TeachME PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
CEUs for Teachers and Educators

Promoting Equity and Inclusion in the School Setting

Introduction

In 1954, while delivering the *Brown v. Board of Education* verdict, the United States Supreme Court determined that education is "a right which must be made available to all on equal terms." While *Brown v. Board of Education* was a cornerstone case in terms of civil rights and integrating schools, it was still just one step toward creating educational equity. Today, teachers and leaders continue to strive for an inclusive, quality education to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student body. Educators are tasked with building school communities that promote equity and inclusion, and are not confined by the structural barriers that restrict children in historically marginalized groups. Promoting equity and inclusion in schools helps to ensure that all students have a fair and just experience in their academic careers.

To create and maintain such a setting, educators must understand the historical and contemporary movements related to inclusion in schools, understand unconscious bias and how it affects teaching, and be armed with strategies to promote equity and inclusion in the classroom. When all of these components are recognized and implemented, and combined with legislation and policies that promote equity and inclusion, children from all backgrounds should have improved academic and life outcomes.

Section 1: What is Equity & Inclusion in Schools?

Before reading the definitions of equity and inclusion, you may want to write down what these words mean to you. This can include connotative and denotative meanings, as well as examples and non-examples. Later, you will circle back and re-examine your initial impressions to see if they have changed at all.

Definitions

The words "equity" and "inclusion" are all over the media but many people don't know exactly what these words mean, or how they come into play in a school setting; as such, it is necessary to have a working definition of these terms.

Equity

The word "equity" is derived from the Latin word "aequus," meaning "level" or "just," indicating that equity in education is about leveling the playing field (The Equity

Collaborative, 2021). In his executive order on "Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government," President Biden (2021) defines equity in the following way:

The consistent and systematic fair, just, and impartial treatment of all individuals, including individuals who belong to underserved communities that have been denied such treatment, such as Black, Latino, and Indigenous and Native American persons, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and other persons of color; members of religious minorities; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) persons; persons with disabilities; persons who live in rural areas; and persons otherwise adversely affected by persistent poverty or inequality.

Building on this definition, **equity** in a school setting means that all students get what they need, as individuals, to be successful in their academic careers. Unlike equality, which suggests that everyone gets the same things, equity denotes that each person, due to individual circumstances, requires unique supports and opportunities to achieve educational goals. "When we work toward equity, we recognize that people do not start on equal footing. The fact that we are all human beings with our own identities, abilities, ideas, and skills means that we are inherently unequal" (The Equity Collaborative).

Racial Equity. The Equity Collaborative (2021) explains, "In order for us to work toward racial justice and racial equity, we must first acknowledge that inequitable systems and racist practices have existed in the United States since the country's inception." Educators must recognize that historically, education in the United States was built on racist and oppressive ideals. As such, children of different races, cultures, and ethnicities do not have the same, or equal, educational experiences. "Students' nationality, ethnicity, and citizenship status intersect with — and can significantly shape — their access to resources, sense of membership and inclusion, and ultimately their educational and life outcomes" (Cacciatore, 2021).

Gender Equity. Schools have always welcomed white cisgender males but the same cannot be said for other genders. "Girls in general, and girls of color specifically and students who identify as LGBTQIA+ (regardless of gender identity), face marginalization in public school settings" (The Equity Collaborative, 2021). Most school curriculum and texts do not explore the experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals, or other marginalized groups. The Equity Collaborative describes what achieving gender equity in school looks like:

> Positive representations of people of different gender identities in content, access to educational opportunities for people who represent marginalized gender identities, intentional recruitment of girls and students who identify as LGBTQIA+ in courses where they are underrepresented, and dismantling of written and unwritten policies that discriminate against people with marginalized gender identities.

As such, teachers will need to reevaluate the curriculum that they use, or supplement it with outside sources that include marginalized gender identities.

Economic and Social Equity. "Economic and social power within schools translates to access to funds of knowledge, opportunities, and resources" (The Equity Collaborative, 2021). Children who live in the worst socioeconomic conditions require the most educational resources to be successful, yet their access is limited. The Equity Collaborative explains, "Schools should dedicate their resources to balance the scale of economic and social power for students who lack this among peers, teachers, and the power structures within schools and districts."

Societal Impacts of School Inequity. In addition to impacting students, inequity in education also has a negative impact on society and the economy. Economic mobility is largely reliant on equity in education, and inequity disrupts economic mobility. Economic mobility refers to an individuals' ability to change their income or wealth, such as through education (Amedeo, 2021). Without economic mobility, "the economy will suffer from an achievement gap between groups in society. Because some students aren't prepared to achieve their working potential, it creates income inequality, which, in turn, forms a wealth gap" (Amadeo). Inequity has also been a major contributor to the achievement gap between races (discussed in more detail in section 3). The achievement gap refers to Black and Latinx students achieving significantly lower scores on standardized tests than white students. One study found that the achievement gap "caused by inequity in education has cost the U.S. economy more than all recessions since the 1970s" (Amadeo). Inequity in education also leads to structural inequality. "Students in low-income neighborhoods may receive an inferior education compared with students in wealthier areas" (Amadeo). Amadeo explains, "Because of school differences in content exposure for low- and high-income students in this country, the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer . . . The belief that schools are the great equalizer, helping students overcome the inequalities of poverty, is a myth."

Inclusion

In the United States and many other countries, inclusion is often thought of as educating individuals with disabilities in the mainstream setting. However, internationally, "it is increasingly seen more broadly as a principle that supports and welcomes diversity amongst all learners. This means that the aim is to eliminate social exclusion that is a consequence of attitudes and responses to diversity in race, social class, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, migrant status and ability" (International Bureau of Education [IBE], 2021). This course will focus on the IBE's conceptualization of inclusion, as it includes individuals with disabilities in addition to other groups that require more attention. The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2020), also provides a definition of **inclusion** in education: "A process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing exclusion from education and from within education." Everyone has the right to a quality education, and inclusion means meeting children where they are and helping them move forward. Still, millions of people around the world are excluded from education on account of sex, gender orientation, ethnic or social origin, language, religion, nationality, economic condition or ability (UNESCO). Working toward an inclusive educational environment means "working to identify all barriers to education and remove them" and it "covers everything from curricula to pedagogy and teaching" (UNESCO). Inclusion will be discussed in greater detail in Section 2.

History of Inclusion (or Lack Thereof) in American Schools

America's education system has a history of exclusion: Exclusion based on race, gender, socioeconomic status, religion, ability, and the list goes on. In fact, in the earliest times, the only individuals who were truly "included" in the education system were white males from families that were wealthy enough to pay for their schooling. In order to build inclusive school settings, educators must know the exclusionary nature that the system was built upon, and understand how the resulting systemic prejudices still affect certain groups. "Learning about the evolution of the education system and its treatment of students who are different in terms of race, gender, or ability can guide us as educators to lead the way forward" (Boroson, 2017).

Early Years (1600-Mid 1700s)

During the country's early years, before there was public education, schooling itself was a disorganized effort. With no central governing authority, children who did participate in school, namely white children, were educated in haphazard setups, such as church-

supported schools, local schools organized by parents and townspeople, charity schools for poor children, and tuition schools run by traveling schoolmasters (Center on Education Policy [CEP], 2020). These early schools were financed from random sources and typically were not free. Likewise, "many children were excluded on the basis of income, race or ethnicity, gender, geographic location, and other reasons" (CEP). Some rural areas had no schools and the ones that did, were overcrowded and under-resourced. Further, teachers had no real training, were grossly underpaid, and typically did not stay long in such positions (CEP).

Post Revolutionary War (After 1776-1800s)

After the Revolutionary War ended, Thomas Jefferson proposed an education system supported by taxpayer dollars, but this wasn't acted upon for almost a century (Noah Webster Educational Foundation, 2021). By this time, common schools were utilized, which consisted of one teacher who educated students of all ages in one room. Parents had to pay for these schools and if they couldn't pay then they would provide the teacher with food and shelter instead (Noah Webster Educational Foundation). Because these schools cost money, there continued to be a disparity in the students who were able to attend, as poor families could not afford it.

By the mid-1800s, public schools began to focus on academics. Massachusetts created a Board of Education in 1837, and offered free public school for every grade (Noah Webster Educational Foundation, 2021). This effort to expand education was led by Horace Mann, a state legislator at the time. Mann believed that education was the key "to bridging social gaps, overcoming poverty and creating a more equal society overall" (Chen, 2021). During his time on the Board, he extended the school year and attempted to get better pay for teachers. Mann also felt "that free schools should be available to all citizens, regardless of race or social class, as a means of building wealth within the country and providing opportunities to all Americans" (Chen). However, it is important to note that at that time, citizenship was only available to free white adults, meaning that only free white children could attend schools. In 1867, the Federal Department of Education was founded, "establishing a national standard for education" (Chen).

Late 1800s & 1900s: Exclusion

Racial Exclusion. The 1800s was a time of racial exclusion in the education system in the United States for a number of different racial groups. Up until the mid 1800s, the United States banned black Americans from receiving an education. Boroson (2017) explains, "At the time, it was widely thought that educating those who were believed to be

inferior would be not only a waste of resources, but also a threat to the dominant majority." Then, after the 13th amendment, which abolished slavery, was instituted in 1865, the Jim Crow Laws came into play. The Jim Crow Laws were state and local regulations that legalized racial segregation, and did so in schools behind the veil of "separate but equal" (History.com, 2022; Boroson). While states strictly upheld the "separate" portion of that sentiment, they did not tend to the "equal" part. Also during the times of Jim Crow, in some states "Latinx students or Chinese American students were forced to attend segregated schools. And many American Indian children were sent to federally run day or boarding schools, where the goal was often to assimilate the students into white culture and discourage their Native culture" (CEP, 2020). While Native American children were forced to assimilate, Chinese-American children were banned from going to school at all; later, "legislation stated they had a right to public education but segregated them into Chinese-only schools" (Lynch, 2019).

Although education during the Jim Crow era existed under the doctrine of "separate but equal" for black children, their education was inferior to those of white children in every way, from the school conditions to accessibility. Schools for white people received more public money, and thus were more adequately funded. "Many school buildings for African Americans had leaking roofs, sagging floors, and windows without glass. They ranged from untidy to positively filthy" (Brooker, 2022). Further, resources at these schools were scarce. When books were available, they were old books handed down from the white schools. These schools were overcrowded and did not have enough desks for all of the students. Even worse, "there were limits on what blacks could be taught in school. White school leaders simply did not want black children to be exposed to ideas like equality and freedom" (Brooker).

Although black children technically had the right to attend a black school, this was not unconditional. "Black children were often pulled out of school because they were needed on the farm . . . Even if they weren't needed on the farm, the white owner of their farm might pull black children out if he decided they were needed for work," or if the owner just didn't believe that black children had the right to be educated (Brooker, 2022). Further, there were not as many public schools available for black people. If a town didn't have the funds for two schools, they would build one, and it would be for white students (Brooker).

In 1954, the verdict of Brown v. Board of Education led to desegregation efforts. The ruling stated "in the field of public education the doctrine of 'separate but equal' has no place," and that segregation was "inherently unequal" (History.com, 2022). Despite the

ruling in Brown v. Board of Education, many school districts took years to completely desegregate, and some continued to blatantly refuse. Particularly in the south, many districts not only protested desegregation, but they did so with violent means. For example, in 1957, "with the integration of Little Rock High School in Arkansas . . . President Eisenhower had to use military forces to protect the black students struggling to get through mobs of angry White protestors" (Noltemyer et al., 2012). Although this was three years after Brown v. Board of Education, black children were still enduring hatred as they tried to attain an education.

