Beyond Online Learning:
Towards a Community of Care Facing Death, Dying, and Loss
Virtual Coffeehouse Session 3

INDIANA UNIVERSITY
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TRANSCRIPTION

Tiffany Kyser: Good afternoon, again, and welcome to the Region III Midwest and Plains Equity Assistance Center Virtual Coffeehouse Series. As some of you know, and as some of you may not know, who may be new joining us today. This series is intended to provide a space to virtually land, as well as discuss our efforts to meet the needs of our respective school communities, particularly to students and families on the margins, in the face of abrupt changes in response to COVID-19.

As we work to pursue our consistent stance on realizing educational equity, we want to use this time as an opportunity to share what is going well, in addition to our struggles. And I would be remiss not to also center the current pain, and just a lot of anger, frustration, and sadness at the hands of unjust deaths that are occurring and the resistance that is happening, that is sweeping our country and nation. To be clear, the Region III Midwest and Plains Equity Assistance Center Communities of Care Virtual Coffeehouse, its intent is to center the perspectives of you all, of the participants. We encourage all of you to come together in this virtual space, share our experiences, and use dialogue and conversation, just as you would in your local coffeehouse.

Tiffany Kyser: We just want to keep that in mind. Session three of our Virtual Coffeehouse Series is focused on advancing our communities of care amongst each other, by sharing our stories, our approaches, and our lessons learned. This is not a didactic, instruction-based experience. This virtual engagement aims to acknowledge the need for us to come together in virtual community, to discuss common challenges, discover, and be encouraged by what we've learned collectively, as well as work to meet the demands of teaching and learning in the wake of what is happening in our current context in response to COVID-19.

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This is an opportunity for us to learn and dialogue together, to fellowship, and to provide collegial support. We ask and encourage you to be prepared to take notes to continue to our conversation and leverage our shared learning today. We also ask that, and Diana will get to this item briefly. You may be automatically muted if we hear sound, but Diana will go through that just briefly.

I want to welcome each of us on the call today and we want to acknowledge that nine state departments, 43 districts and schools, 23 education-based organizations, service centers, and foundations, 9 institutes of higher ed, representing 17 states and the District of Columbia, are set to join us today. So, welcome, everyone.

I also want to acknowledge myself and formally introduce myself and the rest of the team before we begin. My name is Tiffany Kyser and I am the Associate Director for Engagement and Partnerships with the Midwest and Plains Equity Assistance Center. Which I will refer to moving forward as the MAP Center. I have the privilege as serving as your host for today. Joined with me are Nickie Coomer, she is a Doctoral Research Assistant at the MAP Center who will serve as co-host. I'll allow Nickie to say hello.

Nickie Coomer: Hi everyone.

Tiffany Kyser: I am also joined by Diana Lazzell who's our Outreach and Engagement Coordinator. She'll serve as the technical director and chat moderator. Diana, I'll give you a chance to say hello to everyone.

Dianna Lazzell: Hello.

Tiffany Kyser: I also want to extend a welcome to Rosiline Floyd and Sophie Richardson, who are members of our team and are concurrently being the virtual teacher for our youth

Beyond Online Learning:
Towards a Community of Care Facing Death, Dying, and Loss
Virtual Coffeehouse Session 3

INDIANA UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
IUPUI

concurrent session. So, if you had any youth or children ages five to ten, they may be participating in that. So, I want to extend that welcome on behalf of Rosiline and Sophie. I also want to introduce, Seena Skelton, who is Director of Operations at the MAP Center. I'll give Seena an opportunity to say "hello."

Seena Skelton: Good afternoon, everyone. I'm so excited you all are here.

Tiffany Kyser: I also want to send my welcomes on behalf of Kathleen King Thorius, who is the Executive Director and Principal Investigator of the MAP Center and the Executive Director of Great Lakes Equity Center, as well. I'm thrilled to have three conversation starters who not only are our partners that either we've worked with longstanding, or they're new to the Center and folks that were referred to us by their expertise.

Their role is to support and provide their perspectives and their insights to break the "virtual ice" as we pepper in three reflective prompts throughout today's Virtual Coffeehouse session. And I'll provide each of them an opportunity to introduce themselves. Why don't we start first with Barry?

