Confronting White Supremacy Culture in K-12 School Spaces

For the 2023–2024
Jefferson County Public Schools
Racial Equity Institute

Introductions

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I began teaching HS ELA at Butler Traditional in 2015.

In my six years in the classroom, I taught English 1, English 2, African American Literature, and sponsored our school's first ever Black Student Union.

I have been pursuing my Ed.D. in Educational Leadership and Organizational Development at UofL since August of 2018. I am slated to graduate in May 2024.

01

Session Overview

Session Alignment

Racial Equity Alignment

"2. School Culture and Climate

a. Provide ongoing mandatory professional development for all school and District staff that:

    3. Helps identify and address racism (personal and structural) and implicit bias" p. 4

Pillars Alignment (Climate and Culture)

"Culture is shaped by the shared expectations, experiences, and philosophies of the school staff as well as the values that guide adult behavior." p. 11

Session Alignment Continued

Pillars Alignment (Backpack of Success Skills)

"The Backpack of Success is a P–12 initiative that ensures that every single student receives an education in which academic achievement and personal development go hand-in-hand to empower students with skills they need to be successful students, professionals, and citizens of our community." p. 11

Six Systems Alignment

System 2: Effective Use of Data

System 4: Progress Monitoring and Analysis of Student Work

P. 10-11

Session Goals

Through active participation in this session, participants will . . .

1. Analyze how and specifically where white supremacy still appears in JCPS Systems and in JCPS schools.
2. Achieve a deeper understanding of anti-biased and anti-racist practices.
3. Explore resources and supports to disrupt white supremacy everyday in their classrooms and schools.

Session Norms

Be present. We ask that everyone be intentional in their interactions today.

Assume good intentions. Assume that everyone is here to collaborate and learn.

Provide space for an equity of voice. As we work to collaborate, be aware of others who may not be willing to speak out with the same frequency as you.

Give respect. All ideas, opinions, and thoughts that are shared here will be received without judgement and kept confidential.

Be comfortable with discomfort. We are discussing ideas and topics today that are very personal and may conflict with your moral code. Expect and respect the discomfort.

02

Essential Vocabulary

Diversity & Equity Definitions

A guide to understanding diversity and equity in the context of education from the Department of Diversity, Equity, and Poverty.