Although the Brown case did not immediately end segregation, it did lead to additional efforts. The Federal Civil Rights Act of 1964, which "prohibited federally funded programs from discriminating on the basis of race, color, national origin, or gender - allowed for serious enforcement of the Brown decree by allowing the U.S. Department of Justice to withhold federal funds from school districts that discriminated against black students" (Noltemyer et al., 2012). Also in 1964, the Department of Education Office for Civil Rights was established, and was another entity fighting for civil rights in education. Unfortunately, the fight against racism in American society was far from over, despite these efforts. Judge Robert L. Carter, who presented part of the oral argument in Brown v. Board of Education, explained the persistence of racism, "Few in the country, black or white, understood in 1954 that racial segregation was merely a symptom, not the disease; that the real sickness is that our society in all its manifestations is geared to the maintenance of white superiority" (as cited in Kohli et al., 2017).

Gender Exclusion. In the early years, education was the right of white males, and not so much white females. In the early 19th century, girls that were allowed to access education were "generally taught only homemaking skills, such as needlework, cooking, and etiquette" (Boroson, 2017). Further, there was a great deal of emphasis placed on educating girls to be proper mothers and wives to their husbands, rather than preparing them for work or independence of any kind. "In addition, those who did receive education tended to come from families with the financial means to allow them to participate in school rather than to assist in the home or farms" (Noltemyer et al., 2012).

It was not until the mid 1800s, 200 years after the first American colleges were founded, that women were allowed to enroll in postsecondary school; even then, the only opportunities were in a "separate but equal" facility (Boroson, 2017). Boroson continues, "Women were granted admission to *coordinate colleges* that were loosely affiliated with men's colleges, providing only limited access to university resources and opportunities." By the beginning of the 1900s, women were allowed to enroll in colleges that were

previously all-male establishments, but they were still met with pushback and prejudice. “Many professors disapproved of the admission of women, asserting that women were constitutionally incapable of higher-level academic work and often refusing to acknowledge women's presence in their classes” (Boroson). It should also be noted that the challenges for black women were even more pronounced.

In 1972 Title IX was added to Civil Rights legislation, which banned gender discrimination at schools and other organizations receiving federal funds. “This resulted in the increased female participation in school athletics, fewer gender stereotypes in texts and curricular materials, and a gradual increase in the number of female administrators” (Noltemyer et al., 2012). The passage of Title IX brought a dramatic shift in the treatment of girls and women in the education system, but there were still challenges. Even as recent as 1992, “a report developed by the American Association of University Women (AAUW) asserted that education policymakers were neglecting issues relevant to girls such as declining self-esteem, gender bias in testing, achievement gaps in math and science, and the absence of women's issues in the curriculum” (Noltemyer).

Ability Exclusion. Individuals with disabilities - physical, cognitive, sensory, and emotional - “have also faced unequal access, subpar education, and outright discrimination” (Noltemyer, 2012). In the earliest times, people with disabilities were completely excluded from education; they were kept at home, taken in by communities, or sometimes even persecuted (Noltemyer). By the 1800s, “most states used institutions which kept children with disabilities out of mainstream society,” under the belief that these children had little to offer society (Proffer, 2018). There were more options for individuals with disabilities by the end of the 19th century, but they were unequal and exclusionary in nature.

The early 1900s were met with “distrust and contempt related to individuals with disabilities, and the emphasis in residential facilities was more on isolation and eradication than education and treatment of individuals with what was often referred to as ‘feeblemindedness’ and ‘mental deficiency’” (Noltemyer, 2012). Society, collectively, feared that individuals with disabilities would negatively impact typically functioning students if they were in the same classrooms. One report, written in 1911, reflected this sentiment, “Habits of stupidity and inertness are often more contagious than are the examples of the best workers. This is why the elimination of the stupids is so urgent and so often effected today by segregating them in various ways” (as cited in Noltemyer).

The 1954 verdict of Brown v. Board of Education opened the doors for parents of children with disabilities to come forward and fight for their rights. Parents filed lawsuits

stating that “by excluding these children, schools were discriminating against the children because of their disabilities” (Wright & Wright, 2021). As such, some schools provided services for students with disabilities, but they were subpar and scarce. Even 16-years after the Brown verdict, schools were still not required to provide services for students with disabilities. Schools that did provide services continued to do so mostly in separate settings, following segregationist ideals; in the few cases of buildings shared with regular students, the “separation manifested itself in different start and end times for the school day and for recess, and inferior classroom locations in basements or dilapidated sections of school buildings” (Noltemyer, 2012).

In 1965, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 was enacted to address the “educational opportunity for underprivileged children” (Wright & Wright, 2021). The act provided resources to underprivileged children with the hope of providing a quality education. In 1966, there was an amendment added to provide “funding to schools for special education services and to universities to train teachers for the disabled” (Noltemyer, 2012). Although these initial acts were a step in the right direction, children with disabilities continued to receive inadequate services until “the results of the federal monetary initiatives with regard to teacher training and improved programs began to trickle into school systems” (Noltemyer).

At the beginning of the 1970s, some landmark court cases led to congress taking a closer look at the treatment of individuals with disabilities in the school system. “PARC v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania (1972) established the precedence for guaranteeing special education services to children with cognitive disabilities,” and “Milk v. the District of Columbia (1973) extended these rights to all children with disabilities” (Noltemyer, 2012). During the same time period, two key pieces of legislation regarding the treatment of individuals with disabilities passed: Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975. Section 504 “protected individuals from discrimination based on a disability in the schools and other public organizations,” and became part of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (Noltemyer). The Education for All Handicapped Children Act really laid the foundation for special education services in the United States, as it “required that school districts identify students with disabilities and provide them a free and appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment,” and called for the development of an Individualized Education Program (IEP) (Noltemyer).

In 1994, the World Conference for Special Education was held in Salamanca, Spain, and over 90 countries agreed to a statement supporting inclusion as the “standard” for

educational practices: “Regular schools with this inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all” (as cited in Foreman & Arthur-Kelly, 2017). In the United States, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act has been reauthorized several times, including in 1990 when it was renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and in 2004 when it was established as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, typically referred to as IDEA 2004. IDEA 2004 has two major purposes: 1) “to provide an education that meets a child's unique needs and prepares the child for further education, employment, and independent living,” and 2) “to protect the rights of both children with disabilities and their parents” (Wright & Wright, 2021). In 2001, ESEA was replaced with the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) act, which impacted children with disabilities because “it required districts to hold all students accountable for math and reading proficiency, even those with disabilities who had previously been excluded from accountability initiatives” (Noltemyer, 2012). Thus, when IDEA 2004 was enacted, congress emphasized the importance of aligning IDEA with NCLB. Congress pushed for such alignments by explaining, “The education of children with disabilities can be made more effective by . . . having high expectations for such children and ensuring their access to the general education curriculum in the regular classroom . . . to meet developmental goals and . . . the challenging expectations that have been established for all children” (Wright & Wright, 2021). In 2015, NCLB was replaced by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), and although the law is geared toward underprivileged children, it also affects children with disabilities, as it “advances equity by upholding critical protections for America’s disadvantaged and high-need students.”

Modern Times

Institutional Racism Today. Institutional, or systemic racism, is “a form of racism that is embedded in the laws and regulations of a society or an organization” (Furfaro, 2020). Institutional racism today is sometimes referred to as “new racism,” and is “concealed, more subtle, and much harder to detect, this New Racism operates deep under the radar” (Lynch, 2019). While the Black Lives Matter movement and the “looming” Trump Administration brought the discussion of systemic racism into the spotlight, it is argued that these conversations are not of utmost importance, and that society does not recognize the “systemic racism that has been present in our educational system for decades,” because “racism is so deeply innate that it is believed that racism no longer exists in our country” (Lynch, 2019). Kohli et al. (2017) conducted a study examining “how contemporary racism disrupts the educational opportunities of students of Color

in K–12 schools," and identified three main patterns of racism in schools today: 1) evaded racism, 2) "anti racist" racism, and 3) everyday racism.

Evaded Racism. Evaded racism is "where equity-explicit discourse is divorced from institutional analyses or concrete discourse on race and racism (this type of racism is often used to avoid, silence, or invisibilize racism)" (Kohli et al., 2017). In other words, evaded racism occurs when schools "adopt a colorblind stance when examining racial disparities that may in fact be the result of institutional or systemic racism" (Li, 2021). While schools and educators might think they are being inclusive by taking a colorblind stance, it actually undermines the unique experiences of different races. Li explains that colorblind ideology "sustains and even exacerbates hostile racial climates in the classroom by silencing discussion about racism, thereby normalizing or legitimizing the racism that BIPOC [Black and Indigenous People of Color] students experience."

The effects of evaded racism are aplenty, including arbitrary discussions of the achievement gap, and the overrepresentation of black children in disciplinary situations. Evaded racism in relation to the achievement gap occurs when the underachievement of children of color is blamed on children and their parents, rather than on systemic issues, such as limited resources or racial profiling (Kohli et al., 2018). Kohli explains that sometimes this manifests as making suggestions to families, such as to read to their children more, or maintain a growth mindset, rather than "suggesting shifts to structures or policies that systematically fail students of Color." Further, "several studies have found that students of color, specifically Black boys and girls, are subject to criminalizing or inferior perceptions by their teachers," leading to an overrepresentation in "behavioral infractions, hypersurveillance, and differential punishment" (Li, 2021). Colorblind ideologies allow educators and administrators to ignore the racial disparities and deem these issues "isolated instances of misbehavior rather than the consequence of racial profiling or prejudice" (Li). Evaded racism even appears in the very curriculum that students are learning from. In many curricular programs "the portrayal of historical racial violence against Black communities and their resistance against it are portrayed as individual incidents rather than a pattern of systemic oppression" (Li). This colorblind ideology belittles the oppression that black people have endured; further, if the mistreatment and oppression is not addressed, how can society prevent it from recurring? Until these issues are examined through the lens of racial inequity, schools will never solve the root of the problems, but rather they might solve isolated "symptoms" of the problem that will undoubtedly reappear later.

Anti-Racist Racism. Anti-racist racism is "where racially inequitable policies and practice are actually masked as the solution to racism" Kohli et al., 2017). Anti-racist racism refers to racism that is "not evaded but is actually framed through equity, justice, and antiracist rhetoric" (Kohli et al.). Anti-racist racism includes colorblindness, or the idea that one does not see race. "Despite attempts to equate colorblindness to equity, qualitative and conceptual studies demonstrate how silence around race maintains and legitimates racism, thus constructing hostile racial climates for students of Color and teachers of Color" (Kohli et al.). Colorblind ideology is damaging because it undermines the systemic oppression that people of color experience. Hoskin (2022) explains, "The willful avoidance of appreciating diversity and [not] looking at racial disparities only reinforces white comfort, power, and privilege, rendering this approach wildly ineffective."

Everyday Racism. Everyday racism is "where the racism manifests on a micro or interpersonal level, and thus is often unrecognized or viewed as insignificant" (Kohli et al., 2017). Scholars argue that "we must pay attention to racialized microevents and how they connect to macrostructures of racial injustice, particularly because the normalizing everydayness serves as a barrier to dismantling racism" (Kohli et al.). Everyday racism is similar to evaded racism in that it is not so obvious. Everyday racism can occur in the form of microaggressions and implicit bias (discussed more in section 2), being ingrained in institutional policies, or existing in everyday practices of individuals in schools. "Everyday racism is not about racists, but about racist practice, meaning racism as common societal behavior" (Indiana University, 2022).

