

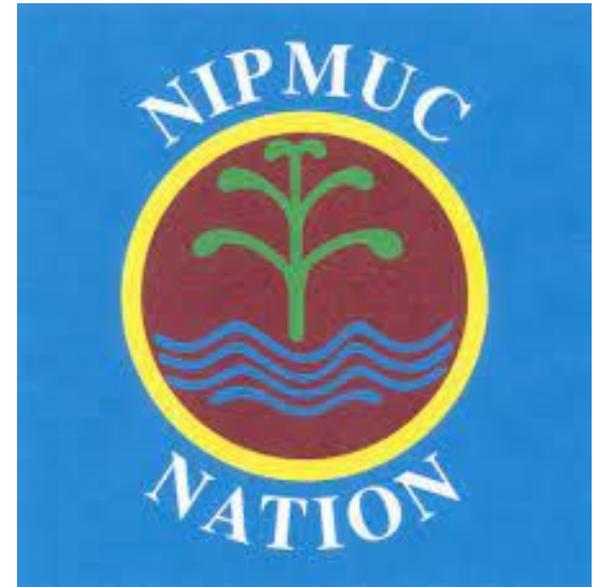


Identity, Belonging, and Brain Science: Engaging All Students

Jenny Jun-lei Kravitz
Equity and Inclusion Specialists

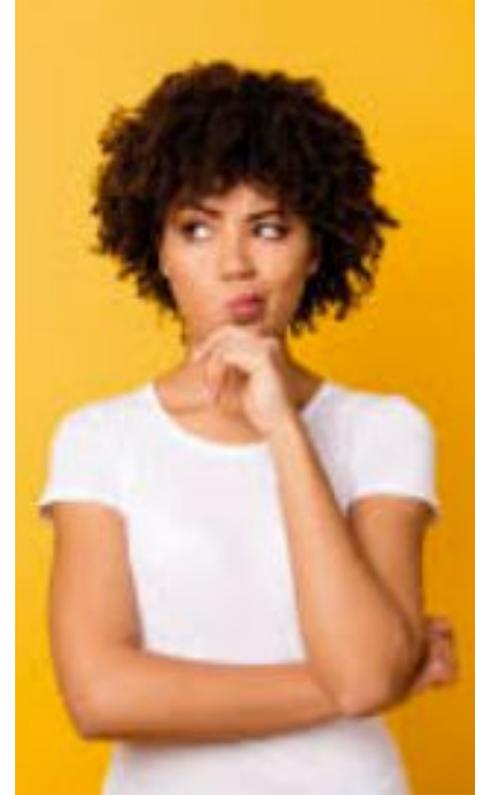
Land Acknowledgement

- We are currently located in the unceded lands of the Nipmuc Nation, the “**Fresh Water People.**”
- In the 1600s, English Puritan Colonists established **Praying Plantations** to initially to convert Indigenous Peoples, and then to contain them during the Wampanoag conflict in 1675.
- The few Nipmuc who persisted after the English prevailed were **dispossessed of their land** and subsequently developed some strong housing enclaves scattered around Worcester.
- The Nipmuc Nation currently centers activities at its **Hassanamisco Reservation** in Grafton, situated on a few acres of land that was once part of the Hassanamesit Praying Plantation.



Workshop Agenda

1. Identity and Belonging
2. Brain Science of Belonging
3. Establishing Psychological Safety
4. Examine and Reimagine



Common Language

- Useful to **avoid miscommunications and misunderstandings** in discussions
- Helps define community-wide understandings of **important concepts**
- Open and clear communication enables us to **build trusting and meaningful relationships** with one another
- Conversations and topics aren't "hard," just "**unpracticed**"