Privilege/White Privilege: A special right, advantage, or immunity granted or available only to a particular person or group.
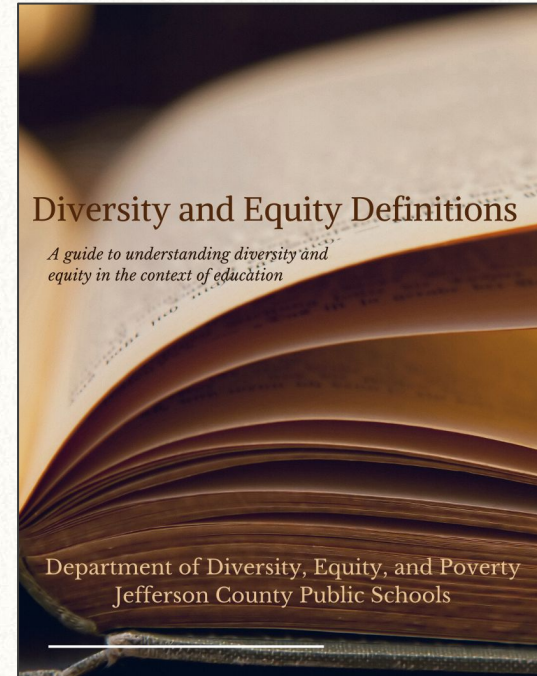
Structural/Systemic Racism: A system in which public policies, institutional practices, cultural representations, and other norms work in various, often reinforcing ways to perpetuate racial group inequity.
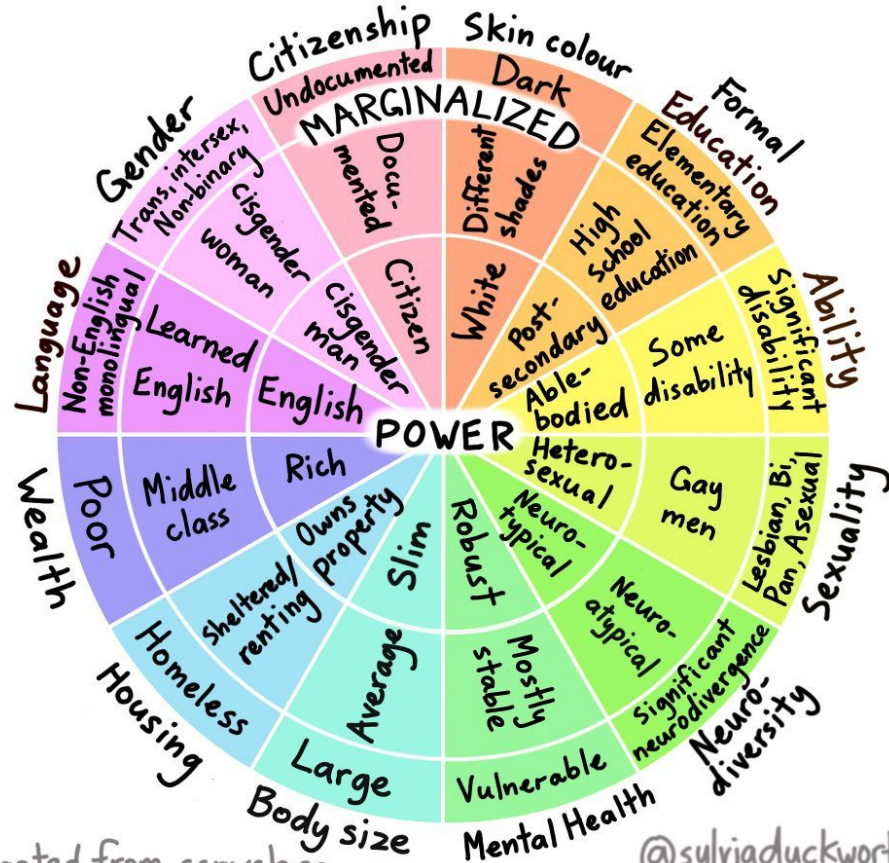

Diversity and Equity Definitions

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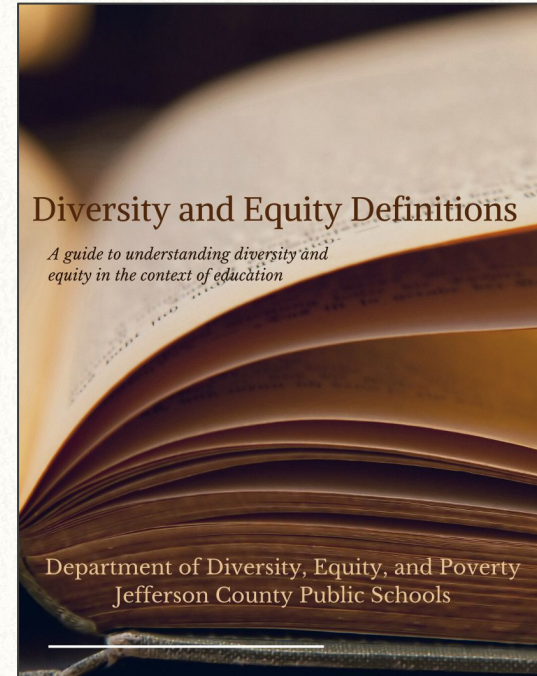
Diversity & Equity Definitions

White Supremacy:

1: The belief that the white race is inherently superior to other races and that white people should have control over people of other races.

