

THE DISCOVERY CENTER

A classroom without walls for a future without prejudice

Co-Creating Equity: Critical Shifts

1. Mainstream → Margins

Educational systems--like all systems in the US--were designed to benefit individuals with 'mainstream' identities (*white, male, English-speaking, middle- upper-middle class, Christian, neurotypical, able-bodied, heterosexual, etc.*). It is not surprising that schools today continue to best serve students who hold these identities. In order to transform our policies, practices, and procedures to become more equitable we must focus on the experiences of those who are marginalized. Individuals with lived experiences of marginalization and oppression hold the greatest knowledge and potential to envision new systems that will meet their unique needs. Systems designed to serve students in the margins, will serve all students well.

2. Deficit → Systems*

*Adapted from Five Shifts of Consciousness for Multicultural Educators. Gorski, 2010

A *deficit* approach finds fault in students of color, low-income students, and other students/families from marginalized groups (i.e. there is something wrong with their culture; or, their family doesn't value education; or, they are just a lazy student). A *systems* approach examines the ways in which policies, practices, and pedagogies--as well as larger societal factors (e.g.: inequities in access to living wage work, health care, and safe and affordable housing)--influence educational outcome disparities. Where the problem is positioned matters, because it will determine how solutions are generated.

Example: Deficit: The problem is that these parents don't speak English

System: The problem is that our school is not prepared to accommodate our linguistically diverse community

3. Equality → 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 look 'fair.' This is because we have a history of indigenous genocide, colonization, white supremacy, patriarchy, etc. which has created the unjust society in which we live. If we did not have this history, perhaps equality could be our goal. However, our foundation is not level--we do not all start from the same place nor with the same privileges. We must understand today's inequity in the context of yesterday's injustice and respond accordingly.

4. Isolated (single-issue) → Interconnected & Intersectional

Racism, oppression, and inequity are well designed and durable systems. If we want to sustainably transform them, we must strategically address them at each domain: Internal, Interpersonal, Institutional, and Ideological. We enter through the lens of racial equity, with a commitment to intersectionality because we recognize that all oppression is interconnected. The concept of collective liberation teaches us that if all of us aren't free, none of us are free.

5. Racism requires INTENT to harm → If the IMPACT or outcome negatively affects communities of color; that is racism

Many definitions of racism have often, inaccurately required malicious intent to harm a person because of their race or skin color. When we expand our definition of racism to include disproportionate impact we allow ourselves to address the many ways racism affects people of color, even when there was no intention to harm them. We often get so distracted trying to defend our good intentions--or uphold a specific rule/policy--that we miss the opportunity to address the ways we are furthering marginalization and oppression. Whether it's a verbal microaggression, discipline data, or academic tracking, if the impact disproportionately marginalizes communities of color--it is racism! And, racism will not be solved with colorblind or race-neutral approaches.