

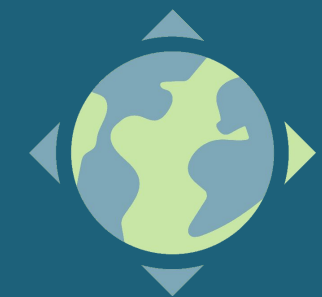
Ditching Deficit Ideology and Harmful Language



A Question to Get Us Started:

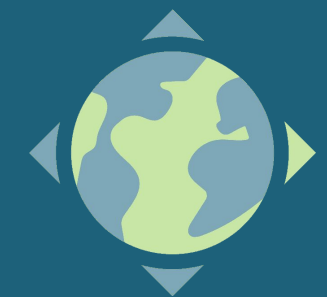


What is your understanding of “deficit ideology”? If you haven’t heard the term before, what would you guess it means?



A Simple Truth

Equity cannot live where deficit ideology lives.



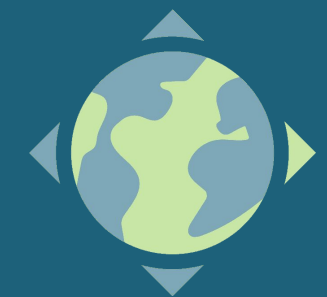
Deficit Thinking—A habit (General Psychology)

Deficit thinking is an ingrained habit of focusing on gaps and weaknesses (the deficit) instead of what's working (and can be made to work better still).



Deficit Ideology

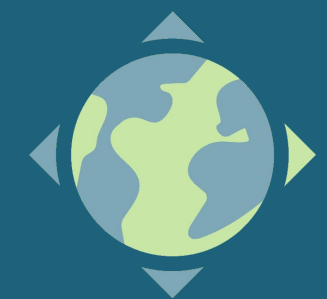
Belief system that locates the primary cause of disparities **within** rather than **pressing upon** the communities experiencing the disparities



Deficit Ideology (In Education)

“Deficit ideology refers to the notion that students (particularly low income, ELL, Students of Color, etc.) fail in school because they and their families experience deficiencies that obstruct the learning process.” --R. Valencia

Ex: test score gaps, behavior referral and special education referral disproportionalities, graduation rates, etc.



Catching Our Implicit Deficit Framing

“Achievement gap” -> **Opportunity gap**

“Dropout” -> **Pushout**

“Generational poverty” -> **Generational inequity**

...and the incessant search for strategies—*grit, growth mindset, behavior modification*—that avoid any real confrontation with inequity.

Others??



**Deficit thinking often views students
(particularly marginalized students/families) as
“lacking” in terms of:**

- Biology (gender, race)
- culture (parenting, discipline, respect)
- psychology (emotional expression, social skills)
- mental acuity (sensory perception, thinking skills)
- environment (resources, space)
- Language (academic English)
- moral integrity (work ethic, honesty)
- Goals and Values (academic goals, definition of success/happiness)

Note, the most common, broad and unconscious deficit thinking is...

the assumption that students and their families do not have sufficient foundational knowledge to contribute to their own and others' learning.

The established curriculum and instruction are positioned as the center of teaching and learning.

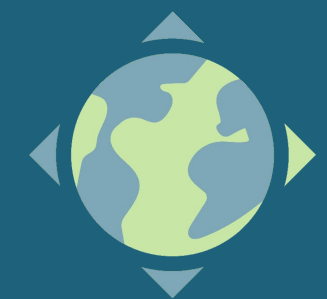
Policy and Practice Analysis

**What are some policy or practices that are based in deficit ideology?
What are some policies or practices that reinforce deficit ideology?**

****IMPORTANT****

Opposite of *deficit ideology* is not a strengths based view.

Opposite of deficit *ideology* is a structural ideology (or the belief system that attributes disparities to inequity)



**If Not Deficit Ideology,
What?**

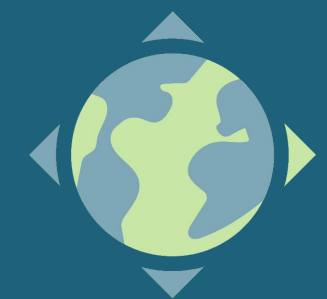


Structural Impulse

What are the challenges, barriers, inequities and biases?

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Let's Practice!

**How would you
respond to these
statements?**

Considerations

- Reaffirm the power of ideology and language
- Examine specific examples of deficit ideology and harmful language
- Take action! Moving beyond awareness

Obvious harmful language

Deficit language:

“These kids are so far behind; they’ll never catch up now. I might as well work with the kids that stand a chance.”

Less-obvious harmful language

Deficit language:

““The students who don't want to learn make it hard to teach the students who do want to learn.”



Less-obvious harmful language

Deficit language:

“If I don’t hold these students accountable, they will never learn responsibility”

Obvious harmful language

Racist language:

“Ever since our school started getting more *diverse* our discipline problems have gone up.”

Less-obvious harmful language

Racist language:

“Those parents don’t care about their children’s education”

“Those parents don’t even know or want to learn English.”

Obvious harmful language

Classist language:

“Well, these kids are just going to be meth dealers anyway so we might as well teach them some basic math so they can be good meth dealers.”

Less-obvious harmful language

Classist language:

“Those XYZ Neighborhood kids don’t have any role models at home.”



Obvious harmful language

Homophobic language:

“If the LGBTQIA+ students don’t want to be bullied, they shouldn’t throw their sexual orientations in other students’ faces.”

Less-obvious harmful language

Homophobic and Gendered language:

“Dear Moms and Dads...” (in school to home communications)

“Homecoming King and Queen”



Language and Ideology that divides and reinforces dominant cultural norms

Schools are also infused with language that divides and reinforces and prioritizes dominant cultural norms. This language de-values the differences in experiences, goals, values, and behaviors that our students bring with them to their learning and prioritizes compliance with established dominant norms. By reinforcing dominant cultural norms and assumptions, we maintain existing power and privilege stratifications.



Words that divide

- Low kids, low students, low achievers, low babies
- Struggling students, at-risk students
- Highflyers, high achievers, high students, gifted students



Words that reinforce dominant cultural norms

- healthy behavior
- positive environment
- classroom citizenship
- respect
- consequences
- accountability



Words that reinforce dominant cultural norms (cont.)

- achievement gap
- higher order thinking
- articulate
- rigor, grit
- disciplined
- gifted and talented



Words that reinforce dominant cultural norms (cont.)

- college and career ready
- professionalism
- timely
- organized



Here's what you CAN do...

- Engage with students and families as they are, and what they value
- Use strength-based language and identifiers
- Examine your school-home communications
- Create a team that cultivates and sustains inclusive language practices
- Identify and address the systemic challenges, barriers, biases and inequities

Collegial Conversations: Opening a New Window

- “I wonder” statements
- What are the challenges and barriers—the biases and inequities?
- Refocus on what we *can do*, in our spheres of influence

I wonder...

- “XYZ students rarely enroll in our extracurricular activities. Doesn’t that prove they aren’t really invested in school?”
- I wonder...

What are the biases and inequities?

- “If girls were interested in computer science courses, they would register for them.”
- What are the biases and inequities?

Refocus on what *we* can do

- “XYZ parents never show up for family engagement opportunities. They obviously don’t value their children’s education.”
- What can we do differently?

Ending Reflection

- What is one particularly harmful example of deficit ideology in your sphere of influence?
- What will you do to help bridge people to a structural/equity view?

Remember? Try? Share?

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