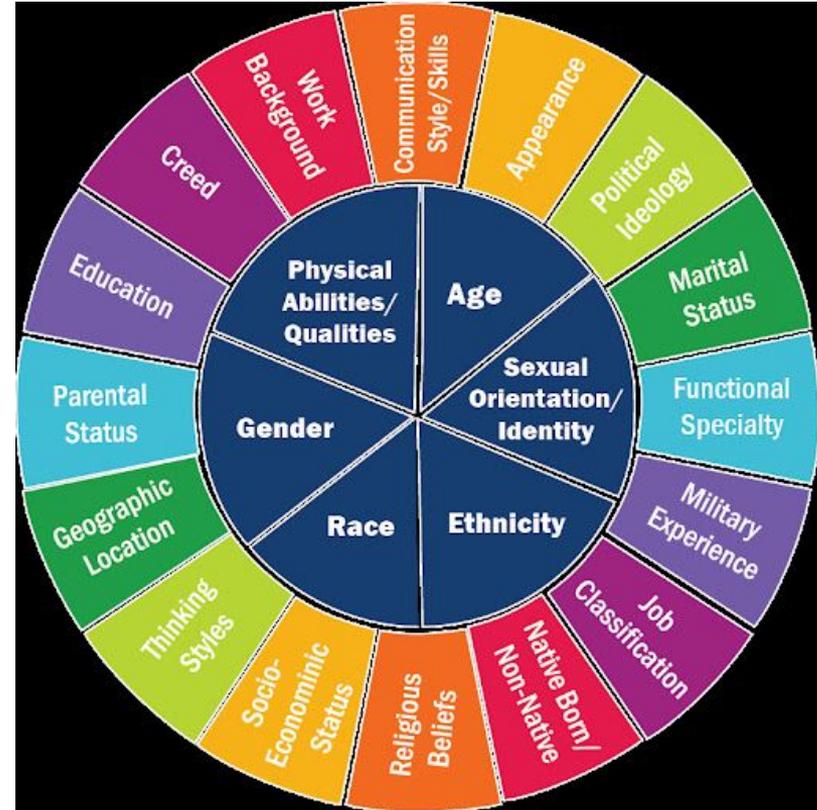


What is IDENTITY?

Identity is a particular **group, culture, or community** with which an individual identifies or shares a sense of belonging.

Individual agency is crucial for identity development; no person should be pressured to identify with any existing group, but instead have the freedom to **self-identify** on their own terms.

Individuals simultaneously hold **multiple identities** within themselves, which can and do **interact** with one another.



What is BELONGING?

Belonging is fulfillment of the human need to be **taken in, cared-for, protected, and valued** by a group, community, or organization.

Belonging is created through actions that express affinity, empathy, generosity, and more.

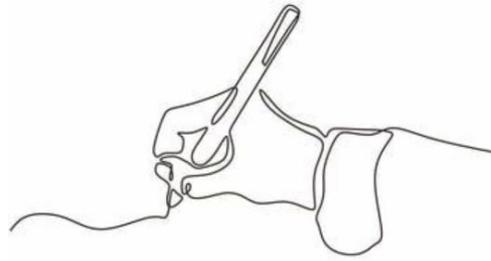


Identity Quick Activity

CHOOSE three aspects of your identity that you feel are core to who you are as a person.

DRAW a doodle to represent each one on a notecard.

Briefly **SHARE** about your doodles with someone near you.



Imagine that I rip one of the doodles off of your notecard and **throw it away**.

You don't get to choose which one, and **now it's gone**.

How does that make you feel?

