

Challenging Assumptions: An Equity Practice

Nicole Bridge & Marian Dingle
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“All teaching is culturally responsive.
The question is to whose culture you
are responding.”

- Zaretta Hammond

Interview on Cult of Pedagogy podcast, September 10, 2017

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Purpose:

- *We will recognize the ways that assumptions and common narratives impact our students and communities through interrogating our own bias.*
- *We will identify questions that will allow us to challenge assumptions and reframe common narratives.*

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Introductions – Marian, Nicole, or Both?

Has worked in a private school	Has worked in schools with racially diverse students
Has worked in schools with racially diverse staff	Has worked in schools with majority white administrators
Grew up in a 2 parent household	Has had classrooms in 2 different states
Has 2 college-educated parents	Has had their expertise questioned by parents

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Working Agreements

- They are **ALL our kids**.
- This is **work for ALL of us**.
- We **speak** about students, families, and teachers **in a way that is respectful and maintains their dignity**.
- Assume positive intent. Realize that **impact > intent**.
- Be **comfortable with discomfort** and non-closure.

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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 ourselves to describe a situation in a way that aligns with our assumptions.*

Introductions – Marian, Nicole, or Both?

Has worked in a private school MARIAN	Has worked in schools with racially diverse students BOTH
Has worked in schools with racially diverse staff BOTH	Has worked in schools with majority white administrators BOTH
Grew up in a 2 parent household MARIAN	Has had classrooms in 2 different states BOTH
Has 2 college-educated parents MARIAN	Has had their expertise questioned by parents MARIAN

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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

- 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

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The Problem with Assumptions and Narratives (cont.)

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

“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

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Stop and Reflect

- What is **1 thing** that you are **thinking** right now?
- What is **1 thing** that you are **wondering** right now?
- Check in with your **emotions**.

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What Narratives Do We Hear?

- Student capacity/ability
- Home life/parental support
- Intervention/Enrichment

- Mathematics

How might the narrative...

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

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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**?

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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?

Now You!

- **Select** a narrative.
- **Unpack** it using the following 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?*

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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.

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.

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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.

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Committing to the Work

- How will **I** (me, personally) challenge narratives and assumptions?
- How will **we** (us, together) challenge narratives and assumptions?
- How will we **hold one another accountable** in this work?

Final Reflection

Please tweet at us with your final reflections on this session.

“My 1 big take-away is...”

Don't forget to tag us!

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THANK YOU!!!

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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