Section 1 Key Terms

Economic Mobility - The ability to change one's wealth or income, such as through education

Equality - State of being equal

Equity - Every person gets what they need (e.g. supports, opportunities), as individuals, to be successful

Exclusion - The act of not allowing someone or something to take part in an activity or to enter a place

Inclusion - A process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing exclusion from education and from within education

Institutional Racism - (Also known as systemic racism) Racism that is embedded in the laws and regulations of a society or an organization

Prejudice - Preconceived opinion that is not based on reason or actual experience

Systemic Racism - A form of racism that is embedded in the laws and regulations of a society or an organization

Section 1 Reflection Questions

1. How do you distinguish between **equity** and **equality** in your classroom? Do you think equity and equality are the same thing? How do you think your students' parents define equity and equality? How important are equity and equality to teaching?

2. To what extent does your school discuss issues regarding racism? If it is not a normal part of your practice, why do you think that is?

3. What are some ways that your school promotes equity? This can be through policies, classroom practices, or anything else.

4. Think about an example of "everyday racism" that you have seen at your school. Discuss what happened and what the impact was.

Section 1 Activities

1. Look through your school's handbook and make note of language, policies, and procedures that promote equity, as well as some that do not. Pick a passage that does not promote equity and rewrite it in such a way that you feel does.

2. After reading about the history of systemic racism in America, start the conversation about racism with your colleagues. Come up with three discussion questions that you can pose to your colleagues regarding racism. (Note: This can be about the historical contexts of racism, racism in your school today, how people deal with racism, etc.).

3. Select one recent policy or practice, memo, communication, or initiative that your school/district released about race or racism. Analyze who the focus was on, what specific problem/s they were trying to solve, whose comfort was being protected, and what actions were taken.

Section 2: Responding to Diversity in Schools

Classroom Diversity

Classrooms in the United States are becoming more diverse than ever before. Students represent different races, ethnicities, cultures, religions, abilities, genders, and socioeconomic backgrounds, and they speak several different languages. Diversity can be defined as "the representation of all our varied identities and differences (race, ethnicity, gender, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, tribe, caste, socio-economic status, thinking and communication styles, etc.), collectively and as individuals" (Otis College of Art and Design, 2022). Understanding student demographics and diversity is "important because the circumstances in which children are born and grow up strongly influence their well being and academic success," and "decades of research show persistent academic disparities by race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, English proficiency, and disability status" (Population Reference Bureau [PRB], 2022).

Cultural Diversity

The word culture generally refers to "customs, languages, values, beliefs, and achievements of a group of people. Students' culture and lived experiences that influence how they understand and make sense of the world or themselves are an integral part of who they are as learners" (Will & Navarro, 2022). While sometimes culture is discussed in relation to specific racial or ethnic groups, it can also refer to broader groups of people. In the United States, there are over 1,000 different cultures represented by students in public schools, and such diversity means "that teachers will have students who display different ways of learning, behaving, communicating, and interacting with others" (Vanderbilt, 2022). For example, in some cultures, making eye contact with a teacher, or other person of authority, is considered disrespectful; however, in America, many teachers would consider lack of eye contact as a sign that the student is not paying attention. Therefore, teachers must be mindful of cultural differences to create a safe and welcoming environment for all students.

Racial Diversity

The number of white and African American students has actually decreased from 2000 to 2021, but other races have seen significant increases. Racial demographics in

American schools have changed significantly in the past 20+ years, as shown by the table below:

Race/Ethnicity	Year 2000	Year 2021
African American / Black	17.2%	15.0%
American Indian / Alaska Native	1.2%	0.9%
Asian	N/A	5.5%
Hispanic/Latino	15.7%	27.5%
Native Hawaiian / Pacific Islander	N/A	0.4%
White	62.0%	46.1%
Multiracial	N/A	4.5%

(PRB, 2022)

The 2015-2016 school year marked the first year that the overall number of Latino, African-American, and Asian students surpassed the number of white students (Riser-Kositsky). This shift is due to "increasing birth rates among immigrant families from Asia and Central and South America, combined with lower birth rates among white families" (Chen). Minority groups have been historically underserved in the school setting, so the implications of this increase are great. Policies and educational practices must be altered to ensure that these students, who now make up the majority of the student body, have what they need to succeed in schools.

Lack of Racial Diversity in Teachers. While the student body is diverse, public school teachers are significantly less racially and ethnically diverse. During the 2017-2018 school year, the racial breakdown for American public school teachers was as follows:

- 79.3% White
- 9.3% Hispanic
- 6.7% Black
- 2.1% Asian
- 1.8% Two or more races
- 0.5% American Indian/Alaska Native

- 0.2% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (Riser-Kositsky, 2022)

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) found that in schools with larger percentages of ethnic or minority students, there were more teachers who were Hispanic, Black, or Asian, and the reverse was true for schools with a majority of white students (Schaefer, 2021). However, with almost 80% of teachers in America being white, there is a mass underrepresentation of other races and ethnicities in the field of education. In fact, the U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics reports that only "one in five teachers are people of color, compared to more than half of K-12 public school students" (Rodriguez, 2021).

As it stands today, the majority of teachers are white females; more specifically, the average teacher is a 43-year-old white female, according to federal data (Will, 2020a). During the 2017-2018 school year, about 76% of public school teachers were female, compared to 24% of male teachers (NCES, 2022). The number of non-white male teachers is significantly lower. Black and Hispanic male teachers make up about 2% of the teaching population (Rodriguez, 2021). Rodriguez explains, "Given that most U.S. children grow up with all White female teachers, and a student's only interaction with men of color may be through the television or social media platforms, racial bias can and does develop early in life."

Why Does Representation Matter? Teacher diversity benefits all students. Decades of research shows that teachers of color "can help close access and opportunity gaps for students of color while being vital to the well-being of students of all races" (Rodriguez, 2021). When teachers are racially diverse, "students of color see themselves represented and identify with them as role models" (Rodriguez). However, due to the lack of representation in teachers, "students of color feel isolated, underrepresented or mistreated, which leads to lower graduation and higher dropout rates" (Rodriguez).

Linguistic Diversity

Students identified as English Learners (ELs) are a growing population in American schools. In 2019, the percentage of ELs in American public schools was 10.4%, or 5.1 million students, which increased from 9.2%, or 4.5 million in 2010 (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2022). In total, students in U.S. public schools speak over 400 different languages; in 2014-15, more than three-fourths of ELs spoke Spanish, with Arabic, Chinese, and Vietnamese being the next most common languages (Department of Education, 2017). With the increase in ELs in public schools, teachers must be prepared to address linguistic differences and adequately teach these students. ELs "can

participate in language assistance programs to help ensure that they attain English proficiency and meet the academic content and achievement standards expected of all students" (NCES, 2022b). Typically these programs include instruction from a Bilingual or English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher, and might consist of a separate resource period, or the ESL teacher pushing into a general education class for support. However, there are also supports and strategies that general education teachers can implement to improve learning outcomes for ELs.

Varying Abilities

During the 2020-21 school year, 7.2 million, or 15% of all public school students, received special education services under IDEA (NCES, 2022c). "Eligible students are those identified by a team of professionals as having a disability that adversely affects academic performance and as being in need of special education and related services" (NCES). In summary, IDEA (2004) ensures that students with disabilities have the right to a free appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE), and necessary supports, including accommodations, modifications, and related services, are outlined in the student's individualized education program (IEP). Because IDEA guarantees a student be educated in the LRE, the goal is to keep students in the general education classroom as much as possible, so long as they can learn; as a result, the majority of general education classrooms include students with special needs. Students with disabilities vary greatly in their abilities and areas of needs, and teachers must be knowledgeable in differentiated practices to meet diverse needs. While all teachers should use varied teaching techniques, more specific and personalized supports for a student should be outlined in a student's IEP.

Socioeconomic Status (SES)

SES encompasses "not just income but also educational attainment, financial security, and subjective perceptions of social status and social class," and can also include "quality of life attributes as well as the opportunities and privileges afforded to people within society" (American Psychological Association [APA], 2017). So why does SES matter in a school setting? "Low SES and its correlates, such as lower educational achievement, poverty and poor health, ultimately affect our society," so disparities in SES are really everyone's problem (APA). Research shows that children in low SES households experience challenges that lead to poor educational outcomes, including "poor cognitive development, language, memory, socioemotional processing," and slower development of academic skills (APA). Poverty is also a major risk factor for school failure. Factors related to poverty that put children at a higher risk include "very young parents, with a

very low educational level . . . Unemployment; abuse and neglect, substance abuse, dangerous neighborhoods, homelessness, Mobility, and exposure to inappropriate or inappropriate educational experiences" (Punjab Colleges, 2020). Teachers being able to identify students at risk is an essential part of supporting students experiencing poverty and low SES'. In thinking of how SES and poverty affects academic achievement, consider the following statistics:

- "Children from low-SES families enter high school with average literacy skills five years behind those of high-income students
- In 2014, the high school dropout rate among persons 16–24 years old was highest in low-income families (11.6 percent) as compared to high-income families (2.8 percent)
- According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2014), individuals within the top family income quartile are 8 times more likely to obtain a bachelor's degree by age 24 as compared to individuals from the lowest family income quartile" (APA)

The schools in low SES communities are inadequate compared to schools in middle and high SES communities. "Research indicates that school conditions contribute more to SES differences in learning rates than family characteristics do," as schools in low SES areas are often under-resourced and employ teachers that are less qualified (APA).

School Response to Diversity

Exclusion → Segregation → Integration → Inclusion

As discussed in section 1, schools in the United States were not always welcoming to diversity. In fact, in the early years, education was a completely exclusionary practice, only including wealthy white males. The journey from exclusion to inclusion was not a nonstop flight, but rather went as follows: exclusion → segregation → integration → inclusion -- and the inclusion destination is still a work in progress.

Up until the mid 1800s, schools responded to diversity with exclusion. African Americans were prevented from receiving any type of education, and other minority races endured similar treatment as well. After slavery was eradicated by the 13th amendment in 1865, some African Americans were allowed to go to school, but not in the same facilities as white children. Likewise, Native American and Chinese-American children were put in separate schools. At the same time, individuals with disabilities were institutionalized and isolated from the rest of society. All of this was done under

the doctrine of "separate but equal," but this was to the contrary. After *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1964, schools were forced to integrate, though many school officials in the south still protested.

School integration was considered a win, as it means that all students would at least be educated in the same schools, and hopefully receive the same quality of education. Integration is defined as "a process of placing" diverse individuals (based on race, ethnicity, ability, etc.), "in existing mainstream educational institutions, as long as the former can adjust to the standardized requirements of such institutions" (Villegas, 2017). Integration was a step in the right direction for the education system in America, but it did not create equitable conditions for learning, nor did it set all students up for success.

The United Nations explains how inclusion differs so greatly from integration:

> Inclusion involves a process of systemic reform embodying changes and modifications in content, teaching methods, approaches, structures and strategies in education to overcome barriers with a vision serving to provide all students of the relevant age range with an equitable and participatory learning experience and environment that best corresponds to their requirements and preferences. (As cited in Villegas, 2017)

Integration gets all students in the same place, but it does not guarantee that the setting is inclusive. For example, "Placing students with disabilities within mainstream classes without accompanying structural changes to, for example, organization, curriculum and teaching and learning strategies, does not constitute inclusion" (Villegas). Likewise, teaching a racially diverse student body without using culturally relevant pedagogy does not constitute inclusion. Inclusion involves the school providing for the needs of all of their students, regardless of race, ethnicity, ability, disability, and so on.