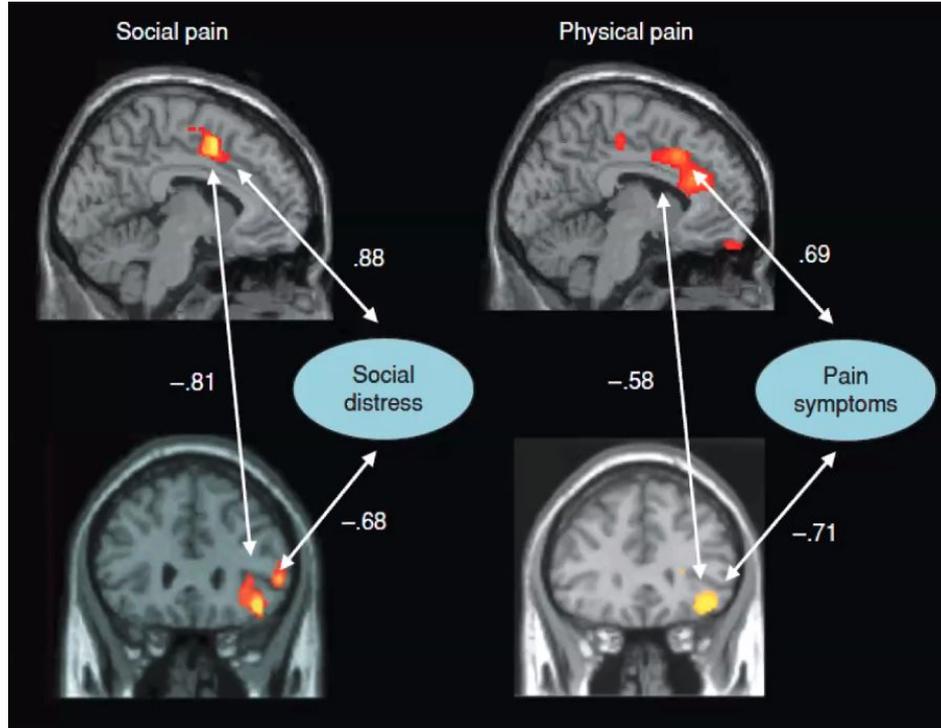
Identity Erasure Occurs When...

- Asked to **give up** an aspect of your identity
- Compelled to **hide** an aspect of your identity to “fit in” with everyone else
- Identified by **only one** aspect of your identity

Consider the big and small ways that this happens when you interact with others.



Brain Science of Social Distress



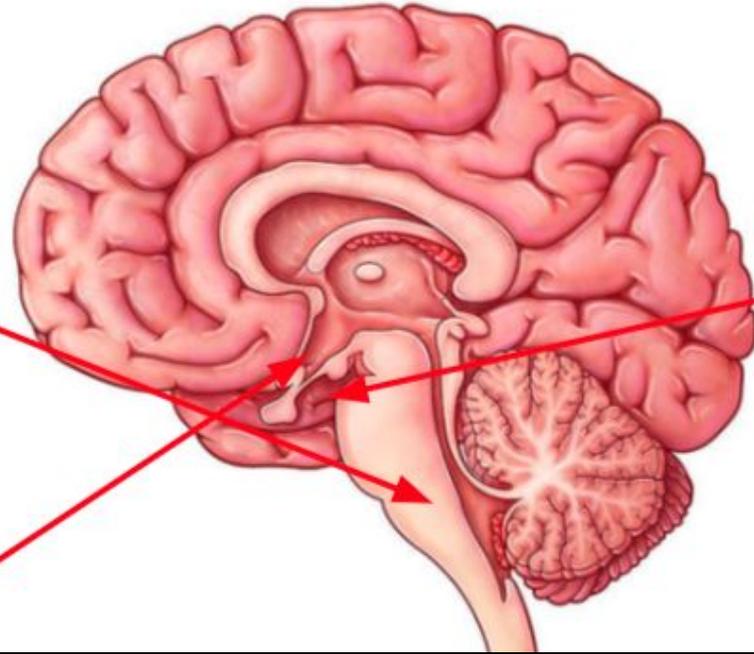
The brain processes **social pain** as it does **physical pain.**

Social Distress Causes Cognitive Impairment

Reticular Activating System

Scans environment for threats and rewards

Amygdala
Fight or flight response



Hippocampus

Where the brain connects new information to already existing knowledge (where learning happens!)

