Culturally Responsive Problem Solving for Increased Equity

Heidi Erstad
Technical Assistance Coordinator
Wisconsin RtI Center
erstadh@wisconsinrticenter.org

Heidi Laabs
Statewide Leadership and Coaching Coordinator
Wisconsin RtI Center
laabsh@wisconsinrticenter.org
Session Description

This session will help participants understand how biases commonly emerge in problem-solving and the strategies to interrupt them in order to achieve more equitable outcomes for students.

Participants will receive access to DPI's Culturally Responsive Problem Solving Guide (draft).
Session Take-aways

- Understand the **role of mindsets and bias** in shaping decision-making
- Identify **strategies to set the stage for and stay engaged with culturally responsive problem-solving processes** to achieve equitable outcomes
- Identify **decision points in team problem-solving processes that are vulnerable to bias and strategies to navigate through**
Culturally Responsive Problem-Solving

- Brings team members’ cultural attitudes and beliefs into the discussion
- Is an evidence-based practice for all students
- Has the greatest impact on groups of students historically underserved by schools.

DPI Culturally Responsive Problem-Solving: An Evidence-Based Guide for Team Practice
Community Agreements

“[Community agreements] are important for a group that intends to work together on difficult issues or who will be working together over time. Starting with [community agreements] builds trust, clarifies group expectations of one another, and establishes points of reflection to see how the group is doing regarding process.”

- Marilyn Wentworth, School Reform Initiative
In order to have an honest and vulnerable conversation, I need...
Community Agreements

1. Use & receive “I” statements with respect
2. Respect confidentiality
3. Embrace messiness & kindness
4. Practice accountability (*intent vs. impact*)
5. Be aware of equity of voice (*move up, move back*)
Our stories shape, limit, and define our way of being, the way we think, and the way we interact with others.

Which stories do we tell?

Robert Hargrove, Masterful Coaching
What is a common “rut” story this team tells about students, families, staff..?
Turn and talk …
Mental Models

◎ Values, beliefs and assumptions about how the world works
◎ Make sense of the world
◎ Protect ourselves
◎ Drive our behavior
◎ Operate unconsciously
◎ All flawed to some extent

“Like a pane of glass framing and subtly distorting our vision, mental models determine what we see.” - Peter Senge
"Functional hypocrisy"
- Anthony Muhammad

Apprenticeship of Observation

- Educators have been socialized in their field since childhood (13K hours) and adopt the norms of the field.
- The average educator was a good student.
- Educators subconsciously protect a system that was of personal benefit.
- Educators implement practices that protect the system (academic obstacle course).

(Lortie, Schoolteacher: A Sociological Study, 1975)
Norm of Silence: “Wisconsin Nice”

“...[D]ominant culture in the United States tries to suppress conversations on race. There are numerous reasons for this, most of them related to the maintenance of the power status quo. ..... There are certain conversations that take place in teachers’ lounges about students and their families that I find both infuriating and heartbreaking. Too often, teachers are silent in the face of racist, prejudicial, biased, or stereotypical comments. I know it’s uncomfortable to confront a colleague.”

-Afrika Afeni Mills, A Black Educator Mom

Dear White Teachers of My Black Children
About Implicit Bias

- Forms automatically and unintentionally
- Pervasive: Everyone is susceptible
- Does not always align with explicit beliefs
- Unchecked, results in attitudes, behaviors or actions that are prejudiced for or against a person or a group of people
- Malleable

Sources: Wisconsin DPI Culturally Responsive Problem-Solving: An Evidence-Based Guide for Team Practice
Kirwin Institute State of the Science: Implicit Bias. What the Starbucks incident tells us about implicit bias.
How are mental models, implicit bias, and problem solving connected?
Mental models, implicit bias, and problem solving

“Deficit-based thinking can make typical behavior appear as atypical, and individual and cultural expressions appear as disorder rather than difference (Newell & Chavez-Korell, 2017). When we have deficit-based views of students and families, we immediately diminish opportunities for effective problem-solving and increase the likelihood that we will further marginalize students and families from the educational process. For these reasons, educators cannot ignore their own cultural beliefs, values, and experiences in the problem-solving process.”

- DPI Culturally Responsive Problem-Solving: An Evidence-Based Guide for Team Practice
If we deliberately bring team members’ attitudes and beliefs into the discussion, we can collectively...

◎ Reduce the likelihood that teams will identify problems within students that don’t exist or are inaccurate
◎ Reduce discrepancy in equitable opportunities and outcomes for marginalized students
◎ Reduce the over-representation of students of color in special education
Setting the Stage Strategies

- Establish and use community agreements
- Model use of person-first language
- Model vulnerability
- Commit to continually learning about yourself and others
- Collectively learn about and examine beliefs and assumptions
- Practice “calling-in” accountability
A direct challenge to something said or done, usually in public, with the intent of exposing the person’s wrongdoing to others.