How is Diversity Related to Equity and Inclusion?

Diversity refers to the representation of differences within a school setting -- e.g. different gender, different race, different religion, different SES, etc. -- inclusion means that everyone, regardless of their differences, feels welcome and has a sense of belonging. Diversity advocate Vernā Myers framed it perfectly when she said, "Diversity is being invited to the party. Inclusion is being asked to dance" (as cited in Bolger, 2020). Equity means that everyone has what they need to access the same opportunities. "Equity recognizes that advantages and barriers exist and that, as a result, we all don't start from the same place; we all come from diverse backgrounds" (Bolger). Bolger

further explains, “Equity is a process that begins by acknowledging that unequal starting place and makes a commitment to correct and address the imbalance.” This section, Diversity in the Classroom, has discussed various components that contribute to the diverse student body, and some of the challenges that accompany such diversity. The remainder of section 2 will focus on how schools respond to increasing diversity, and how inclusion is conceptualized in an increasingly diverse setting.

Characteristics of Inclusion in Schools

Since this course is looking at inclusion on a broad spectrum, rather than concerning only one group, it is helpful to conceptualize specific characteristics of inclusion in the school setting. This helps to build a universal definition of inclusion, as well as conceptualize what it looks like in schools. Ainscow and Messiou (2017) identify the following characteristics of inclusion: “*A process of development; Focusing on identification and removal of barriers; A concern with the presence, participation, and achievement of all learners; A particular emphasis on those learners who may be at risk of underachievement, marginalization or exclusion.*”

Process of Development

Inclusion in education is always changing and evolving because our schools are always changing and evolving. Inclusion “requires a continuous search to find better ways of responding to student diversity. It is about learning how to live with difference and learning how to learn from difference” (Ainscow & Messiou, 2017). When diversity is looked at through this lens, “differences come to be seen more positively as a stimulus for fostering learning among children and adults” (Ainscow & Messiou).

Focusing on Identification and Removal of Barriers

Barriers to full inclusion come in different shapes and sizes, so to speak, depending on the environment. Some barriers might include “the way schools and other educational contexts are organized, the forms of teaching provided, and the ways in which children’s progress is evaluated” (Ainscow & Messiou, 2017). Children must be provided with the resources that they need to access the curriculum, the lessons, and the school community. For example, texts that include idioms are often inaccessible to English Language Learners (ELLs) and Diverse Learners (DLs), unless they are provided with the meanings of the idioms ahead of time; for similar reasons, standardized reading tests often present unique challenges for these groups, and make the inclusiveness of such assessments questionable.

Concern with the Presence, Participation, and Achievement of All Learners

Presence. Presence refers to a child physically attending school - whether in person or remotely - and how "reliably" and "punctually" they are present (Ainscow & Messiou, 2017). Chronic absenteeism - missing 15 or more days of school in a school year - is an issue in American schools. During the 2015-16 school year, over 7 million students, or about 16% of the student population, missed 15 or more school days (Department of Education [DOE], 2019). While all student demographics have a higher than ideal absentee rate, there are disparities in chronic absenteeism by demographic groups. According to the DOE, "compared to their white peers, American Indian and Pacific Islander students are over 50 percent more likely to lose three weeks of school or more, black students 40 percent more likely, and Hispanic students 17 percent more likely." While English Language Learners (ELLs), "who face significant barriers in school and society," are about 1.2 times LESS likely to be chronically absent than non-ELLs, students with disabilities are 1.5 MORE likely to be chronically absent than their non-disabled peers (DOE). However, rates of chronic absenteeism for ELLs at the high school level are higher than non-ELLs at the high school level. Chronic absenteeism occurs at all grade levels but is more prominent in high school.

The reasons for chronic absenteeism vary greatly, but frequently include "poor health, limited transportation, and a lack of safety — which can be particularly acute in disadvantaged communities and areas of poverty" (DOE, 2019). Chronic absenteeism can have detrimental effects on a child's life, including not reaching early learning milestones, higher risk of dropping out of school, and poor outcomes later in life, such as poverty and involvement in the criminal justice system (DOE). Unfortunately, "the very students who tend to face significant challenges and need the most educational supports are often missing the most school" (DOE).

So, what are policymakers doing to combat chronic absenteeism? The 2015 ESSA gave states the freedom to create accountability systems for their districts. In addition to measuring annual school performance, ESSA requires states to "to hold schools accountable for one measure of 'school quality or student success (SQSS)' and 36 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico submitted plans to the U.S. Department of Education to use chronic absenteeism as one SQSS indicator" (DOE, 2019). Further, ESSA state plans "outline strategies to leverage federal funds to improve attendance through teacher training, improving health services, family engagement, and school climate, important levers for increasing school attendance" (DOE).

Participation. Participation refers to "the quality of their experiences while they are present and therefore must incorporate the views of the learners themselves" (Ainscow & Messiou, 2017). An inclusive education is meant to remove the barriers to student access and success, and thus increases participation. Levels of participation can be increased by providing necessary academic and behavioral supports, implementing student voice, and engaging in culturally responsive practices.

Achievement. Achievement refers to student outcomes. Student outcomes are not only based on standardized tests or exams, but rather "outcomes of learning across the curriculum" (Ainscow & Messiou, 2017). Access, participation, and achievement are all interrelated, as achievement cannot exist without access and participation. Creating equitable learning environments for students lays the foundations for greater achievement.

The Achievement Gap. The "achievement gap" is a persistent topic within the field of education. So what exactly is the achievement gap? "The achievement gap is the persistent disparity in academic achievement between minority and disadvantaged students and their white counterparts" (Porter, 2022). There are multiple theories as to why this disparity still exists. Porter addresses the nature vs. nurture discussion that often arises; Porter quotes American psychologist, Richard Nisbett, "[T]he most relevant studies provide no evidence of the genetic superiority of either race but strong evidence for substantial environmental contributions to the IQ gap between blacks and whites." As such, Porter concludes that it is "not innate ability" but instead the "opportunity to learn," a result of the environment that fuels the achievement gap. It is unsurprising, then, that the achievement gap seems to revolve more around socioeconomic status, namely the poverty composition, than it does around race.

Race: Achievement gaps for racial minorities are "correlated "with gaps in income, poverty rates, unemployment rates, and parents' education level" (Amadeo, 2022). Research shows that the correlation between "achievement gaps and these socioeconomic factors" was at least 62% for black communities and 83% for Latinx communities (Amadeo). Wealthier states also tend to have higher achievement scores. Income alone is not responsible for these achievement gaps, as "structural inequality" also plays a role. Amadeo defines structural inequality as "a system of privilege created by institutions within an economy," explaining that "inequality is structural when policies keep some groups of people from obtaining the resources to better their lives." For example, "students from high-poverty schools do not receive equal government funding" (Amadeo). A 2011 DOE study found that 45% of "high-poverty schools

received less state and local funding than other schools within their own districts" (Amadeo). Such schools are typically lower quality, and have more uncredentialed or inexperienced teachers. However, as most educators are aware, students in high-poverty schools require more funding, teacher support, and overall academic support, than students not in high-poverty schools, just to establish an equal starting point.

Gender: There are also achievement gap disparities by gender. "Cisgender students are guided toward 'gender appropriate' studies. LBGTQ students face these challenges, plus outright discrimination both in K-12 and college" (Amadeo, 2022). For males and females, the disparity varies by subject area. Girls "test better than male students in reading, have higher grade point averages, and a higher rate of acceptance into college," while the opposite is true for science and math (Amadeo). This is why women are often underrepresented in the fields of science, technology, engineering and math [STEM]. The cause of this achievement gap is up for debate. Some studies indicate that "boys avoid liberal arts because society says reading is feminine, and many boys are steered toward sports rather than academics," while "girls have been historically guided toward home economics classes instead of science, math, or economics" (Amadeo).

LGBTQ+ students experience significant discrimination that makes educational achievement even more challenging. For instance, over half of LGBTQ+ students "have experienced slurs, sexual harassment, or violence because of their sexual orientation or gender identity," and nearly 60% of transgender students "could not use the bathroom that conformed to their gender identity" (Amadeo, 2022). When school is not a safe and affirming space for a child, it makes learning very difficult, if not impossible. These difficulties tend to worsen with age, as LGBTQ+ high school students experience "higher truancy, lower grades, and lower expectations to complete high school or college" (Amadeo).

What contributes to the achievement gap? The National Education Association [NEA] identified eight areas that contribute to the racial and income achievement gaps and classified them by factors a school can control and factors outside of a school's control (Amadeo, 2022). Factors schools can control include 1) class size and school safety, 2) teacher experience, 3) teacher cultural sensitivity, and 4) encouragement of student interest and family involvement; factors schools cannot control include 5) educational funding, 6) personal factors such as "family income or the student's diet, language, and mobility," 7) family's cultural bias on the importance of education, and 8) neighborhood safety, access to libraries, and job availability (Amadeo).

What attempts have been made to close it? Porter (2022) expresses that since the 1960s, solutions to the achievement gap fall into one of four major categories: preschool reforms, teacher reforms, instructional reforms, and standards-based reforms. Research on preschool program reforms show that there are early gains in achievement, but such gains are not sustained (Porter). In addition, for reasons that are unknown to researchers, "the academic advantages of preschool programs are less likely to be sustained for children of color than for white children" (Porter).

Teacher quality is a key indicator of educational achievement, so efforts to close the achievement gap have been made in the form of teacher reforms. However, teacher reform by itself, or even guaranteeing a quality teacher in every classroom, will not close the achievement gap. "For an education reform to solve the achievement gap, it must produce bigger gains for black students than for white students. But most education interventions actually exacerbate the gap, and the more effective they are in raising mean achievement, the more they widen the gap" (Porter, 2022). If every teacher in every classroom were highly effective, achievement scores for all students would rise. While this sounds like a positive accomplishment, it still doesn't do enough to solve the disparities in achievement for black and white students.

Instructional reforms have also been attempted in an effort to close the gap. Instructional reforms vary in what they set out to accomplish, but some have included interventions to raise the bottom level of achievement in classrooms, decreasing class sizes, ability grouping and tracking, increasing graduation requirements, and changing promotion and retention policies (Porter, 2022). None of these initiatives had life changing results. For example, ability grouping and tracking provided "counterintuitive results," as it is actually "enriched classes that tended to have positive effects on student achievement," whereas remedial classes, where interventions were most needed, did not significantly benefit (Porter).

Standards-based reforms are probably the most frequently talked about amongst educators (e.g. NCLB, ESSA, Common Core State Standards). While the point of such reforms was to increase equity in schools and provide additional support and funding where it was needed, it seems the results are anticlimactic. "Standards-based reform has been with us for ten or 15 years—first at the state level and now in the form of No Child Left Behind—and it does seem that by now, we would be seeing improvements that we're just not seeing" (Porter, 2022).

Addressing the Achievement Gap: It should be noted that schools are not the cause of the achievement gap, as the gap begins before formal schooling does. Porter (2022)

explains, “The gap between whites and blacks is present before children experience any schooling. By the time children are three or four, it is already a standard deviation.” While children are in school, the gap does not typically increase. So while the problem isn’t caused by schools, individuals often look to schools to solve it. In order for schools to remedy the achievement gap, “we will need much more aggressive interventions—interventions that address the critical issue of opportunities to learn—particularly the opportunities we do (or don’t) provide to our most disadvantaged children” (Porter).