When the RAS detects a threat, it alerts the amygdala, triggering a fight or flight response that suppresses activity in the hippocampus.

Invisible Harm: Microaggressions

A microaggression is an intentional or unintentional **insult, slight, or hostile, negative message** to those who do not fit into the imaginary box of **dominant culture**.

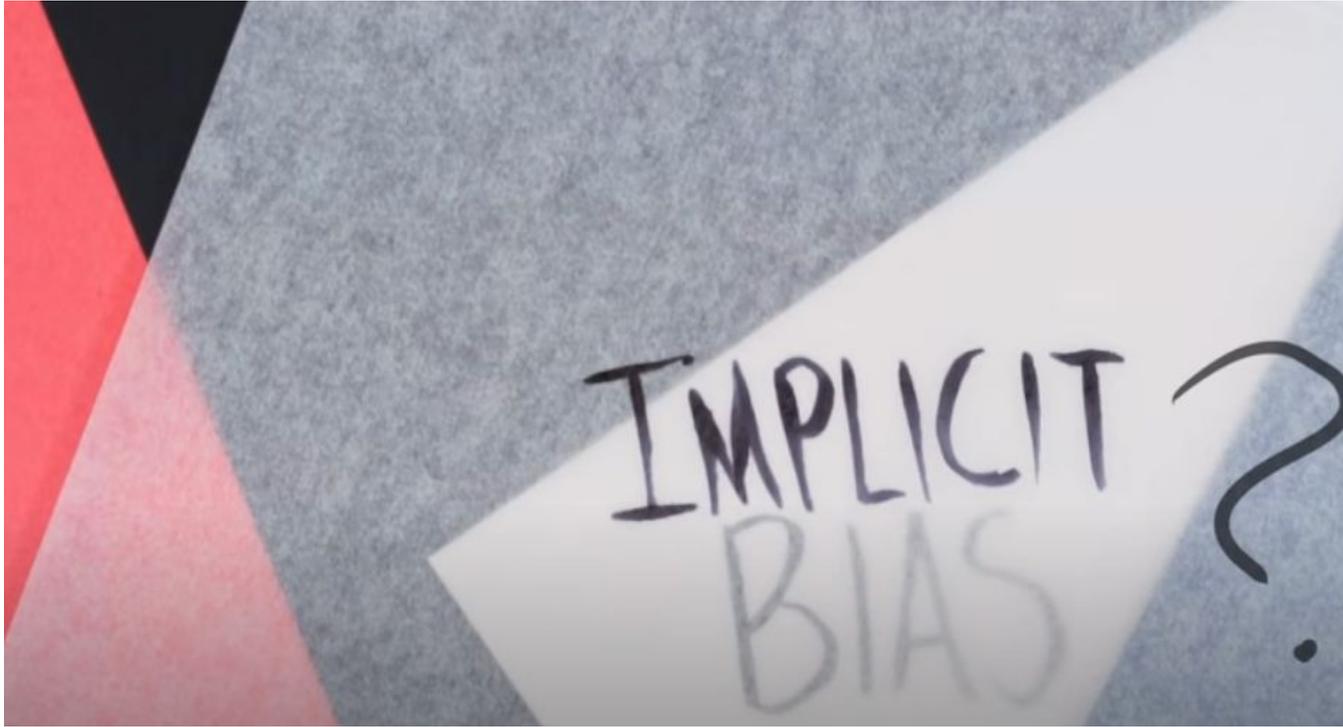
Sometimes they are **spoken**, like “Where are you from?” to someone who doesn’t look white.

Other times they are **acted out**, like calling on students with different frequency or more closely monitoring some students’ behavior.



<https://youtu.be/05BRBKfdDXc>

Unintentional Harm: Implicit Bias



<https://youtu.be/1JVN2qWSJF4>

Efficient Processing: Cognitive Biases

COGNITIVE BIAS CODEX

What Should We Remember?

