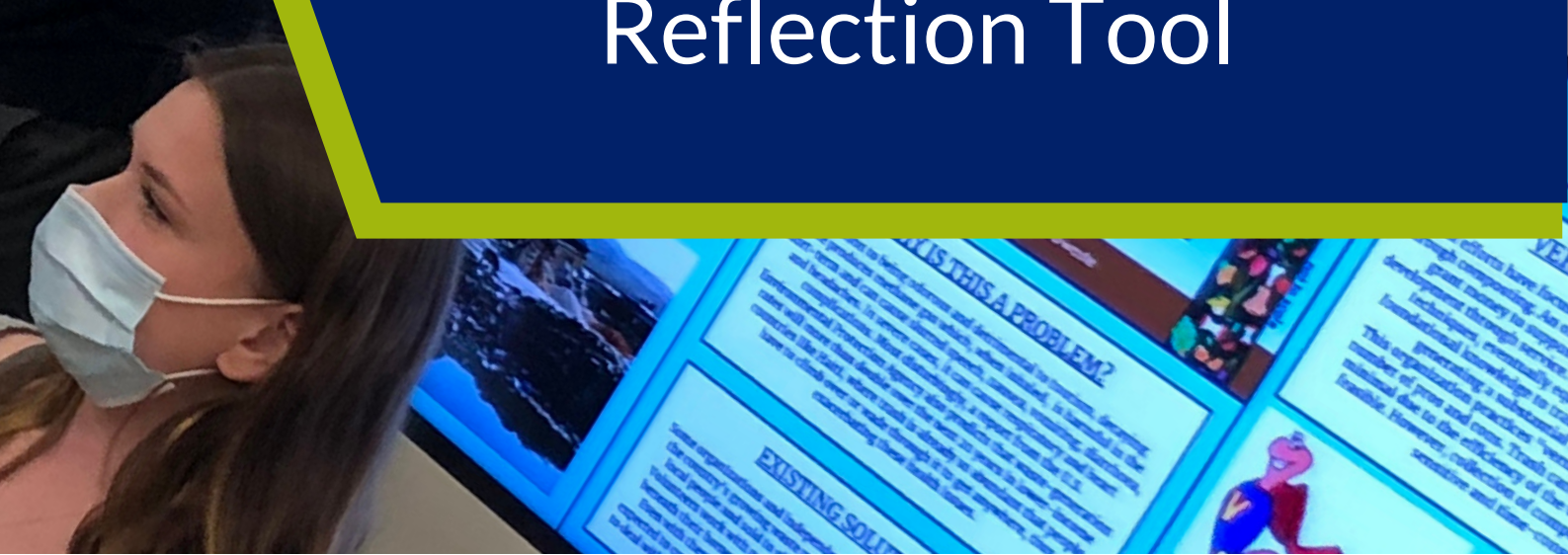




Critical Service-Learning Reflection Tool



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The Critical Service-Learning Reflection Tool is a design and planning instrument developed for experiential education and service-learning practitioners with various levels of familiarity with critical theory.

The tool is intended to support all collaborators involved in service-learning (e.g., instructors, students, staff, and community members) in reflecting critically and setting actionable goals that move their practices towards justice.

Introduction

“Critical service-learning” is an ideology distinguished from traditional service-learning through its deliberate focus on social justice. Some traditional service-learning experiences ignore the political nature of service and perpetuate inequitable social hierarchies (Eby, 1998; Mitchell & Latta, 2020). To address this, critical service-learning endeavors to integrate social justice concepts in the classroom; redistribute power among students, professors, and community partners; and develop authentic relationships (Mitchell, 2008). Critical service-learning practitioners incorporate critical pedagogy, action, and reflection in and beyond the classroom to increase understanding of oppression and find solutions to social problems through community-campus partnerships (Santiago-Ortiz, 2019).

Several years ago, staff, faculty, and student activists at Duke created a self-assessment tool designed to encourage to move service-learning collaborations toward more just concepts, practices, and outcomes (Stith et al., 2018). The tool was well-received at conferences and there seemed to be interest in a guide that pushed critical pedagogy. However, there was also an expressed overwhelmedness about where and how to start given the depth and history of critical theory and social justice.