Source: Austrew, A. *Is There A Difference Between “Calling In” And “Calling Out”?*
Think about your team’s rut story...

What gets your way of disrupting this pattern?

What are the social consequences of disrupting?

What are the consequences of staying silent?

What unspoken team norms allow deficit-based thinking and language to continue uninterrupted?

What norms allow for interrupting bias and holding each other accountable?
Use mediational stems

◎ How have you come to this way of thinking?
◎ What assumptions are you making?
◎ What evidence do you have?
◎ How might _____ view this?
◎ What might this look/feel/sound like to ___?
◎ What might be some unintended consequences of this thinking?
◎ When you think about this perspective, what’s in your heart? Your gut?
Use confrontational stems

Describe and deflect

or

Inspect and reflect

Anthony Muhammad
Use confrontational stems

- Would you be willing to explore your thinking about that?
- Could we examine your assumptions about that?
- I’m having a reaction to something you said. Is it okay if I ask you about...?
- I’m hearing what sounds like a rut story. Could we look at that?
- We have a norm about...
Turn and talk …
What have you heard so far that might be helpful?
Culturally Responsive Problem-Solving:
An Evidence-Based Guide for Team Practice

Developed by Markeda Newell PhD
Associate Professor, School Psychology
Loyola University - Chicago.
Problem-Solving Process

Is there a problem?

Why is it happening?

What should be done?

Is the plan working?

Plan Implementation

Plan Evaluation

Problem Identification

Problem Analysis

Why is it happening?

What should be done?

Is there a problem?

Is the plan working?
Key Concepts in Guide

The Guide assists teams in identifying vulnerable decision points (VDP) where bias is most likely to influence the problem-solving process.
Elements of a situation that increase the likelihood of bias affecting decision making. These *vulnerable decision points* momentarily increase the likelihood of making a biased decision.

Some decision points may be more vulnerable to bias than others. The literature identifies some decision points that are most vulnerable to implicit bias and may be consistent across a range of schools.

In general, implicit biases tend to affect decisions that involve more *uncertainty, ambiguity, or discretion*.

Known Vulnerable Decision Points (VDP) in Problem-Solving

VDP 1: Presenting Initial Concern
VDP 2: Identifying Area of Need
VDP 3: Identifying Hypothesis
VDP 4: Collecting Data
VDP 5: Interpreting Data
VDP 6: Selecting Evidence-based Interventions
VDP 7: Improving Cultural Responsiveness of Intervention
How the Guide Helps

For each vulnerable decision point, the guide includes:

◎ How bias shows up
◎ A guiding question
◎ Strategies to reduce the likelihood of bias influencing the decision point
◎ Indicators of success
VULNERABLE DECISION POINT 1
Presenting Initial Concern

HOW BIAS SHOWS UP

- Teams agree with what’s first offered as THE underlying factor creating a concern AND/OR
- Teams situate the problem with the student or their family
VULNERABLE DECISION POINT 1
Presenting Initial Concern

GUIDING QUESTION
Did the team consider perspectives other than the initial presentation of the student concern?

STRATEGIES TO INTERRUPT BIAS
- Interview teacher about classroom management, curriculum, and instruction
- Collect data on classroom management and instruction
- Collect data on student performance in other settings
Use in Problem-Solving

Teams responsible for problem-solving may use the Guide to **reflect on and remedy possible cultural mismatches at all levels of support** and to plan for culturally responsive interventions.

By using this Guide, teams can move closer to accurately identifying target areas of need and developing solutions that will improve outcomes for every student served.
Understand the role of mindsets and bias in shaping decision-making

Identify strategies to set the stage for and stay engaged with culturally responsive problem-solving processes to achieve equitable outcomes

Identify decision points in team problem-solving processes that are vulnerable to bias and strategies to navigate through
Turn and talk...

When you think about what brought you to this session, what’s in your heart? What’s in your gut? What opportunities and obstacles do you see now? Where will you get support?
“...[D]ominant culture in the United States tries to suppress conversations on race. There are numerous reasons for this, most of them related to the maintenance of the power status quo. I’m asking you to help break this damaging practice — especially among adults in your school. There are certain conversations that take place in teachers’ lounges about students and their families that I find both infuriating and heartbreaking. Too often, teachers are silent in the face of racist, prejudicial, biased, or stereotypical comments.

I know it’s uncomfortable to confront a colleague. I want you to consider, however, how uncomfortable it makes my family and all other families of color to know that there are people who we’ve entrusted with the care and teaching of our children who think of them as less than — less important, less worthy of our love and attention. When that moment arises next time — and it will arise — I want you to think of how uncomfortable the students are in that teacher’s classroom, and I want you to speak up on their behalf. If a colleague says something derogatory about a child and/or that child’s family, you must speak up. As Desmond Tutu said, ‘If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor.’”

Afrika Afeni Mills, A Black Educator Mom

Dear White Teachers of My Black Children

Commit to Changing the Norm
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