Particular Emphasis on At-Risk Learners

At-risk learners refers to those students who may be at risk of underachievement, marginalization or exclusion (Ainscow & Messiou, 2017). The process of inclusion is concerned with ensuring that all students have what they need to succeed. With this in mind, it’s important to note that some learners will need more attention than others. This concept “indicates the moral responsibility to ensure that those groups that are statistically more at risk are carefully monitored and that - where necessary - steps are taken to ensure their presence, participation and achievement within the education system” (Ainscow & Messiou, 2017). Likewise, it’s necessary for educators to be diligent about identifying students that might otherwise be overlooked.

Section 2 Key Terms

Culture - Customs, languages, values, beliefs, and achievements of a group of people

Diversity - The representation of all our varied identities and differences (race, ethnicity, gender, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, tribe, caste, socio-economic status, thinking and communication styles, etc.), collectively and as individuals

Marginalization - Treatment of a person, group, or concept as insignificant or peripheral

Section 2 Reflection Questions

1. Is it important to acknowledge student diversity in the classroom setting (e.g. in lesson plans, activities, and assessments)? Why or why not?
2. In your own words, define inclusion. Has your definition changed since you started the course?
3. If inclusion is about “all students” why do you think there is an emphasis on at-risk learners? How is this correlated with equity?

Section 2 Activities

1. Examine test data from your own classroom, or from your grade level if you have access. Organize the data to see if an achievement gap exists in your own classroom/school.
2. Create a list of classroom norms that promote equity and inclusion.
3. Research your school's policies and programs surrounding inclusion. Does your school's definition and practice of inclusion match the one described in this section? Does it match your own definition? If not, rewrite portions of the program description to better capture what inclusion means.

Section 3: Unconscious Bias in the Classroom

Everyone has unique preferences, assumptions, perceptions, and prejudices that are based on individual experiences and knowledge. We use this information to make judgments, and such judgments drive our behavior. The judgments we make are what we refer to as biases. Not all biases are negative, as sometimes they are used to find common ground with another person. However, biases are harmful when they result in negative reactions toward someone or something. This course will focus largely on implicit, or unconscious bias.

Unconscious Bias

Although the term "unconscious bias" (UB), also referred to as implicit bias, seems like a recent development, it was coined in 1995 by two psychologists who "argued that social behavior is largely influenced by unconscious associations and judgments" (Ruhl, 2020). Therefore, UB can be defined as "Unconscious, or implicit . . . attitudes, preferences, and assumptions that any person holds toward another individual or group of people" (Bowman, 2020). UB occurs because the human brain harbors the ability to make decisions at a subconscious level. This "reflexive decision making" is what Israeli-American Psychologist and Nobel Laureate, Daniel Khaneman, refers to as "System 1" thinking, "as opposed to the more analytical, thoughtful, deliberate decision making of 'System 2')" (Gershenson & Dee, 2017). Like many human instincts, system 1 thinking evolved to help humans survive. However, "these automatic responses occur via the rapid processing of new information through existing patterns of thought . . . [B]ecause

our automatic responses are shaped by our lived experiences and the broader social contexts in which we live and work, a pervasive byproduct of reflexive decisionmaking is unconscious bias" (Gershenson & Dee). All humans, regardless of how good intentioned they are, are susceptible to UB. This does not mean that any one person is prejudiced or more inclined to discriminate, but instead means "that your brain is working in a way that makes associations and generalizations" (Cherry, 2020). Even as teachers, driven to make a difference in the lives of young people, it is virtually impossible to avoid traces of UB. Still, since bias can drive behaviors, it is crucial that teachers acknowledge their UB and work through it, rather than try to avoid it.

What Influences UB?

UB "occurs automatically and is triggered by the brain making quick judgments and assessments of people and situations that are influenced by personal background, experiences, memories, and cultural environment" (Bryyny, 2017). UB is likely an evolutionary construct that originated as a fear response for our ancestors that helped them stay safe and survive. Bryyny explains, "Cognitive stereotyping helps perceive surroundings quickly and efficiently, and unconsciously affect judgment with missing information filled in from unconscious cognition to guide behavior during social interactions and decision-making." Essentially, this shortcut allows humans to respond to stimuli in the environment without having all of the information. Influences on UB are put into perspective by Bryyny:

> Over time, we intensify and reaffirm our perception that members in a certain category are more homogeneous than they are in reality. We then use personal characteristics—race, gender, etc.—as markers for personality, behaviors, and other traits. This is compounded by media and cultural stereotypes presented by friends, family, colleagues, the news, and social media.

As such, the formation of UB is a process and it happens over time. Both personal experiences and outside influences play a role in what turns into UB. "Since our implicit associations are outside of our conscious awareness, they do not necessarily align and match our explicit beliefs or our stated intentions. They have been learned over time and incorporated functionally in our brains and neurons" (Bryyny).

UB in the Classroom

Discussing bias is difficult because nobody wants to believe that they are biased. This is especially true for teachers, who spend their lives trying to teach and impact the next generation of learners. However, "even the most dedicated and well-meaning teacher holds stereotypes and beliefs that affect their students" (Marco Learning, 2018). UB is inevitable and when it is not acknowledged and worked through, it can be harmful to students. Teachers are often the most influential adults in a child's life, and their actions and expectations hold significant weight. "When the UBs of well-intentioned teachers influence their judgment towards particular students (e.g., by race, ethnicity, gender), it can influence their instructional practices, the expectations they convey, and their recommendations for relevant outcomes like course placement, special education, and discipline" (Dee & Gershenson, 2017).

Effects of UB in the Classroom

Teacher "biases tend to influence the expectations they have for their students, the quality of their teaching, and the choices in how they manage their classrooms" (Will, 2020b). Several studies have shown that teacher expectations impact student achievement. In the 1960s, Harvard Professor Robert Rosenthal was one of the first to conduct an experiment to document how teacher expectations affect student performance. He told elementary school teachers that a test could determine which students' IQs were going to dramatically increase, "randomly selected students to label with this potential growth, and tested the students' real IQs at the beginning of the year as well as at the end" (Marco Learning, 2018). At the end of the experiment, the students that teachers expected to achieve growth did indeed achieve more growth than the control group, even though they were chosen at random (Marco Learning). This study has provided the foundation for further research on teacher biases and stereotypes in the classroom. Regardless of whether it's gender, race, religion, or another factor "that causes a teacher to have higher expectations for some of their students and lower expectations for others is bound to create results to match" (Marco Learning).

So knowing that teacher expectations matter, what does the effect of UB look like in the classroom setting? Research shows that white teachers tend to have much lower expectations for their black students than they do for white students. This not only impacts the way that a child views him or herself, but it can also "contribute to highschool graduation and college-enrollment rates" (Will, 2020b). These lowered expectations can turn into "self-fulfilling prophecies when students internalize them or

when teachers change their approach to students as a result" (Blad, 2017). Whether it's because of actual achievement levels or due to how students are assigned to gifted classes regardless of ability, research also shows that black students are less likely to be enrolled in gifted classes (Will).

What's more is that students of color probably rely more on the acceptance and encouragement of their teachers than white students do. Foundational theoretical work by Coleman in the 1980s argues that "individuals belonging to socially disadvantaged groups must rely on their social capital outside of the family to succeed . . . [T]eacher perceptions can disproportionately influence the school performance of students from low social class backgrounds . . . [S]tudies suggest the same for youth of color" (Cherng, 2017). In another study of low-income Latino and black adolescents, Cherng describes a Latina student that was recognized by her teacher and recommended to the school's honor program. The student explains, "It was my teacher and my mom - really my teacher. I missed the [qualifying] test at first, and then later my teacher drove me there, picked me up, and brought me home" (as cited in Cherng). Thus, "it may be that students of color with teachers who have confidence in their academic abilities particularly benefit from these relationships by having high academic expectations and achievement" (Cherng). On the other hand, students of color who have teachers with low expectations of them are often more negatively impacted than their white counterparts (Cherng).

Disciplinary Disparities. Latino, American Indian, and Black adolescents, particularly black boys receiving special education services, are "significantly more likely than other students to be referred to school administrators for discipline problems," and are more likely to receive exclusionary punishments, like suspension, expulsion, or even referral to law enforcement (Gregory & Ferus, 2017). While black males are disciplined the most frequently, both male and female black students "receive discipline referrals and out-of-school suspension, most often at a rate two to three times greater than White students" for the same infractions (Gregory et al., 2017). Further, during studies when teachers were told to watch for problem behavior, they were consistently more likely to focus on black children than on white children (Cherry, 2020). More recent research also suggests that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students might also be disciplined more often (Gregory & Fergus).

Shockingly, these disparities in school discipline begin as early as preschool. In 2014, the DOE Office for Civil Rights (OCR) published data about American public schools from the 2011-12 school year. One key statistic was that black children represented only 18% of

preschool enrollment, while white students represented 43%; however, black students accounted for 48% of children receiving one or more out-of-school suspensions (OSS), while white children only accounted for 26% (Scialabba, 2017). Further, when a black student and white student who "are comparable in many ways are issued discipline referrals for similar reasons," the black student is more likely to receive an exclusionary punishment, "thereby losing more days of instruction than the white student, who is more likely to receive detention or in-school suspension" (Gregory & Ferus). Unfortunately, these discipline disparities continue through elementary, middle and high school. Most of the research focuses on how white teachers discipline black students more harshly, but some research is beginning to surface on how black teachers discipline black students. Scialabba reports that although the research is new, there is at least one study from the Yale Child Study Center "that evaluated black and white preschool teachers and found that black teachers also have implicit biases that influence administering discipline" (Scialabba).

Zero Tolerance Policies. In response to an increase in juvenile crimes during the 1990s, many schools started implementing a zero tolerance policy. Schools use zero tolerance policies to "mandate the application of predetermined consequences, most often severe and punitive in nature, that are intended to be applied regardless of the gravity of the behavior, mitigating circumstances, or situational context" (Henry et al., 2021). The problem with zero tolerance policies is that they prevent any case-by-case analysis of risk or damage, "contextual variables," or considering alternative consequences that may be better for the child (Henry et al.). Likewise, such policies have resulted in significant increases in suspensions, expulsions, and law-enforcement referrals, even when the crime did not necessarily match the consequences in severity (Henry et al.). Exclusionary disciplinary practices have devastating results on young people. One suspension during the first year of high school doubles the chance that a child will drop out of school, and an expulsion triples the likelihood that a child ends up in the juvenile justice system (Scialabba, 2017). As such, zero tolerance policies only exacerbate the racial disproportion of disciplinary practices. Statistically speaking, "over 70 percent of schoolchildren referred to law enforcement agencies for school-related incidents are black or Latino" (Scialabba).

Zero tolerance policies are objective in punishment, but very subjective in definition. Exact definitions of zero tolerance policies vary, as do the "behaviors targeted and consequences applied by school systems" (Henry et al., 2021). Such subjectivity can lead to "systemic racism in the education system, because biases and prejudice affect interpretation of behavior and selection of consequences" (Henry et al.). Henry et al.

emphasizes the detrimental impact of zero tolerance policies on students of color: “Zero tolerance has led to disproportionate rates of injustice for Black students, causing a school-to-prison pipeline in which students, predominantly Black males, are pushed into the criminal justice system through suspensions and expulsions.”