Fast forward to 2020: Motivated by our own interests in critical practice, the original members of the tool creation team came together with new team members to review and revise the tool. Over the last year we met regularly, revised items, debated formats, and considered both nuanced and practical implications. For example, should the tool be simplified

with accessible language or should it hold firm to naming critical concepts? In making important choices, we found ourselves faced with many of the same tensions acknowledged in the tool, including whose identity and voice counts and when. This tension caused considerable reflection about the dynamics and challenges of critical work, which the team addressed in an article we co-wrote and published in *Experiential Learning & Teaching in Higher Education* (Stith et al., 2021).

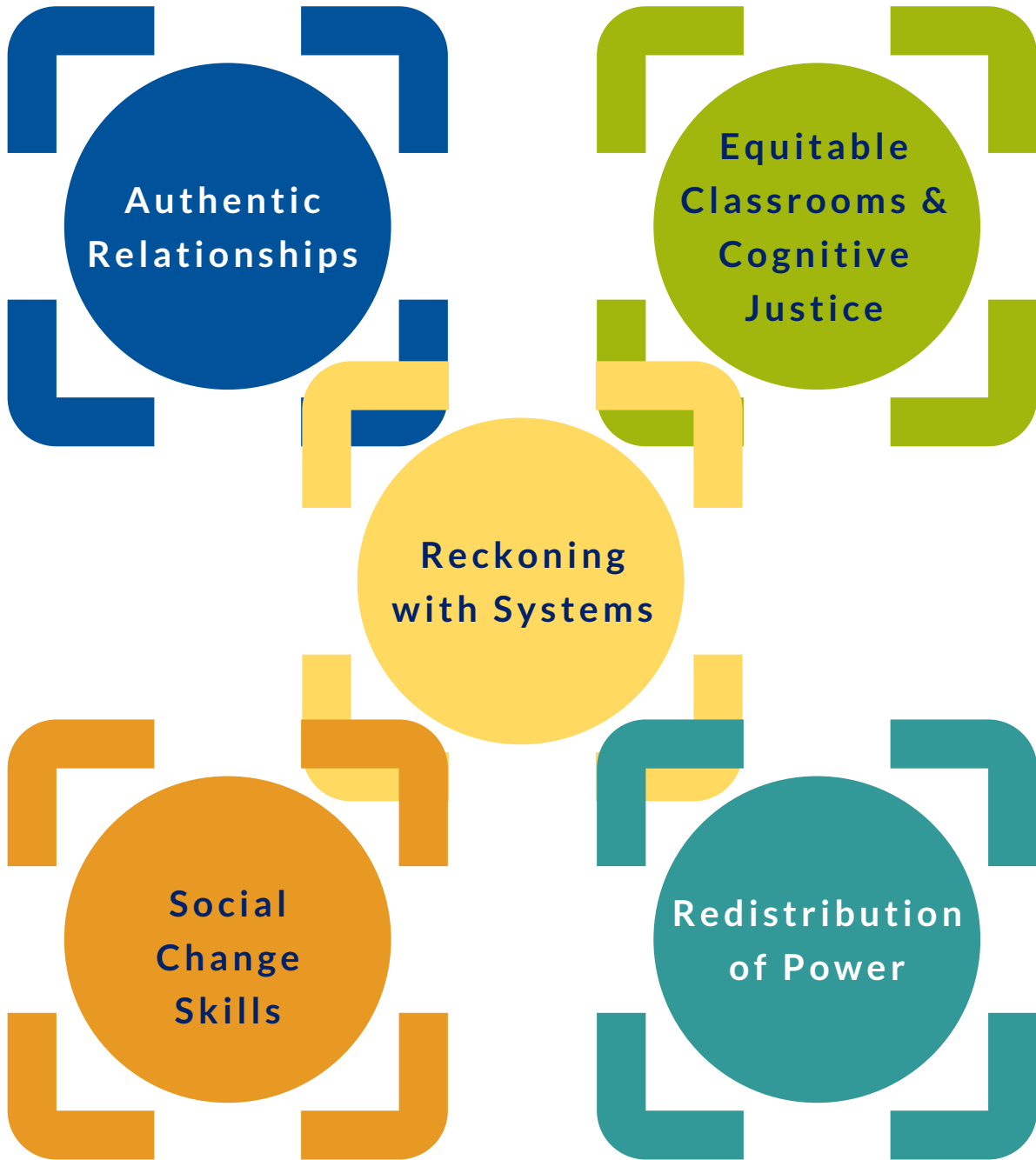
We also conducted a series of cognitive interviews with the revised statements in order to identify ambiguous concepts and some of the tension choice points. In the following pages, the statements represent recommendations and observations from the current critical service-learning literature that were modified with input of higher education faculty, students, and staff; we acknowledge the need for additional feedback from partners and program participants. The revised statements are grouped into five areas of critical focus for consideration: Authentic Relationships, Equitable Classrooms & Cognitive Justice, Reckoning with Systems, Social Change Skills, and Redistribution of Power. Three of these areas are taken directly from Tania Mitchell's now seminal article "Traditional vs. Critical Service-Learning" and the others were constructed by the original team. Our tool is built on the idea that critical service-learning is both a process and an outcome. Thus, the tool both invites you to implement the pedagogy, academic content, and praxis of critical service-learning. Holding the value that small steps toward justice are a part of the longer journey we are on, we invite you to use the action plan provided with the tool as an implementation strategy.