Barry Thomas: Well, good morning or good afternoon, depending on how close you are to the West Coast. Yeah, I'm Barry Thomas. I'm the Director of Equity and Diversity from Omaha Public Schools. My pronouns are he, him, his. And I am excited and grateful for the opportunity to be with everyone this afternoon or morning.

Tiffany Kyser: Thank you, Barry. And would you mind sharing where Omaha Public Schools in terms of state?

Barry Thomas: Oh, my apologies. Omaha Public Schools is in Omaha, Nebraska.

A PROJECT OF

Beyond Online Learning:
Towards a Community of Care Facing Death, Dying, and Loss
Virtual Coffeehouse Session 3

INDIANA UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
IUPUI

Tiffany Kyser: No problem at all. Thanks, Barry. And we'll move to Mykish and if I pronounced that incorrectly, please let me know.

Mykish Summers: No problem, Tiffany. Thank you. Good afternoon or morning, as Barry said to everyone. It is Mykish Summers.

Tiffany Kyser: Mykish.

Mykish Summers: Yes, I work, I am the Regional Director at St. Joseph Orphanage. And we are located, our direct campus is located in Cincinnati, Ohio. However, I run our region from our Dayton Campus, which covers Montgomery County.

Tiffany Kyser: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Mykish Summers: With St. Joseph's Orphanage, (I'm) in charge of our outpatient services, as well as I oversee some of our foster care services as well. [crosstalk 00:02:34].

Tiffany Kyser: Thank you Mykish. Pleasure to have you, and what state are you, are you representing today?

Mykish Summers: Sorry, I missed that part, Cincinnati, Ohio. (laughs).

Tiffany Kyser: Ohio. No problem. Thank you. Thank you so much for being here and then I'll turn it over to our last conversation starter, Lindsay.

Lindsay Bergman: Hi, I'm Lindsay Bergman. I am the Chief Clinical Officer at Resurge Recovery in Cincinnati, Ohio. It is a new endeavor, so we are a startup at this point. I previously actually worked with Mykish at St. Joseph Orphanage as a Regional Director over our school and community-based services for all of Cincinnati and Clermont County and Brown County.

A PROJECT OF

Beyond Online Learning:
Towards a Community of Care Facing Death, Dying, and Loss
Virtual Coffeehouse Session 3

INDIANA UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
IUPUI

Tiffany Kyser: Thank you, Lindsay. And, also from Ohio, just to make that clear for everyone. Mykish, Lindsay, Barry, thank you so much for joining us today. As we move forward, one of our goals at the MAP Center is to engage participants in a well-defined, content-rich technical assistance, such that knowledge and expertise are shared in a way that results in transformative systemic change, as well as professional reflection and growth.

To this end, we aim to make this unique learning available on our website via recording and transcription. Additionally, sharing photos of today's conversation on our social media platforms. We encourage participants to consider this disclaimer, as they share and engage today. I'll turn it over to Diana to give us a little bit of guidance on technology etiquette for today.

Diana Lazzell: This MAP Center Communities of Care Virtual Coffeehouse is intended to be interactive. Participants are to interact in real time via our teleconferencing format. To reduce noise, we ask that all participants mute their microphones when not speaking. We'll post additional resources to the chat bar. And the video camera function has been turned on; plus, if you have a webcam and you would like to join, please feel free to do so by clicking the camera icon at the lower right of your screen.

If you have a question or comment, please utilize the raise hand feature in Zoom. You may also say, "I have a question" in the chat bar. We will try to attend to most questions and comments, and we thank you for your patience in this process. When your question or comment has been addressed, please lower your hand in Zoom. Again, please don't forget to mute your microphone when not speaking.

Tiffany Kyser: Yeah, thanks Diana. And if we see that perhaps that you're not speaking and you're unmuted, we might go ahead and mute you. I know that's just as a

A PROJECT OF

courtesy, and you can certainly unmute yourself if you're sharing. Now I want to move into the conversation at hand and I'll turn it over to Nickie to kick us off with, I believe, the first question that we have for today.