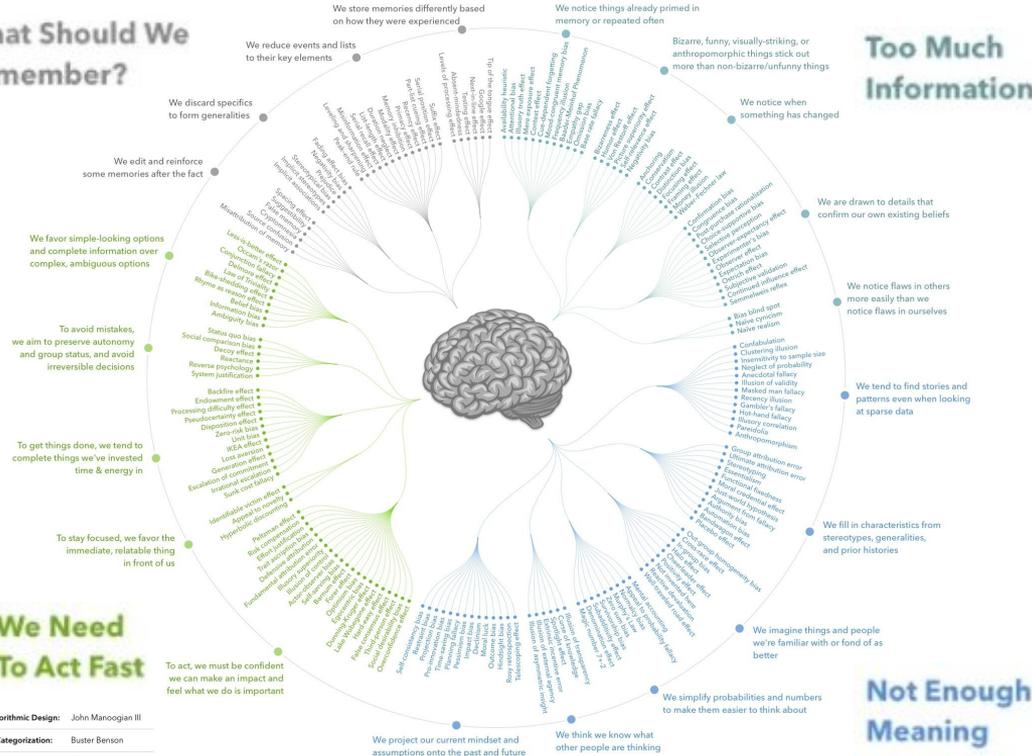


Photo from LGM by Manuel Schmalstieg CC-BY-2.0, Illusory Color Remix by Gwynn-KHBS - <https://pippin.gimp.org/>

What do you see in this photograph?