A grayscale background image showing a group of people, including one person in a wheelchair, engaged in conversation. The image is partially obscured by a dark blue overlay containing text.

Using the Reflection Tool

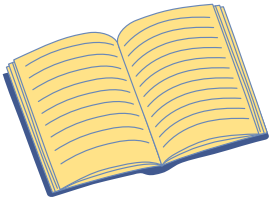
The reflection tool is organized into five focus areas. Within each focus area, there are opportunities for reflection and action planning.

Areas of Focus



Step 1: Reflection

Read



Read the statements in their entirety and note a few in each section that feel relevant for your practice.

Identify



Identify among the following responses to each statement.

1

No

I'm not doing this, and I don't think I'll do this in the near future.

2

Not Yet

I'm not doing this, but I would like to consider adding this at some time.

3

Somewhat

I'm doing this somewhat, and I would like to enhance this.

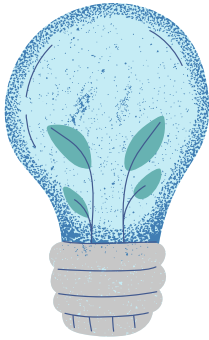
4

Yes

I'm already doing this rather well.

Step 2: Action Planning

Enhance



Examine the statements rated “I’m doing this somewhat, and I would like to enhance this” and consider this as a starting place. Star the statements which you would like to take tangible steps towards implementing.

Investigate



If you come to a term that you want to investigate, use the links provided and investigate further.

Implement



Choose the statements that you believe would be both feasible and impactful on the experience to implement.

Authentic Relationships

Collaborators (defined but not limited to community organizations, community members, students, higher education faculty and staff) intentionally build trust through activities that identify mutually defined goals and negotiated responsibilities.

The challenge is to create relationships that neither ignore the realities of social inequality in our society nor attempt to artificially homogenize all people in the service-learning experience (Bickford & Reynolds, 2002). (Mitchell, 2008)

Reflection

1 2 3 4

Collaborators have the opportunity to co-create support for authentic relationships such as written understanding of expectations, responsibilities, and goals for working together (e.g., memorandum of understanding, regular/scheduled check-ins, meetings both on campus and in the community, and engaging beyond the service-learning experience).

1 2 3 4

Collaborators build consensus on the type, length, and quantity of engagement required to meet community-defined activities with social change as the partnership's focus.

1 2 3 4

Collaborators reflect critically on how their intersectional identities constrain, contribute to, and shape their unique and shared identities and what they need to learn from one another.

1 2 3 4

Collaborators plan for how critical feedback and conflict will be handled, used to make collective decisions, and leveraged to deepen relationships.

Reflection

1 2 3 4

Collaborators develop a shared understanding of the assets and history of the places and people involved, including the relationships between community and campus.