2: The social, economic, and political systems that collectively enable white people to maintain power over people of other races.
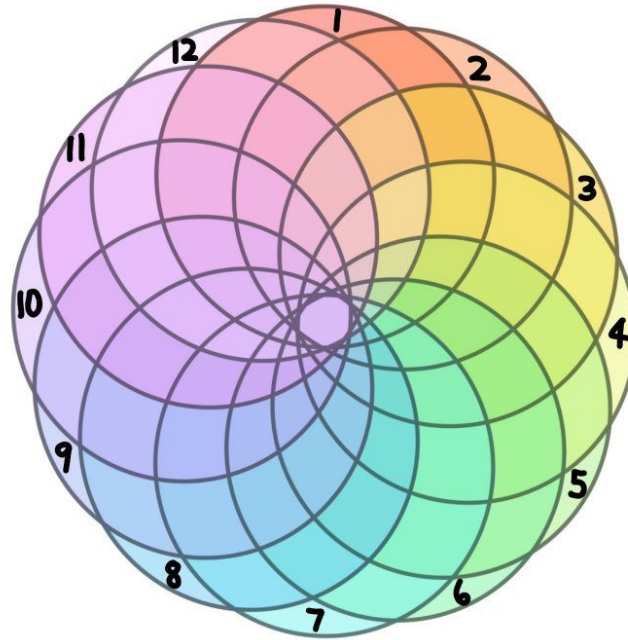
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INTERSECTIONALITY

1. Race
2. Ethnicity
3. Gender identity
4. Class
5. Language
6. Religion
7. Ability
8. Sexuality
9. Mental health
10. Age
11. Education
12. Body size
(...and many more...)

Intersectionality is a lens through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it locks and intersects. It is the acknowledgement that everyone has their own unique experiences of discrimination and privilege.
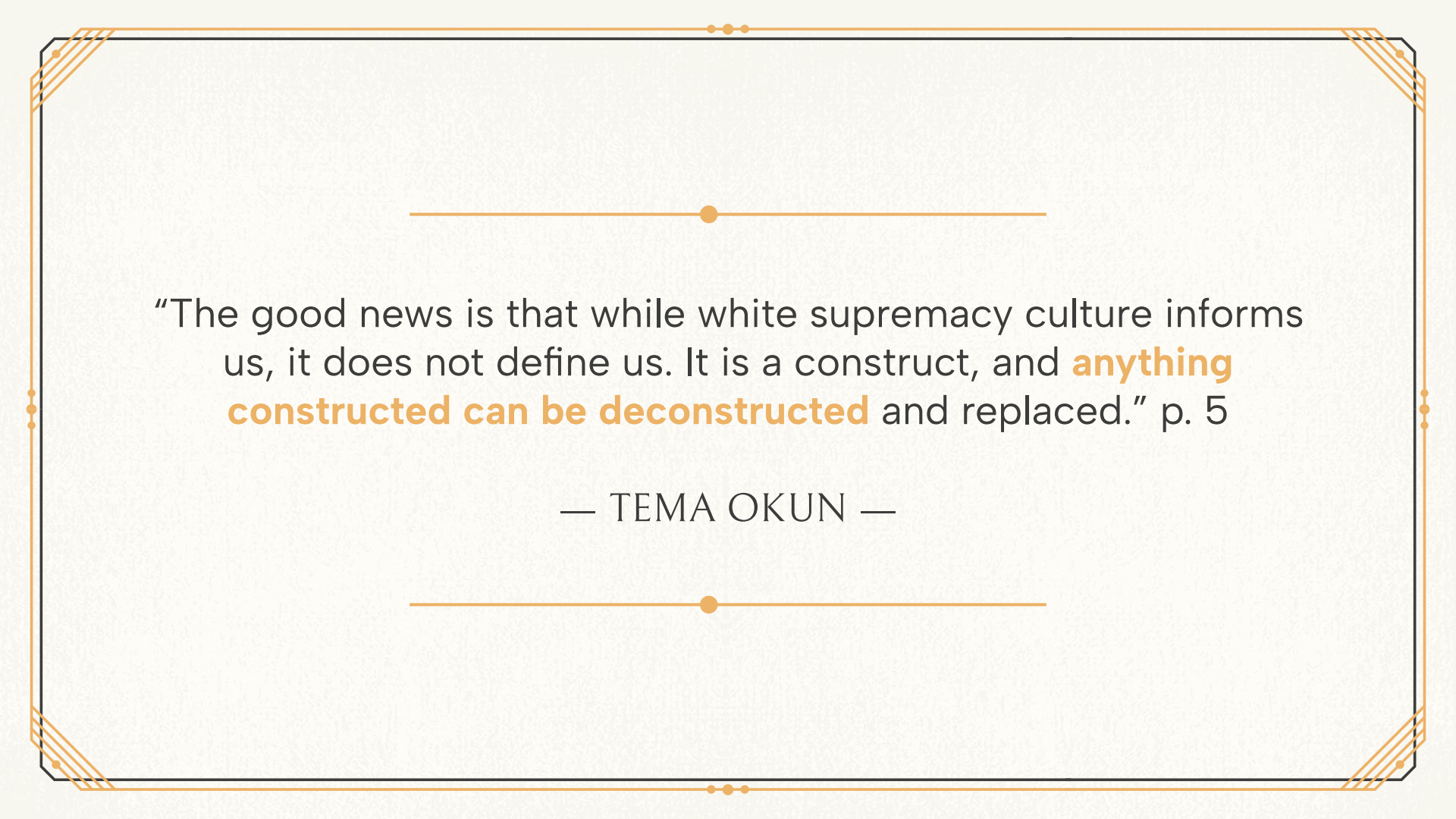
— Kimberlé Crenshaw —

