

Challenging Assumptions and Reframing Narratives: An Equity Practice

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“Your assumptions are your windows to the world. Scrub them off every once in a while, or the light won’t come in.”

- Isaac Asimov

Assumption 1

“All teaching is culturally responsive.
The question is to whose culture you
are responding.”

(Source: Zaretta Hammond, Interview on *Cult of Pedagogy* podcast, September 10, 2017)

Assumption 2

Decisions made with positive intent can still have a negative or harmful impact.

Impact > Intent

Naming My Assumptions

- All leadership is culturally responsive.
The question is to whose culture you are responding.
- Impact > Intent

Defining Assumptions and Narratives

- **Assumption** – a thing that is **accepted as true** or that will happen, without proof
- **Narrative** - a representation of a particular situation or process in such a way as to **reflect or conform to an overarching set of aims or values**.
- *A story that we tell to describe a situation in a way that aligns with our assumptions.*

A Story of Home



Source: <https://community-wealth.org/content/pittsburgh-pennsylvania>



Source: Jon Dawson via Flickr



Source: <http://www.braums.com>



Source: Grand Communications/The Fred Rogers Company

A Story of Home



Source: *Documenting the Pittsburgh Potty: An Architectural Mystery in Our Basements* by Sarah Kovash
Photo by Ted Zellers

“What are you talking about?!”



Basement Potty Tax Relief



Source: *Documenting the Pittsburgh Potty: An Architectual Mystery in Our Basements* by Sarah Kovash
Photo by Ted Zellers

Basement Potty Tax Relief

- What impact would this have?
- What assumptions would I be making?
- Who would benefit? Who would not?

Assumptions Lead to Decisions

I can only know my own experience.



My experiences shape my assumptions and thus, my narratives.

AND

My assumptions are often invisible to me.



I make decisions through the lens of my assumptions.

AND

Invisible assumptions can lead to unintended consequences.

The Problem with Assumptions and Narratives

“Constant exposure to people and perspectives so similar to my family’s was setting me up to **develop a distorted worldview**. It was like living in a hall of mirrors.”

(Debby Irving, TED Talk: *Finding Myself in the Story of Race*, 2015)

The Problem with Assumptions and Narratives (cont.)

“The consequence of a single story is this:
It robs people of dignity.”

(Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, TED Talk: *Danger of a Single Story*, 2009)

The Problem with Assumptions and Narratives (cont.)

“All of these stories make me who I am. But to insist on only these negative stories is **to flatten my experience and to overlook the many other stories that formed me.**”

(Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, TED Talk: *Danger of a Single Story*, 2009)

Stop and Reflect

- What is **1 thing** that you are **thinking** right now?
- What is **1 thing** that you are **wondering** right now?

Feel free to share your reflection via tweet:

[@Math_Solutions](#) [@NicoleBridge1](#) [#InspireMathCulture](#)

What Narratives Do We Hear?

- Student capacity/ability
- Home life/parental support
- Technology
- Mathematics

How might the narrative...

- Represent a distorted perspective?
- Flatten the existence of a student/family/community?

How Do We Think Differently?

We ask questions!

- What **assumptions** does this narrative make?
- **Who benefits** from this narrative? Who does not? Who is left out?
- What would it sound like to **make different assumptions**?

Let's Try It!

Narrative: **“Students can’t do higher level math because they don’t know their math facts.”**

What assumptions does this narrative make?	Who Benefits? Who does not?	What could a reframe sound like?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Students who know their facts are good at math.• That facts are a gatekeeper to higher math.• That memorizing facts is a goal worthy in and of itself.• That memorized multiplication facts are the same as multiplicative thinking.• That students reach a point where it is too late.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Benefit:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Students who are good memorizers.• Teachers who have an excuse to explain their own struggles.• Does Not Benefit:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Students who are not fast at recall.• Students who use some facts to connect to others.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Students who do not know their facts CAN access higher level math.• What do students need to know to be able to enter into a given task?• How does understanding relationships support the learning of math facts?• Facts are one tool in the math toolbox.• When does a calculator support the learning/understanding of a concept and when does it not?

What Impact Can This Have?

Title IX (1972) – “No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.” (20 U.S. Code § 1681 – Sex)

- **2008:**

- Women in high school sports had increased by a factor of 9.
- Women in college sports increased by more than 450%.

- **2018:**

- Team USA won 23 total medals in Pyeongchang, South Korea...12 of them belonged to women.



Source: IMDB



Source: IMDB



ABS ONE

@Abs1er



The most Black people, as dark as me, on screen that I've ever seen that wasn't a comedy or period piece about slavery. The powerful use of modern and classic hip hop perfectly blended with Afro jazz and funk to score this movie dope. I'm overwhelmed w/ pride 🖤 #BlackPantherMovie

1:55 AM - Feb 16, 2018

♡ 3,200 💬 859 people are talking about this



William Ketchum III ✓

@WEKetchum



Just saw #BlackPanther, and my girlfriend's 13-year-old daughter is literally crying because of how powerfully the film portrayed black people, esp black women. Don't let anyone say this film doesn't impact how we see ourselves.

11:36 PM - Feb 15, 2018

♡ 24.1K 💬 6,506 people are talking about this



Gennifer Hutchison ✓

@GennHutchison



Black Panther is revolutionary in many ways, but very specifically in terms of representation. It's not just about the number of black women and men on screen. It's about how distinct and richly developed they are. This is powerful. And we need more of it.

4:44 PM - Feb 18, 2018

♡ 206 💬 33 people are talking about this



Janella Angeles

@janella_angeles



Just cried in the middle of a theater because I saw a little boy pointing excitedly at all the #BlackPanther posters around screaming "HE LOOKS LIKE ME!!" 🥹🥹🥹

#RepresentationMatters

2:28 PM - Feb 18, 2018

♡ 158 💬 38 people are talking about this



(Source: Twitter.com, via Kitty Lindsay, 14 Powerful Reactions from People Who Have Seen "Black Panther", hellogiggles.com, February 18, 2018)

Why Does It Matter?

- Equity cannot exist until we see our students and communities in the fullness of their humanity.
- “Our students become the words we use.”
(Allen & Schnell, 2016)

Challenging assumptions and reframing narratives is about restoring and reclaiming the humanity of our students and communities.

Action Steps

- **PRACTICE!**
 - **ASK** the questions
 - Have the **CONVERSATIONS**
 - Hold one another **ACCOUNTABLE**
- **Examine policies and structures** for their assumptions
 - Title IX required policy change, not just conversation.

Starting to Reframe

They are **ALL** our kids.

This is work for **ALL** of us.

Be the **first**.

Committing to Change

What will you commit to do to help challenge assumptions and reframe narratives in your school/district?

Share your commitment via tweet:

@Math_Solutions

@NicoleBridge1

#InspireMathCulture

Want to Learn More???

- Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, TED Talk: *Danger of a Single Story*, 2009
- *Cult of Pedagogy* podcast: Interview with Zaretta Hammond, September 10, 2017
- Debby Irving, TED Talk: *Finding Myself in the Story of Race*, 2015
- Kitty Lindsay, *14 Powerful Reactions from People Who Have Seen “Black Panther”*, hellogiggles.com, February 18, 2018

THANK YOU!!!

Please feel free to contact me with any questions that you have.

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@Math_Solutions
#InspireMathCulture