1 2 3 4

Collaborators name their unique and shared experiences, what they need to learn about one another, and the ways systems of power impact their relationships and interactions.

1 2 3 4

Collaborators understand community dynamics deeply enough to recognize the multiple constituencies and interests at play within the community.

1 2 3 4

Collaborators partner for the long-term, beginning before and lasting beyond the critical service-learning experience.

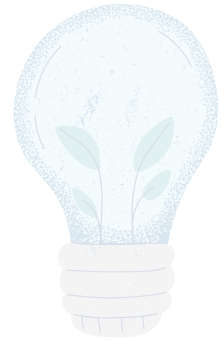
1 2 3 4

Collaborators recognize the impact of individual and community trauma on the relationships within the partnership and incorporate trauma-informed practices that promote healing, growth, and deepened connections.

Action Planning

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Equitable Classrooms & Cognitive Justice

The statements within this theme anchor service-learning in cognitive and epistemic justice: the recognition and active inclusion of numerous co-existing knowledge sources and systems (Stith et al, 2021).

Reflection

1 2 3 4

Conversation and critical reflection about race, class, and privilege are sustained throughout the experience and relationships.

1 2 3 4

Collaborators make deliberate choices about how environments for learning environments reflect power differentials and choose more participatory and egalitarian approaches (e.g., meeting circles, collaborative inquiry, shared leadership models).

1 2 3 4

Pedagogy is culturally responsive in that they welcome and explore their work together through one another's respective cultural heritages.

1 2 3 4

Facilitators model continual critical reflection on their own biases, their positionality (e.g., race, class, gender, ability, religion), and their worldviews and support all collaborators in doing the same.

1 2 3 4

Collaborators commit to continual development of their facilitation skills to guide discussions of oppression and bias and to redress problematic views (including their own) when expressed.

Reflection

1 2 3 4

Collaborators treat one another as co-educators who bring relevant experience and knowledge.

1 2 3 4

Facilitators ensure that sources from diverse identities and perspectives are represented and make clear that no one person represents the thoughts and experiences of an entire group of people.

1 2 3 4

Collaborators seek out and integrate multiple ways of knowing (e.g., utilizing an equitable combination of methods and information from multiple disciplines and knowledge systems including, for example, Indigenous knowledge and the co-production of knowledge).

1 2 3 4

Collaborators acknowledge and examine how knowledge creation is a political process in terms of:

- who and what sources are considered experts
- what questions are valued
- what truths are legitimized
- what values / value systems are endorsed (e.g., objectivity, scientific positivism, neoliberalism).