@sylviaduckworth

02

Unpacking
Tema Okun

"White supremacy culture is the widespread ideology baked into the beliefs, values, norms, and standards of our groups (many if not most of them), our communities, our towns, our states, our nation, teaching us both **overtly** and **covertly** that whiteness holds value, **whiteness is value**." p. 4

— TEMA OKUN —

"The good news is that while white supremacy culture informs us, it does not define us. It is a construct, and **anything constructed can be deconstructed** and replaced." p. 5

— TEMA OKUN —

03

Characteristics of White Supremacy Culture

The Characteristics

Fear. "When we are afraid, whatever the reason, especially when we don't have the skills to hold that fear, we are easily manipulated by any false yet powerful sense of safety. The promised safety is false because it is always based on the abuse and misuse of power that shows up as everything from microaggressions to deadly violence directed at whoever or whatever we are told to be afraid of." p. 7

Perfectionism (One Right Way, Paternalism, & Objectivity). "The conditioned belief and attitude that we can be perfect based on a standard or set of rules that we did not create and that we are led to believe will prove our value." p. 8

Qualified. "People like me who live in these identities are qualified and even duty bound to fix, save, and set straight the world." p. 12

The Characteristics Continued

Either/Or (and the Binary). "This characteristic explores our cultural assumption that we can and should reduce the complexity of life and the nuances of our relationships with each other and all living things into either/or, yes or no, right or wrong in ways that reinforce toxic power." p. 14

Progress is Bigger/More (and Quantity over Quality). "These characteristics explore our cultural assumption that the goal is always to be/do/get more and be/do/get bigger. This leads to an emphasis on what we can "objectively" measure – how well we are doing at being/doing/getting more – as more valuable than the quality of our relationships to all living beings." p. 17

The Characteristics Continued

Worship of the Written Word. "The underlying assumption is that if a written piece reflects some level of wisdom, lived experience, or "other" world view that is not "properly" vetted, then that piece has little or no value to those who consider themselves the gatekeepers of legitimate knowledge. There are so many ways of knowing; writing them down according to a single grammatical standard with a singular set of rules about what makes that knowledge "legitimate" is one of many ways to erase and control." p. 18