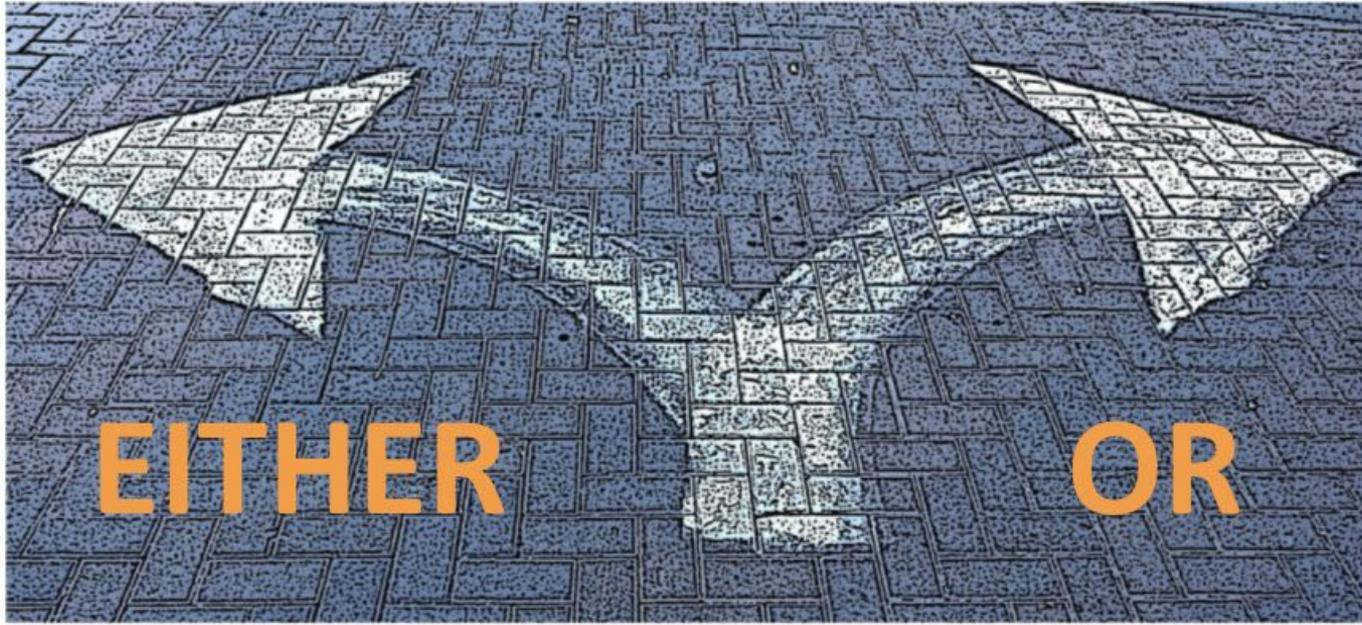
We are typically unaware of the shortcuts our brains are using!



This is a **black & white** photograph with color grid lines added in some places.

Understanding Assumptions: False Binaries

When complex options or ideas are inaccurately understood as two mutually exclusive options



Oversimplification is Problematic

GOOD	BAD
EQUITABLE	RACIST
VICTIM	OPPRESSOR
SUPPORTIVE	HARMFUL



Consider “BOTH / AND” Thinking:

We can **care deeply about students** and strive to compassionately support them

AND

We can be simultaneously and unknowingly **perpetuating harm that affects them** in acute and/or cumulative ways

We can hold privilege, **perpetuate harm**, misspeak, and/or need to learn/unlearn

AND

We can be **good people** who are doing important work, showing up for kids, and **making a positive impact** in their lives

Avoiding Cognitive Impairment: Establishing Psychological Safety



Psychological safety:

A climate in which people are comfortable expressing ideas, concerns, and mentioning mistakes without fear of embarrassment or retribution.

Psychological Safety: Five Needs

 Status	"Am I respected and valued?"
 Certainty	"Am I in the loop?"
 Autonomy	"Am I given choices or control?"
 Relatedness	"Do I feel connected to others?"
 Fairness	"Do I get the credit and opportunities I deserve?"

Status: “Am I respected and valued?”

- Co-create a **Community Agreement** for how you will treat each other and hold each other accountable when together
- Find ways for every single student to make an **essential contribution** to the forward progress and collective accomplishments of the class
- Have **high expectations for ALL** of your students
- **Differentiate instruction** to enable all of your students to reach these high expectations
- Reframe rigor as **how students engage and produce** while in class, NOT how much work they can complete outside of class time