Action Planning

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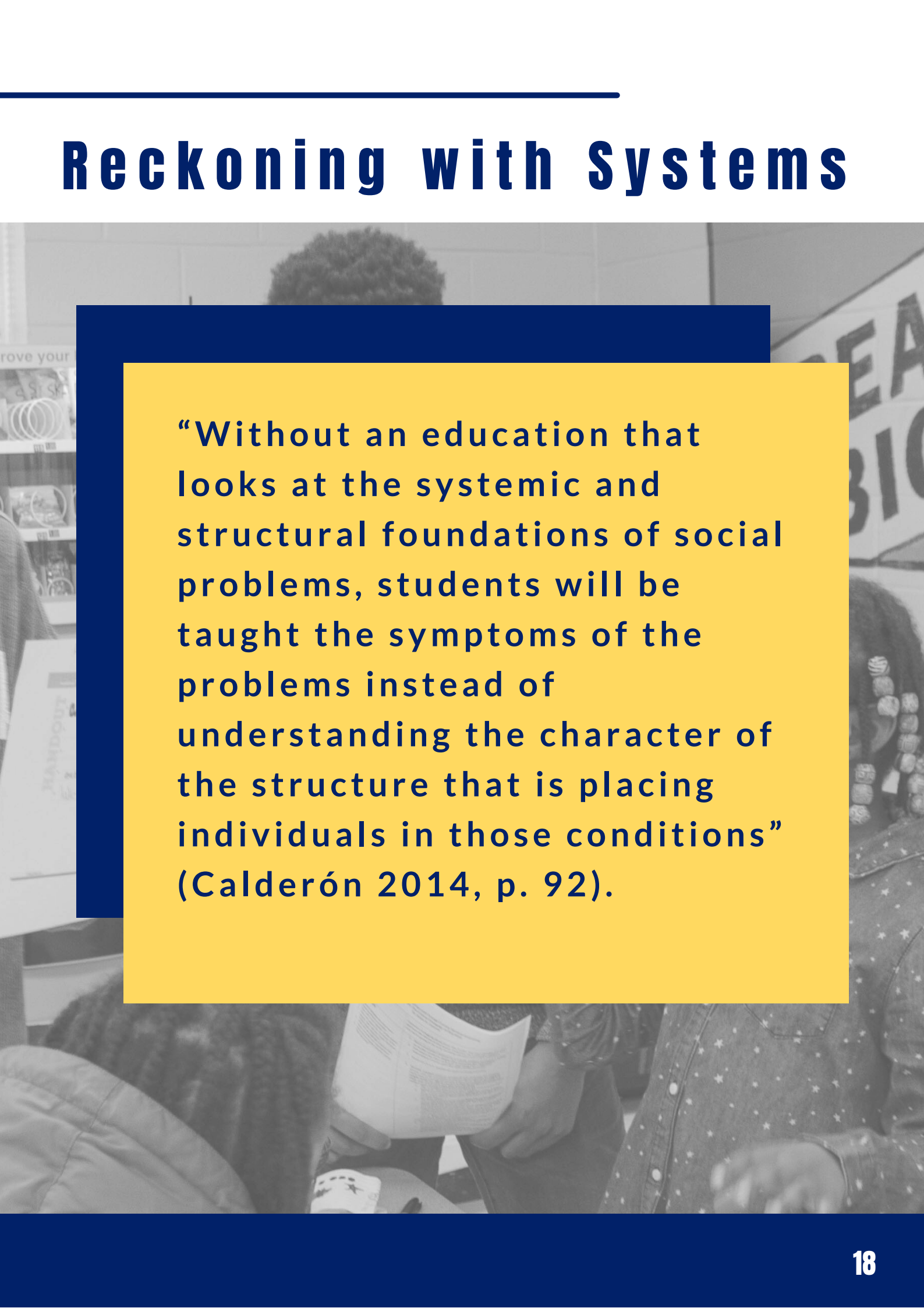


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Reckoning with Systems

The background of the slide is a grayscale photograph of a community event. On the left, there are shelves with various items, including what looks like a sign that says "improve your" and some circular objects. In the center, a person is holding a large white sign with text. On the right, a person is wearing a denim jacket with white stars and a beaded necklace. The overall scene suggests a public gathering or protest.

“Without an education that looks at the systemic and structural foundations of social problems, students will be taught the symptoms of the problems instead of understanding the character of the structure that is placing individuals in those conditions” (Calderón 2014, p. 92).

Reflection

1 2 3 4

Collaborators treat one another as co-educators who bring relevant experience and knowledge.

1 2 3 4

Collaborators acknowledge and examine how societal narratives and norms, institutional structures, policies, and routine practices systematically perpetuate inequities – rather than reducing inequities to the acts of individuals.

1 2 3 4

Collaborators acknowledge and try to minimize the ways in which their work together may be beneficial on one level (e.g., in the short term, for some individuals or organizations) but also perpetuate inequities and inequitable systems.

1 2 3 4

Collaborators examine who is and who should be responsible for ensuring that everyone has equitable life opportunities (e.g., non-profit organizations, government, for-profit sector, individuals, faith communities, organized collectives such as unions or activist communities).

1 2 3 4

Collaborators radically reimagine systems that are more equitable and just and consider tensions involved in moving toward those possibilities [e.g., abolition studies, restorative or transformative justice, futurity, prefigurative politics].