Disciplinary Reforms. While students of color might end up in disciplinary situations more frequently due to UB, exclusionary practices are an issue that cannot be solved simply with teachers overcoming UB; exclusionary punishments and the disproportionate way in which they affect non-white students are a systemic issue. To address the disproportionality of discipline, many districts are adopting restorative justice programs. Schoolwide restorative justice programs typically follow three principles: 1) “Schools hope to repair harm done between the perpetrator and the victim,” 2) “Schools aim to build community and relationships between members of the community (i.e. school staff and students) to increase a feeling of responsibility for maintaining a positive environment,” and 3) “Schools provide students with prosocial skills that will allow them to better address and diffuse potential conflicts” (Davison et al., 2019). The restorative justice model maintains “misconduct cannot be fully restored if the wrongdoer is absent because of a suspension, which means that students should be sent through within-school channels to restore positive behavior,” decreasing the number of suspensions and expulsions as a result (Davison et al.). Instead of exclusionary punishments, restorative justice programs use mediation, focus groups, conferences, and training to encourage prosocial behavior. While research does show potentially promising results for disparities in discipline, whether or not “potential benefits of restorative justice are experienced equally by students from different racial groups, and how restorative justice policies affect racial disproportionality in school discipline is largely missing from this literature” (Davison et al.).

Significant Disproportionality in Special Education. Significant disproportionality is used to describe the widespread trend of students of certain racial and ethnic groups being identified for special education, placed in more restrictive educational settings, and disciplined at markedly higher rates than their peers (National Center for Learning Disabilities [NCLD], 2020). NCLD claims that due to “bias within the education system,” including assessments and policies, “misidentified as needing special education, and are then placed in more restrictive settings and experience harsher discipline because of the intersectionality of race and special education.”

Students of color are identified for special education at a higher rate than white students, with the exception of Asian students (NCLD, 2020). Black students are 40%

more likely to be identified as having a disability than all other students; American Indian and Alaska Native are identified two times more than the general population; Hispanic, black, and Native American students all have a higher ratio of being identified for special education than White children (NCLD). Being misidentified for special education can cause negative short-term and long-term effects for children of color.

Some researchers claim that “disparities in identification rates exist because students of color actually do experience disability at a higher rate than their white peers, and that these students are actually underrepresented in special education based on their significant level of need” (NCLD). The basis for this argument is that race and income are interrelated and “children living at or below the federal poverty level are more than twice as likely to be identified with specific learning disabilities (SLD) as children in households with income four times the poverty level” (NCLD). Further, adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) or trauma, which are also heightened due to poverty, can influence learning and behavior. However, “a great deal of recent evidence points to the troubling existence of systemic racial biases in our schools and communities that lead to students of color being identified for special education at higher rates” (NCLD).

Evidence suggests systemic racial biases when the other factors do not seem to justify patterns of identification. In studies that look at students within the same income bracket across different races, black and Hispanic students are more likely to be identified for special education (NCLD, 2020). For example, “Black students from non-low-income backgrounds had about twice the likelihood of being identified with intellectual disabilities (ID) or emotional disturbances (ED), compared to White students from non-low-income backgrounds in the states studied” (NCLD). These disparities are more severe for disabilities that are more subjective and involve interpretation. For example, disabilities involving vision or hearing are objective because definitive tools are used to measure such deficits. However, Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD), Emotional Disturbances (ED), and ID are more subjective in nature, as they are identified through a number of assessments, surveys, and observations, leaving room for bias and interpretation. Misidentifying a child for special education is a disservice to that child and it can have detrimental results, especially if the student is “being exposed to a less rigorous curriculum, lower expectations, and fewer opportunities to successfully transition to postsecondary education” (NCLD). Inappropriate placement causes short-term and long-term damage particularly for “students of color, students from low-income backgrounds, and students of color from low-income backgrounds” (NCLD).

Significant Disproportionality Reform. In January 2017, the Obama Administration issued the Equity in IDEA regulations, which aim to "help districts address racial and ethnic disparities in identification, placement, and use of discipline for students of color with disabilities" (NCLD, 2020). Prior to this legislation, there was no uniformity "in how they determined whether and to what extent districts had disparities in eligibility, placement, and discipline among racial and ethnic subgroups" (NCLD). Thus, the goal of this regulation was to standardize how districts determined if there were significant racial or ethnic disparities in special education. In 2018, Secretary DeVos tried to delay this regulation, but in March 2019 the United States District Court made it effective immediately. However, there is very limited data on the effects of this reform as it has not been in place for a long enough time.

Policymakers can also work to improve the special education eligibility process to decrease disproportionality. As stated above, certain disability categories have objective assessments, but disability categories like SLD and ED are more subjective. "The subjective nature of certain evaluation processes coupled with the lack of informed observations can allow for bias, such as racial or cultural bias, and mistakes within the special education eligibility process" (NCLD, 2020). To identify a student with an SLD, the DOE does require the school to determine that the problem is not "primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities, of intellectual disabilities, of emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage," and to ensure that "limited english proficiency" is not the root cause (NCLD). NCLD explains, "Without an ethical and contextually relevant lens, it can be difficult to determine whether a student's low achievement is primarily the result of one of these factors. The ability to definitively rule out these factors relative to learning problems using tests is exceptionally limited." This can be remedied by state and local districts working with "outside expertise" to conduct training on disability identification "that includes considerations for linguistic and cultural differences" (NCLD). The problem with this solution is that most districts do not have the extra funds or the time to consult with a specialist for every EL student who is being evaluated, even if it would be in the best interest of the student.

Microaggressions. Microaggressions are: "Brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults to the target person or group" (University of Washington, 2022). While this definition specifies racial microaggressions, microaggressions can target any marginalized group identity, including race, gender, sexuality, SES, ability, and so on (University of Washington).

Microaggressions in a school setting can occur between students, between school personnel and students, or even between school personnel. Even good-intentioned people are susceptible to committing microaggressions. Therefore, understanding what microaggressions are, how they impact students, and the best ways to address them can help in creating a safe and equitable learning environment for all students.

Types of Microaggressions. Miller and Miskimon (2021) identify three types of microaggressions: microinsults, microassaults, and microinvalidations. Microinsults are "communications that convey rudeness and insensitivity and demean a person's identity" (Miller & Miskimon). Microinsults are typically implicit and can be behavioral or verbal in nature. In the classroom, microinsults might manifest in the following ways: Assuming a student's "academic capacity" based on race, expecting problematic behavior based on a student's race/ethnicity or some other identifying factor, scheduling due dates on a cultural or religious holiday or correcting the grammar of a non-English speaking student (Kickboard, 2018). Microassaults are "verbal or nonverbal attacks meant to hurt the intended victim through name-calling, avoidant behavior, or purposeful discriminatory actions" (Miller & Miskimon). Microassaults are more explicit and are actually meant to hurt the person that is targeted. Examples of microassaults that occur in the classroom include an inappropriate joke that "degrades students from different groups," labeling or name calling (e.g. lazy, illegal, girl/boy), mispronouncing names after being corrected, or using the wrong pronouns (Lynch, 2019). Microinvalidations are "communications that exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of persons belonging to minority groups" (Miller & Miskimon). Microinvalidations in the classroom might look like ignoring racial trauma or pain, giving students tasks or roles that "reinforce particular gender roles," or "interpreting students' emotional responses based on gender, sexual orientation, race or ethnicity" (Lynch).

Impacts of Microaggressions. Microaggressions might seem harmless compared to other infractions, but they can actually have long lasting, negative impacts on students. Microaggressions destroy the feelings of safety and inclusivity in a school setting. Microaggressions "can impact the target, aggressor, and bystanders by leaving those exposed to the incident feeling less at ease within their school community" (Miller & Miskimon, 2021). Research shows that children who experience microaggressions have increased levels of anger, stress and anxiety (Miller & Miskimon). Further, individuals experiencing microaggressions are more likely to experience symptoms of post-traumatic stress, and have an increased likelihood of engaging in risky behaviors (e.g. drug and alcohol use, sexual activity) to cope with such symptoms (Miller & Miskimon).

Microaggressions can also impact levels of achievement when teachers have low expectations for students, and students internalize these feelings.

How to Respond. Teachers must be vigilant about acknowledging microaggressions in the classroom, as rejecting this type of behavior is crucial in creating an inclusive classroom. Studies show that "students will take their cues from the instructor about how to react to a hot moment or difficult dialogue – if the instructor ignores it, it can further marginalize minority students and squander an opportunity to dispel stereotypes and promote mutual understanding" (Carnegie Mellon University, 2022). In other words, when a microaggression occurs, teachers must respond to it with "microresistance." Microresistance is defined as "small-scale individual or collaborative efforts that empower targeted people and allies to cope with, respond to, and/or challenge microaggressions with a goal of disrupting systems of oppression as they unfold in everyday life, thereby creating more inclusive institutions" (Cheung et al., 2021).

Cheung et al. describe a communication tool called OTFD, which means "Open the Front Door" to communication. OTFD aims "to organize one's thoughts to respond to a microaggression in a manner that can be heard by the perpetrator rather than having them shut down in defensiveness or fragility." Open the Front Door is a mnemonic device for the four steps of this tool: Observe, Think, Feel, Desire. Ganote et al. (2021) describes how to use the steps of OTFD to respond to a microaggression in the moment:

1. Observe: "State in clear, unambiguous language what you saw happening." Aim to reach common ground here by observing "without evaluation or judgment so that all involved could agree on the speech act, behavior, or incident."

2. Think: "Express what you think and/or what you imagine others might be thinking based on the observation." This is the teacher's interpretation of the events that unfolded.

3. Feel: Express feelings about the situation with "I feel" statements (e.g. "I feel upset / sad / mad when…"). "I feel" should be followed by an emotion.

4. Desire: "State the concrete action you would like to happen next, your desired next step."

OTFD is a good tool to use in the moment because "it encourages transparent communication yet allows for flexibility" (Ganote et al.). There is a similar framework, called ACTION, which includes similar components, but expands on OTFD by exploring impacts of the microaggression. ACTION includes the following steps: "*Ask Questions*,

Come from Curiosity Not Judgment, *Tell Observation*, *Impact Exploration*, *Own Thoughts/Feelings re: Impact*, *Next Steps*" (Ganote et al.). Teachers can use these communication frameworks to respond to microaggressions in the heat of the moment, and they can also teach students the steps to be able to respond themselves.

Another way that teachers can push back against microaggressions and support students in doing so is by "shoring up defenses and building a network of support to increase one's ability to endure, resist, and respond" (Ganote et al., 2021). Self-care and social networks are crucial tools for resilience. "While individuals can practice microresistance on their own, having a network of colleagues who look out for one another provides additional strength" (Ganote et al.). Teachers can help students build their own social connections by promoting ready-made groups that exist at the school, including gender equity groups, performance groups, sports teams, and other interest-based groups. Likewise, teachers can create these networks in class by "employing simple techniques like making sure students learn one another's names and asking them to use them when building off classmates' comments during a discussion, along with more complex ideas like designing and implementing thoughtful group projects that require collaboration and accountability" (Ganote et al.). These small acts are referred to as "microaffirmations," which can be defined as "tiny acts of opening doors to opportunity, gestures of inclusion and caring, and graceful acts of listening," as well as "providing comfort and support when others are in distress" (as cited in Ganote et al).

Overcoming UB

UB influences behavior, so it is a teacher's responsibility to reduce such biases as much as possible. It is not enough to just have good intentions, nor is it enough to simply acknowledge diversity and the existence of UB. "Teachers believe that good intentions will mitigate their biases, and that's just not true . . . Consciousness- and awareness-raising doesn't lead to better action" (Will, 2020b).