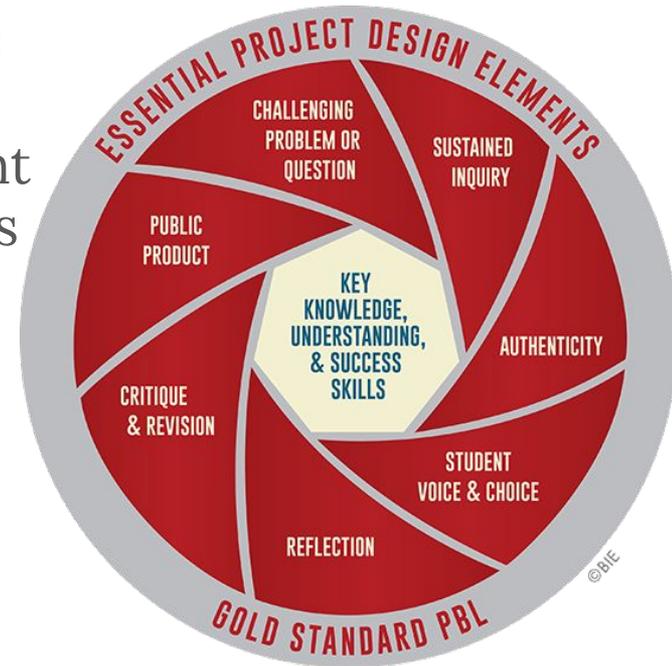
Certainty: “Am I in the loop?”

- Have consistent and predictable **routines** in your classroom: daily, weekly, quarterly, etc.
- Clearly communicate **learning objectives and lesson goals**, so that students can engage with what they are learning, how they’re doing it, and why it’s important
- **No surprise assessments**
(triggers threat response in brain)
- Be transparent with **grading practices**, and provide clear **assessment criteria** BEFORE students engage in the work
- Provide **continual formative feedback** for students, including grade updates (if applicable), so that there are no surprises



Autonomy: “Am I given choices or control?”

- Use Problem or **Project Based Learning**
- Develop and revise **Class Consensus Models**
- **Student Voice & Choice**: work within topics that interest students for deeper engagement and learning; connect to authentic audiences
- Utilize **collaborative working groups** with unique and clearly defined roles (students select based on **knowledge and application of their own strengths**)
- Harness **peer feedback** to offer multiple perspectives and empower students to identify and refine excellence



Relatedness: “Do I feel connected to others?”

- Create space and opportunity to **invite students’ unique cultures, perspectives, and interests** into the learning environment
- Continue **community-building** class exercises beyond the first weeks of the school year (regularly throughout the year)
- Uncover and create meaningful **shared experiences**
- Develop and pursue **shared goals** as a class (or a school/district)
- Emphasize collective endeavors and **shared success**



Fairness: “Do I get the credit and opportunities I deserve?”

- Minimize/eliminate **prerequisites and recommendations** for course enrollment
- Prioritize **sectioning** to meet interest levels and prevent waitlisting
- Utilize **mastery grading** to focus on fully-developed competencies (and provide flexibility and feedback during development)
- **Showcase student work** in ways that create opportunities to uplift and celebrate every student