Reflection

1 2 3 4

Collaborators examine who is and who should be responsible for ensuring that everyone has equitable life opportunities (e.g., non-profit organizations, government, for-profit sector, individuals, faith communities, organized collectives such as unions or activist communities). Collaborators reflect critically on their own relationships with unjust systems, including ways in which:

- they participate in and are complicit in those systems
- the institutions they participate in sustain those systems
- their own beliefs, values, and behaviors are shaped by, reinforce, or challenge those systems
- they benefit from and are harmed by those systems
- they have personal stakes in dismantling those systems

1 2 3 4

Collaborators analyze how systems were deliberately built through processes of settler colonialism, patriarchy, racial capitalism, imperialism, militarism, etc. to advantage particular groups continue to advantage particular groups shape current inequities (e.g., in health, wealth, power, and opportunities). reinforce each other.

Action Planning

Enhance

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Social Change Skills



The statements within this theme encourage collaborators to develop critical ‘orientations’ (Mitchell, 2008) and to develop and utilize skills that address barriers to social, economic, and racial justice.

Reflection

1 2 3 4

Collaborators evaluate various approaches to social change (e.g., community-engaged learning and research, community organizing, activism, direct service, philanthropy, policy and governance, social entrepreneurship, and corporate social responsibility) in terms of their potential benefits as well as their potential to perpetuate systems of inequality.

1 2 3 4

Collaborators reflect critically on how their own talents, identities, and skills align with various approaches to social change.

1 2 3 4

Collaborators reflect critically on how their own talents, identities, and skills align with various approaches to social change. Collaborators reflect critically on how their work together informs their current and future lives (e.g., careers, civic lives, public policy positions, personal choices, responsibilities within communities, complicities in unjust systems).

1 2 3 4

Collaborators offer one another support and guidance on next steps in deepening their justice commitments and practices and also have access to other sources of support and guidance (e.g., campus offices, community member mentors).

Reflection

1 2 3 4

Rather than default to direct service as the focus of their work together, collaborators determine whether and how they can work to change unjust systems and policies; and if direct service is determined to be appropriate, collaborators examine its relationship to social change.

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Rather than default to direct service as the focus of their work together, collaborators determine whether and how they can work to change unjust systems and policies; and if direct service is determined to be appropriate, collaborators examine its relationship to social change. Collaborators build competency in social change skills and tools (e.g., coalition building, root cause analysis, public narratives, human rights frameworks). Collaborators analyze the complexities and risks of social change and movement building (e.g., performance activism, non-performativity, burnout, and movement capture).

Action Planning

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Redistribution of Power

This theme “names the differential access to power experienced by students, faculty, and community members, and encourages analysis, dialogue, and discussion of those power dynamics” (Mitchell, 2008, p. 56).

Reflection

1 2 3 4

Collaborators respect community assets and existing personal and social capital as resources central to their partnership.

1 2 3 4

Collaborators strive to establish a shared leadership model that extends beyond organization leaders and represents multiple community perspectives.

1 2 3 4

Collaborators co-create partnership content, syllabi, activities, roles and responsibilities, schedules, and indicators of success.

1 2 3 4

Collaborators negotiate the processes and desired outcomes of their partnership and (re)distribute power so that the planning, compensation, evaluation, recognition, and expertise are equitably shared.

1 2 3 4

Collaborators negotiate the processes and desired outcomes of their partnership and (re)distribute power so that the planning, compensation, evaluation, recognition, and expertise are equitably shared. Collaborators identify and examine how positionality (race, role, age, university affiliation, advanced degrees) shape and constrain collaboration and take steps to address those dynamics.

Reflection

1 2 3 4

Collaborators seek to balance and integrate the interests and roles of all stakeholders, with social change as the primary focus of the partnership.

1 2 3 4

Collaborators prioritize perspectives, questions, and leadership from those most marginalized and/or those most directly affected as they plan, undertake, and evaluate their work together.

1 2 3 4

The partnership endeavors to address the impact of structural oppression through:

- supporting skill development of community partners
- making material reparations whenever possible to support the community
- acknowledging the resources stolen through capitalism, genocide, colonialism, and slavery

1 2 3 4

Collaborators recognize the influence of the narratives that surround the issues they are working on and seek to create counter-narratives, change the narrative, or build narrative power that challenges oppressive assumptions, values, and practices.

Action Planning

Enhance

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References

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