Self-Awareness & Reflection. Acknowledging UB is an important first step in overcoming preconceived judgments. Keeter says, "Talk about it, anticipate it, create systems to reduce it and hold yourself accountable" (Keeter, 2021). Once teachers acknowledge their biases, they must figure out how to address them and stop them from being influential. Discussions around favoritism, prejudgment,bigotry, and other forms of bias need to happen, so teachers and administrators should get comfortable with the conversations that may be awkward or uncomfortable. "We need to question ourselves when one of our own stereotypes manifests itself and replace it by asking ourselves to

look at the situational circumstances that could have impacted a person's behavior rather than our stereotype that we hold" (Scialabba, 2017). As individuals, we can begin to change our personal prejudices "by asking questions and engaging with others who are different from us" (Scialabba). While experiencing UB might be inevitable, how teachers let such biases impact their classroom practices does not have to be.

Training. Teachers should participate in implicit bias and equity trainings, which "aim to make teachers aware of their unconscious biases and reflect on how to change their behaviors in the classroom" (Will). Further, this type of training not only allows teachers to confront their own biases, but it allows them to challenge inequities and try to find solutions within their own practices. These conversations on inequity and bias need to go deeper than surface level if they are going to make an impact. "School leaders need to facilitate conversations where teachers explicitly examine the ways racism manifests in school policies and processes . . . These discussions should be ongoing and happening in conjunction with other policy changes" (Will).

Data Analysis. Along with school leaders, teachers should examine school data to determine where racial discrepancies exist. Data should include "test scores, attendance, discipline records, advanced course enrollment, and dropout rates" (Will, 2020b). Looking through student records and determining where a problem began and what interventions were put into place can be very telling as well. Data can also be tracked during classroom observations. Such observations can be done "through a race and gender lens, where the observer notes: Who are teachers calling on? Which students are getting in trouble?" (Will).

At the School Level. While the strategies listed above tend to occur at the individual level, UB can be addressed at the school level as well. In addition to investing in professional development for staff, schools can focus on creating a diverse and inclusive workplace. "Increasing diversity in teacher populations has been tied to decreases in racial discipline disparities," and research has shown "that in schools with higher concentrations of Black and Latinx teachers, Black and Latinx students are less likely to be subject to exclusionary discipline" (NCLD, 2020). For example, in a study of North Carolina schools, exclusionary discipline rates for Black male students decreased when they had a black teacher (NCLD). Unfortunately, creating a diverse teaching body to match the diverse student body is difficult when teachers are disproportionately white.

Section 3 Key Terms

Bias - A personal and sometimes unreasoned judgment

Unconscious/Implicit Bias - Unconscious, or implicit . . . attitudes, preferences, and assumptions that any person holds toward another individual or group of people

Microaggression - Brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults to the target person or group

Section 3 Discussion Questions

1. After completing this section on unconscious bias (UB), discuss how you feel UB develops.
    a. Think about your own experiences. Identify three experiences that you believe have shaped some of your own unconscious biases.
2. Do you think we can change our unconscious biases? Why or why not? If yes, then how?
3. How do you handle microaggressions in your classroom? What about if you notice it from a colleague?

Section 3 Activities

1. Search Google for an Implicit Association Test (IAT). There are several different tests available, some regarding race, gender, religion, disability, and so on. Take one or more of these tests and write a brief reflection of your results, answering the following questions.
    a. Are you surprised by your results?
    b. How do you think your results might affect your teaching practice?
    c. What can you do to overcome the UB's identified?
2. Either through roleplaying if you are working with colleagues, or in a written Google doc, respond to the following microaggressions in OTFD (*Observe*, *Think*, *Feel*, *Desire*) or ACTION (*Ask Questions*, *Come from Curiosity Not Judgment*, *Tell*

Observation, *Impact Exploration*, *Own Thoughts/Feelings re: Impact*, *Next Steps*) formats.

   a. "I can't think of a single female mathematician or scientist. Girls are just not as good at math and science as boys are."

   b. After reading an article about a transgender boy that uses the pronoun "he," one student continues to repeatedly refer to the subject as "she," even after being corrected by other students.

   c. You overhear your co-teacher comment to a young boy in class, "Wow, you have great handwriting for a boy!"

3. Research your school and/or district's disciplinary procedures. Make notes of specific policies or language that you feel are inequitable.

Section 4: Promoting Equity & Inclusion in the School Setting

Universal Design for Learning

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a "framework to improve and optimize teaching and learning for all people based on scientific insights into how humans learn" (CAST, 2018). Many existing pedagogies rely on a one-size-fits-all framework: listen to the same lecture, complete the same assignments, use the same material, and so on. Although this type of teaching is common in K-12 classrooms, these solutions "expect compliance and favor students who don't face significant barriers to traditional learning," which ultimately "perpetuates privilege rather than focusing on learning, autonomy, and empowerment" (Novak, 2021). Unfortunately, one-size-fits-all techniques often result in exclusion, as these learning opportunities are not accessible to everyone. UDL, on the other hand, is an approach "for designing learning experiences so students have options for how they learn, what materials they use, and how they demonstrate their learning" (Novak). UDL supports teachers in creating meaningful learning experiences that are inclusive for every learner.

Ultimately, the goal of UDL is to provide accessible and challenging learning opportunities for every learner. "The UDL Guidelines are not meant to be a 'prescription' but a set of suggestions that can be applied to reduce barriers and maximize learning

opportunities for all learners." (CAST, 2018). As such, teachers can mix and match, only using components that they need to achieve specific goals and objectives. CAST recommends that the UDL guidelines be used as "a tool to support the development of a shared language in the design of goals, assessments, methods, and materials that lead to accessible, meaningful, and challenging learning experiences for all."

Core Beliefs of UDL. Novak (2021) defines the core beliefs of a UDL practitioner as follows: 1) variability, 2) firm goals, flexible means, and 3) expert learners. "Variability is the unique mix of skills, interests, needs, and preferences each and every learner brings to the classroom" (Novak).

In UDL, learner variability is the rule and not the exception. Teachers must plan for variability, rather than planning for a "typical" student and modifying for variability. "Students may need to learn in different ways, using different materials, and share what they have learned in different ways to reach the same goals" (Novak). Lessons must have goals and students must understand those goals. UDL practitioners believe that "all students can work toward the same firm goals and grade-level standards when provided with adequate challenge and support" (Novak). Once the goal is determined, teachers should ask themselves: "Based on the variability in my class, what barriers may prevent learners from working toward that goal and how can I eliminate those barriers through design?" (Novak). From there, teachers can plan their lessons with the necessary scaffolds, supports, and teaching strategies to get past such barriers. Lastly, UDL emphasizes that "all students will become expert learners if barriers are removed and they are given opportunities to self-differentiate" (Novak).

Principles of UDL

CAST (2018) developed three UDL principles for teachers to keep in mind when designing lesson plans: 1) engagement, 2) representation, and 3) action and expression.

Multiple Means of Engagement. Children differ in how they can be engaged and motivated to learn. Multiple means of engagement focuses on stimulating interest and motivation for learning and for the specific content for all students (Stapleton-Corcoran, 2022). The engagement principle also focuses on providing options that feel relevant and authentic to students, creating meaning in their learning. "Strategies include providing options for recruiting interest, for sustaining effort and persistence, and for self-regulation. When implemented well, learners are attentive to what is being taught and are motivated to learn more" (Stapleton-Corcoran). Further, this principle requires that students know the goals of the lesson, as well as the standards that are being

attempted. “By being clear about our goals, we help to recruit interest and help students sustain effort and persistence when things get challenging” (Thibodeau, 2021).

Strategies. To start with, provide the class with student-friendly goals for the lessons. Use language that students understand to let them know what they are working toward, rather than directly quoting Common Core State Standards (CCSS), or other types of standards. “Providing opportunities for student-driven learning starts with clear expectations of learning goals that are written in student-friendly language” (STEM Teaching Tools, 2022). For example, the CCSS Reading Standards for Literature (RL) 6.2, or RL6.2, reads: “Determine a theme or central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details; provide a summary of the text distinct from personal opinions or judgments.” For students, the language of this goal is complex and will take time to dive into. Instead, an “I can” statement, such as, “I can use details from the text to determine the theme or message of a story,” conveys the same goal but in a student-friendly way.

Providing opportunities for student-choice is another important element of the engagement principle. When working toward goals, provide a choice menu or ways for students to use some autonomy in their activities. Novak (2021) describes what this might look like in a science classroom:

> At the beginning of the class, the teacher projects a list of communicable diseases including the common cold, strep throat, COVID-19, and Influenza A (the flu). Each disease is paired with a visual. Some learners take out their phones to look at their throats and ask their friends, “Does my throat look like that?” The teacher asks if anyone wants to add a communicable, or spreadable, disease to the list. One student offers, “mono,” so she writes it down. For the next 10 minutes, students have the option to work independently, with a partner, or in a small group with the teacher to list as many symptoms as they can for at least one of the diseases. Students have the option to write words or draw images to represent symptoms on a provided graphic organizer.

In this scenario, students are learning about the same subject (communicable diseases) and they are working toward the same goal (listing symptoms of the diseases), but they are given a choice about how they want to go about achieving the goal. Providing options for collaboration between students creates more engagement as well.

Giving students tools for self-monitoring is also important for this principle. Self-monitoring tools might include a checklist for students with all the steps for completing

a task. This type of tool will also help students plan out their time for the class period, and can communicate precisely what students need to do to achieve the lesson's goal. For example, in a science class, this might look like the following: "(1) I have selected strong evidence to support my argument about why certain organisms can live in an environment; (2) I can create a visual that describes the evidence I have collected; (3) I can explain my evidence to a partner; and (4) I read my response outloud to check for any errors" (STEM Teaching Tools, 2022).

Multiple Means of Representation. The representation principle means that content should be presented in multiple formats so all students can access it. This is important because "learners differ in the ways that they perceive and comprehend information that is presented to them" (CAST, 2018). Individuals with sensory disabilities, learning disabilities, or language and cultural differences, often require different approaches to accessing the content. Further, "Not all learners comprehend information in the same way, have the same background information or funds of knowledge, or have access to the same language" (Novak, 2021). Therefore, when only one mode of representation is used, such as a lecture, video, or reading, student variability is not being taken into account. In addition, "learning, and transfer of learning, occurs when multiple representations are used, because they allow students to make connections within, as well as between, concepts" (CAST).

Strategies. This principle focuses on providing the same information in multiple modalities. This might include preteaching "vocabulary and symbols the first time you present them," as well as activating "background information that links to and activates relevant prior knowledge" from previous learning (Stapleton-Corcoran, 2022). Sharing information in a digital format that allows students to adjust what they see is also helpful. For example, this might mean sharing material in a way that enables students to adjust "font size of text, images, graphs, tables, or other visual content; calibrate the contrast between background and text or image; and adjust the volume or speed or timing of video, animation, sound, or simulations" (Stapleton-Corcoran). Likewise, teachers can provide options for engaging with a text, including audiobooks, text-to-speech, partner reading, and graphic novels.