Curiously Interrogate Your Practice

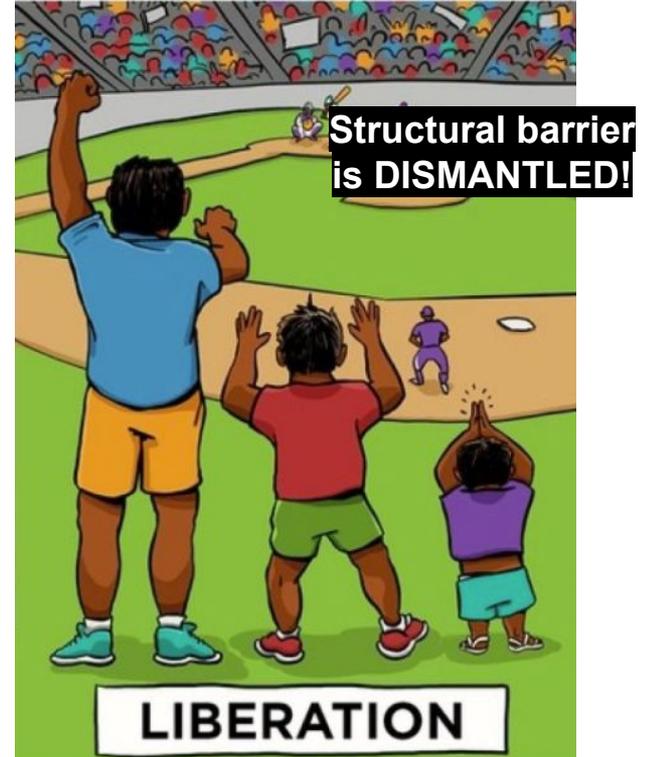
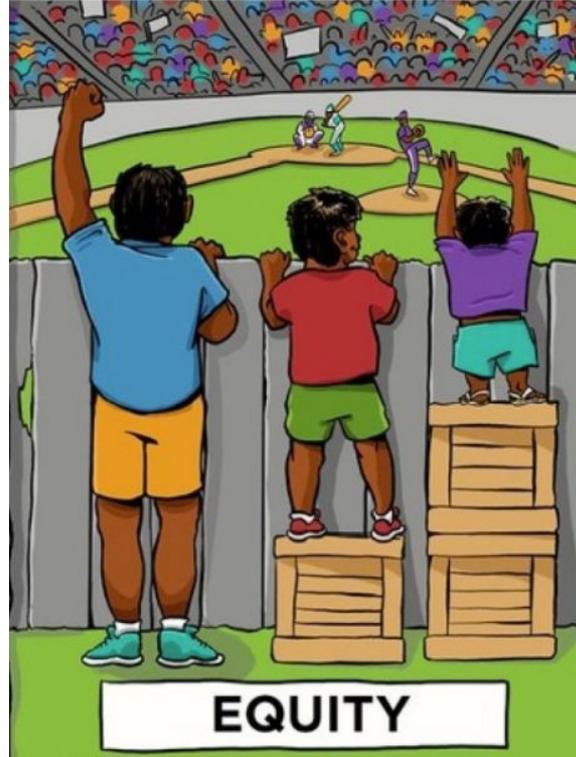
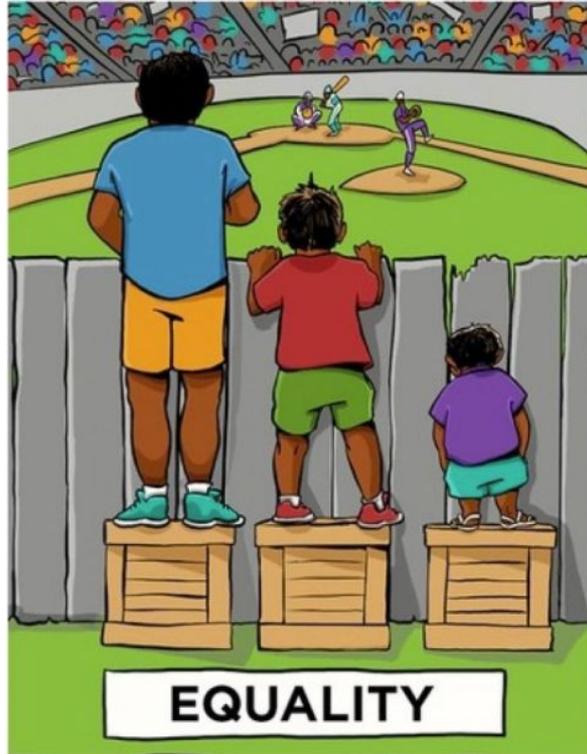
- What are the **norms** in my classroom? School? District?
- How are **decisions** made? Whose voices are **represented**?
- Who are our **policies** written by and for? Who is not **considered**?
- Where does **power** reside in my classroom? School? District?
- What are our fundamental and shared **values**?
- Where can we **collaborate** and build **coalitions**?

Transformative work is **not** about adding something new.

Examine and **reimagine** what you're already doing!



Your Destination is Liberation





Thank you!

Jenny Jun-lei Kravitz

www.EquityInclusionSpecialists.com