Individualism (and I'm the Only One). "Our cultural assumption that individualism is our cultural story – that we make it on our own (or should), without help, while pulling ourselves up by our own bootstraps. Our cultural attachment to individualism leads to a toxic denial of our essential interdependence and the reality that we are all in this, literally, together." p. 19–20

The Characteristics Continued

Defensiveness and Denial. "White supremacy culture encourages a habit of denying and defending any speaking to or about it. White supremacy culture encourages a habit of silence about things that matter." p. 22

Right to Comfort, Fear of Open Conflict, and Power Hoarding. "These characteristics focus on our cultural assumption that I or we (or the ones in formal and informal power) have a right to comfort, which means we cannot tolerate conflict, particularly open conflict. This assumption supports the tendency to blame the person or group causing discomfort or conflict rather than addressing the issues being named." p. 25

Urgency. "Our cultural habit of applying a sense of urgency to our every-day lives in ways that perpetuate power imbalance while disconnecting us from our need to breathe and pause and reflect." p. 27

04

Antidotes for White Supremacy Culture

The 10 Racial Equity Principles from the Dismantling Racism Works Collaborative

In Your Classrooms

Know yourself. Engage deeply in your utilization of the <u>ARE Tool</u> to uncover <u>implicit biases</u> that dictate how you maneuver your <u>content</u> and <u>classroom</u>. Ensure <u>active bias-checking</u> is occurring in your PLCs and other planning conversations.

Think and act collectively. Address the belief that any student is in need of saving by an individual educator or our shared system of education. Instead, seek to <u>empower</u> and engage caregivers and students to <u>build a shared community</u> and vision for student success.

Transparency. Accept that you will experience moments of tension while engaging in anti-bias and anti-racist work in your classroom. <u>Be honest</u> with yourself and your students when you experience <u>moments of struggle</u>.

In Our Schools

Be accountable to principles *and* people. Acknowledge how and when actions, behaviors, and decisions underline disagree with stated principles to the detriment of students. Especially those students who are Black or Brown. Collectively determine how to recenter what is best for students, rather than what is easiest or most popular, before moving forward.

Honor and build power on the margins. Accept that our current system of public education is deeply impacted by structural and systemic racism. Allow those most impacted to determine how best to deconstruct the system.

Set explicit goals. To deconstruct structural and systemic racism, we must be clear and honest in our pursuits. Know what your data says, admit how that translates to adult actions, behaviors, and decisions, and then plan for purposeful disruption.

In Our District

Use an organizing mind. Recognize that there are many others engaging in the work of anti–bias and anti–racist pedagogies and practices throughout the District, state, and country. Access and add to the expertise available to you to begin further building our shared knowledge.

Take risks and learn from mistakes. Accept that in pursuit of anti–racism you may make mistakes. Always seek to repair the harm caused by your actions, but always continue on in the work anyway. (Do not **fear** being **transparent** when engaging in active learning.)

Seek connection. This work cannot be contained within four walls. It must be done in community. With one another, with our students, with their caregivers, and with the larger citizenry of our city. To begin this work, start with self.

Resources

District–Specific

- Diversity and Equity Definitions
- The Affirming Racial Equity Tool
- Racial Equity Analysis Protocol (for Schools)
- First Task Is to Ask! Resource Booklets
- DEP Battery of Opportunities
- Employee Resource Groups (ERGs)

From the Author

- "White Supremacy Culture — Still Here" by Tema Okun (2021)
- White Supremacy Culture Characteristics
- Racial Equity Principles
  - Minding the Fault Lines from Claudia Horwitz
  - The Urgency of Intersectionality from Kimberlé Crenshaw

In Community . . .

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http://bit.ly/43DFRDI

THANK YOU!