Teachers can also provide variation in the learning activities. One effective example of the representation principle is using a hyperdoc for learning. A hyperdoc is a digital document, often created in a Google Doc or Google Slides presentation, that has access to all the learning activities all in one spot. Essentially, "Within a single document, students are provided with hyperlinks to all of the resources they need to complete that

learning cycle" (Gonzalez, 2017). The exact activities might vary, but the hyperdoc typically includes one side with links to different types of media (videos, podcasts, images, texts, etc.), and the other side for students to jot down notes or answer questions. Hyperdocs have many benefits, including multimodal opportunities, materials that are confined to one spot, and more opportunities for teacher-student interaction since the learning material is in the doc. Likewise, hyperdocs allow for privacy; for example, if certain students have modified hyperdocs, nobody else knows. "They don't know that maybe their text … is at a different reading level . . . Or they're able to use Read&Write for Google and just put headphones in, and that's just a little agreement between you and that student" (Gonzalez, 2017).

Multiple Means of Actions and Expression. This principle "includes the multiple ways that teachers can formatively or summatively evaluate students, as well as engage students in self-evaluation" (Kieran & Anderson, 2019). Traditionally, students are asked to express their understanding in one way, using a test, an essay, or an inflexible project. However, there is not one best way for all student learning to be assessed, as variability plays a role. "When teachers provide students with multiple options that are authentic and personalized, learners are able to practice executive functioning skills as they analyze the task and choose the best option to demonstrate that they met the intended outcome" (Novak, 2021).

Strategies. When presenting a lesson, teachers can provide students with, for example, target vocabulary and a rubric of what must be covered, and then allow students to choose how to present the information. Students may then choose a written response, Google Slides presentation, podcast, video presentation, one pager, infographic, and so on. As long as the student is meeting the learning goal, the way in which that information is presented can be flexible. Giving students practical tools to keep track of their tasks is necessary as well, as students can become overwhelmed with "too much" freedom. Teachers can provide "checklists and project planning templates for understanding the problem, setting up prioritization, sequences, and schedules of steps" which will help guide students through the process (UIC, 2022).

Culturally Responsive Teaching

Sometimes referred to as culturally relevant pedagogy or culturally sustaining pedagogy, culturally responsive teaching (CRT) means "using students' customs, characteristics, experience, and perspectives as tools for better classroom instruction" (Will & Najarro, 2022). CRT is an example of an asset-based pedagogy, which seeks to "dismantle a deficit

approach to educating students of color and instead focusing on their strengths, assets, and communities in the classroom" (Will & Navarro). CRT is a term that was coined by researcher Geneva Gay in the year 2000. Gay wrote, "When academic knowledge and skills are situated within the lived experiences and frames of reference for students, they are more personally meaningful, have higher interest appeal, and are learned more easily and thoroughly" (As cited in Will & Najarro). CRT is a research-based approach that "connects students' cultures, languages, and life experiences with what they learn in school. These connections help students access rigorous curriculum and develop higher-level academic skills" (Educators Team at Understood, 2022).

The human brain is wired to make connections. It is easier for the brain to make connections when there is a "hook" to hang it on, and that hook is background knowledge (Educators Team, 2022). Students bring unique knowledge and experiences to the classroom everyday. However, for "students of color, English language learners (ELLs), and other underserved student populations those assets are often overlooked. When that happens, educators miss the chance to use them to support learning" (Educators Team). CRT values the background and experiences of all students. As such, it also raises expectations for all students.

Characteristics of CRT. Gay identified five essential characteristics of CRT:

1. "A strong knowledge base about cultural diversity,
2. Culturally relevant curricula,
3. High expectations for all students
4. An appreciation for different communication styles
5. The use of multicultural instructional examples" (as cited in Will & Najarro, 2022).

Teachers should have a general understanding of different racial and ethnic groups' "cultural values, traditions, and contributions to society, and incorporate that knowledge into their instruction" (Will & Najarro). Understanding the cultural norms and values of students will not only help build teacher-student relationships, but it will also help to avoid any culturally based miscommunications. Including culturally relevant curricula means that teachers "include multiple perspectives in their instruction and make sure the images displayed in classrooms—such as on bulletin boards—represent a wide range of diversity" (Will & Najarro). Reading classic literature by writers such as Shakespeare or Charles Dickens is fine, but including works by authors of diverse cultures will only expand student learning. Further, reading works by varied authors

with diverse characters allows students to see themselves represented in the curriculum.

Maintaining high expectations for all students is especially important for students from underserved groups, whose skills are often underestimated. "With culturally responsive teaching, teachers move away from a deficit mindset (focusing on what a student can't do). Instead, they identify students' assets and use them to create rigorous, student-centered instruction" (Educators Team, 2022). It is the teacher's responsibility to help children achieve academic success, while also "validating their cultural identities" (Will & Najarro). An appreciation for different communication styles indicates that teachers understand and respect that different cultures and ethnicities use different ways of communicating. For instance, "many communities of color have an active, participatory style of communication. A teacher who doesn't understand this cultural context might think a student is being rude and tell the student to be quiet. The student may then shut down" (Will & Navarro). Lastly, using multicultural instructional examples means that "teachers should connect students' prior knowledge and cultural experiences with new knowledge" (Will & Navarro).

Benefits of CRT. A 2016 study that synthesized decades of research on CRT and other similar frameworks found "that engaging in culturally affirming practices across subject matters, including mathematics and science, led to positive increases in students' understanding and engagement with academic skills and concepts" (Will & Navarro, 2022). CRT empowers students, making them feel seen by their teachers and classmates. CRT also increases motivation, engagement, interest, and self-perception. Aronson, a co-author of the 2016 study, reports, "whenever teachers drew direct connections between classroom lessons and students' experiences outside of school, students could see greater value in the academic content as it applies to the real world," which helped "students see themselves as knowledge producers and researchers" (Will & Navarro). CRT focuses on making learning relevant to students of all backgrounds, which "helps them succeed both in terms of quantitative measures such as high test scores, and more qualitative measures such as becoming life-long learners able to ask critical questions about the world around them, both in and out of school" (Will & Navarro).

Strategies & Examples. Teachers that practice CRT make sure that their classroom is full of books and material "featuring characters and images that represent a variety of ages, genders, ethnicities, and other types of diversity" (Will & Navarro, 2022). Intentionally choosing class texts with diverse characters is also important. Choosing texts or resources that discuss diverse people and experiences should not be limited to an

English Language Arts (ELA) classroom, but can be done in science and social studies as well. For example, teachers can “invite local professionals in the scientific field from local hospitals, laboratories, or pharmacies to share about their journey in the sciences as a minority student,” or they can find similar interviews on YouTube to share (Ferlazzo, 2021).

CR teachers “include multiple perspectives when discussing historical and contemporary events, including those from oppressed groups who are often left out of the narrative” (Will & Navarro). Traditionally, textbooks used in U.S. schools are very one-sided and do not convey the hardships and oppression that many groups experienced. Teachers can find resources to explore these other views and provide students with multiple perspectives.

Creating a safe, anonymous, space for students to ask background questions on material is also culturally responsive. “Many students have not had the benefit of early formal or informal exposure to the language, vocabulary, and methodology” used in content areas like math, science, or social studies (Ferlazzo, 2021). In such cases, learning new material is difficult because they do not have an understanding of the foundational concepts. However, this can also be embarrassing for students. To overcome this barrier, teachers can create a space for students to ask background questions or vocabulary clarifying questions. “This can be done virtually through an email address sent to the teacher where students can send questions they need to ask, a phone number to the teacher where students can text questions, or done on a whiteboard or Post-it note area in the classroom teaching space” (Ferlazzo). Teachers can then dedicate a portion of class to address the questions.

Making Remote Learning Inclusive

Before the Covid-19 pandemic, educators in K-12 schools did not typically have to worry about creating an inclusive remote learning environment. However, with many schools continuing to offer remote learning options for students, it’s important to maintain an inclusive classroom even during remote instruction. Cheung et al. (2021) share some tips for increasing inclusivity during remote learning:

- **Turn on closed captions** so that students have access to the auditory and written words that are being said
- Have students **write their preferred name and pronouns** to their Zoom or Google Hangouts display (e.g. Stephan goes by Steve, pronouns he/him)

- **Make allowances for interruptions** and possibly introductions of family members, pets, or others who enter the screen
- **Use breakout rooms** to facilitate discussions, as some students have trouble speaking in front of large groups
- **Encourage turning on video**, but don't require it
- Ensure **text and visuals are large and clear** when screen sharing

While the reasons for most of these suggestions are obvious, some teachers might wonder what is wrong with requiring students to turn on their videos. "By taking a student-centered approach, we make pedagogical decisions based on what is best for the student's learning, not the instructor's teaching per se" (Castelli & Sarvary, 2020). Castelli and Sarvary conducted a study to look into reasons behind why some students were uncomfortable turning on their cameras during remote learning. The researchers found that students were nervous about "people and the physical location being seen in the background and having a weak internet connection, all of which our exploratory analyses suggest may disproportionately influence underrepresented minorities." It's important to remember that no one "should assume the living conditions of students when not on campus. Some students live in some of the worst conditions possible" (Castelli & Sarvary). Rather than requiring video being on for participation points, the authors suggest allowing alternatives such as discussion boards, polling, and shared documents.

Section 4 Key Terms

Asset Based Pedagogy - Teaching approaches that focus on the strengths that diverse students bring to the classroom

Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) - Using students' customs, characteristics, experience, and perspectives as tools for better classroom instruction

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) - A framework to improve and optimize teaching and learning for all people based on scientific insights into how humans learn

Section 4 Discussion Questions

1. How does UDL promote equity and inclusion for all students? Consider students with and without disabilities, English Language Learners (ELLs) and native English speakers.
2. Discuss your thoughts on encouraging but not requiring students to turn their cameras on. Do you agree or disagree with the reasons discussed in this section?
3. How do you practice culturally responsive teaching in your classroom? Which parts can you improve on?

Section 4 Activities

1. Take an existing lesson plan and rewrite it to include UDL principles. (Note: There is an abundance of UDL lesson plan templates available)
2. Create a hyperdoc for an upcoming lesson, (Note: Several hyperdoc samples are available)
3. Design alternative engagement activities for a remote lesson, instead of requiring live participation via camera.

Conclusion

While the United States Supreme Court declared that education is “a right which must be made available to all on equal terms” in 1954, it seems that schools are still working to make this a reality. Educators must constantly evolve in their own practice to provide students with an equitable, inclusive, and high-quality learning experience. Along with educational leaders, it is the responsibility of teachers to promote equity and inclusion in schools to ensure that all students have a fair and just experience in their academic endeavors.

Case Study

Mrs. Klein is a 6th grade teacher at Diversey Middle School, a racially and economically diverse school. Prior to working at Diversey, Mrs. Klein taught at a private school, which

had a predominantly white, middle to upper class population. Although Mrs. Klein is well-liked by her students, some of her lessons are not as well-received as they were at her previous school. Mrs. Klein typically introduces the lesson via lecture with an accompanying Slides presentation, moves onto guided practice, and then independent practice. She has noticed that students seem to be easily distracted during her lessons, and a handful of her students are not passing the multiple choice quizzes and tests. Mrs. Klein doesn't understand where she is going wrong with her lessons, but she is determined to figure it out.

Some considerations for Mrs. Klein may include:

- If my students do not seem to be embracing or understanding my lessons, is it because they may need to learn in different ways, using different materials?
- How can I challenge them and make them the primary experts in their learning?
- Can they have some choice in how they go about completing the lesson, if I provide the necessary tools and guidance?
- Can they share what they have learned in different ways to reach the same goals? What might this look like other than quizzes and tests?
- Are the lessons themselves taking my current students' backgrounds, knowledge, and experiences into consideration?

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