.

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5 Shifts to Co-Create Equity

Shift 4: Equality → **Equity**
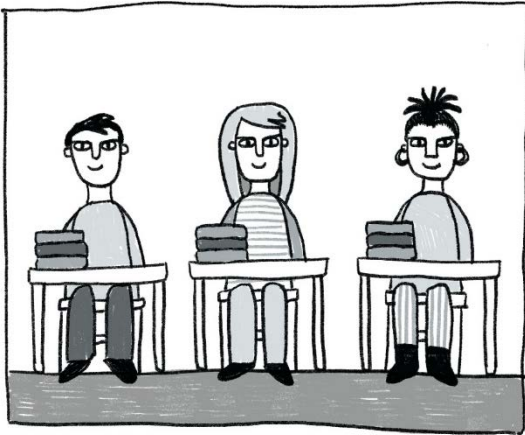
Equality...

...to Equity

Equality: everyone gets the same thing. Equity: everyone gets what they need to grow and thrive. In a society where injustice is present, equity may not feel 'fair.' The legacies of indigenous genocide, slavery, colonization, white supremacy, patriarchy, etc., have shaped the systems and institutions that uphold our current inequitable society. People are born into different geographic locations and social positions with the mechanics and cultural patterns of oppression already in place. Given this context, shallow commitments to *equality* and a desire to "treat everyone the same" will produce disparate outcomes because the current status quo is inherently unequal. Instead, there must be a commitment to repairing, mitigating, and transforming the histories and current realities of inequity and injustice.

This shift leads us to believe that:

1. All people are equal in terms of value, dignity, agency, and humanity.

2. Systems of racism and oppression keep some people in power and marginalize others, based on their social identities. Without interruption, this inequality will continue to produce unequal outcomes.

3. Commitments to equality are shallow and ineffective (i.e. after decades of pursuing equality post Brown v. Board of Education in 1954, we have greater disparity in educational outcomes between white students and students of color); commitments to equity are required.

4. We need equitable approaches to education rooted in an accurate understanding of history and designed to address and transform current inequity and injustice.
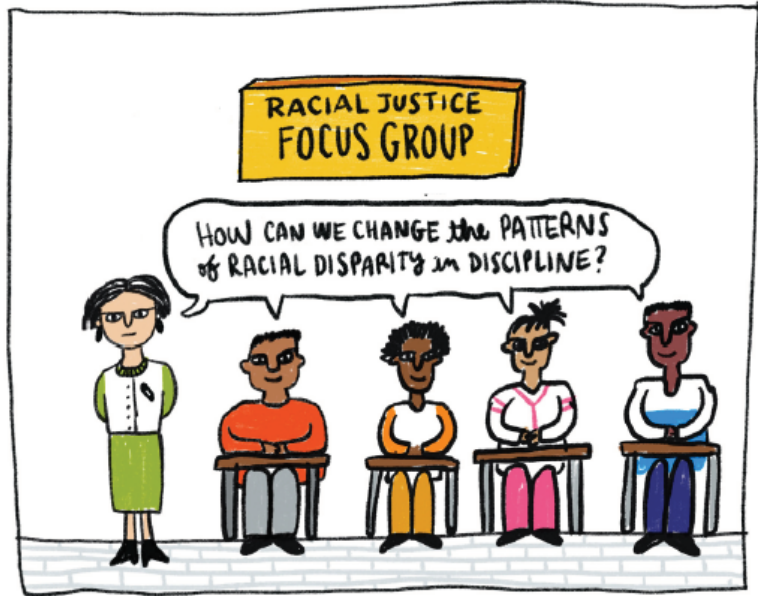
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Shift 5: Racism requires INTENT to harm → **IMPACT that disproportionally harms people of color is racism**

"Racism requires INTENT to harm"...

...IMPACT that disproportionally harms people of color is racism

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This shift leads us to believe that:

1. Racism is the systemic and institutionalized domination, discrimination, and dehumanization of black people and people of color; regardless of intent.

2. Unintentional racism harms students of color, just as much as intentional racism.

3. Microaggressions, disparities in discipline, academic tracking, standardized tests, and any other data that demonstrates a disproportionate negative impact on students of color are indicators of racism.

4. There is no such thing as reverse racism or "non-racism." There is either racism, or anti-racism.

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