Nickie Coomer: Great. Thank you, Tiffany. All right. So, our first question today is, what strategies would you encourage to push educators on to take authentic action with their own self, when preparing to teach students this fall? How would you support educators to critically question and challenge oppressive narratives that suggest that only historically marginalized groups require social, emotional, and mental health supports? Barry, do you want to go ahead and kick us off?

Barry Thomas: Absolutely. So, with the first question I'm just going to put a couple things on to, a couple of things on paper here. And, in regard to encouraging yourself how to push educators to take authentic action, it starts with the individual, so I would say gauge your own temperature. You're a human, you're living through these challenges, just like your students are, and be transparent about that, be as transparent as possible with your students about your experiences and question your own narrative and the narrative that you have, that you have come to understand about others.

And so really kind of centering in on bias and thinking about the biases that you hold, the biases that are being perpetuated throughout media, and really take some time to get a, to answer the question why or how? Specifically, those biases or those narratives that create and other and are based in assumptions.

Continuing on, I typed out just a couple more things here, establish new norms for students when they hear or encounter stimuli that is triggering, right? So, if you don't have procedure in your classroom for a student, when they are made

Beyond Online Learning:
Towards a Community of Care Facing Death, Dying, and Loss
Virtual Coffeehouse Session 3

INDIANA UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
IUPUI

uncomfortable by something that is being presented through content or in conversation. Well, how should students react, if they're feeling uncomfortable?

Give them language to use, or a way to physically take a break without punitive measures being put to them. From engagement, as the encounter becomes uncomfortable, or as you're in as you go into uncomfortable topics, create a space each day for some of your students to process and also make sure that space is not language dependent. So not just necessarily saying, "We're going to take some time to talk through things," or, "We're going to take some time to journal."

Barry Thomas: But also give them some, or even listening to language, but give them some other alternatives to how they might go about processing what they're going through. Maybe giving them some time to do some artwork or maybe giving them some Play-Doh to kind of just sculpt something. Or, you know, just think about different means and mechanisms that you might be able to use in your classroom, that's not always language dependent, for students to be able to help them process anxieties.

And lastly, for the first question, take a second to review your curriculum for triggers. A lot of students are dealing with anxieties that are coming from COVID-19 that, you know, a textbook or a story that you may have used in the past may have something that can be seen as insensitive in it that you might need to think about either leaving that or giving some kind of disclaimer before you go into it.

So, where kids understand we're going to be talking about something that deals with loss or something that deals with illness or a disease, or something that might prompt them to be thinking about COVID-19, that's not necessarily in the curriculum. So, think about how some of the things that you commonly would address with your kids or some curriculum that you commonly use might be able

A PROJECT OF

June 18, 2020-KH

Beyond Online Learning:
Towards a Community of Care Facing Death, Dying, and Loss
Virtual Coffeehouse Session 3

INDIANA UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
IUPUI

to, might be something that triggers your students and brings out something for them.

Relief comes in pursuing imaginative and creative expressions outside of the norm, right? So, think about how your students might be able to create a process to process that information a little bit more easily, if they are triggered by some of the different things that you go over in your curriculum. I have a lot here; specifically, I haven't even hit the second question yet, and I know we only have a certain amount of time, I think it's time for me to step back and maybe give somebody else a voice.

Tiffany Kyser: Any questions, follow-up questions for Barry or anything you want him to unpack?

Barry Thomas: And if not, I can, I can go into that second question a little bit.

Tiffany Kyser: Yeah, I think so, Barry. I'll just recap the first, I'll mirror back the first section, and then we can move to the second section, and then I'll defer back to Nickie. So, what I've heard Barry is, and let me know if I'm not mirroring correctly, is ensuring that curriculum is culturally responsive and sustaining.

That it's not static or fixed--that educators, broadly, not just classroom educators, but educators, are considering the contextual factors of what's happening in the wake of COVID-19, the exacerbation of already preexisting inequities and how the issue of death or dying or illness may present a different type of context in that school community. The second thing I heard was be authentic with self.

So, being really authentic and appropriately transparent with students in the classroom. Also, providing some consistent space for multiple modalities of expression is another thing that I heard. Is that correct, Barry?

A PROJECT OF

Barry Thomas: Yeah, that's correct. But there's a question in here, in the chat, about talking a little bit more about the language dependent piece and to sort of respond to that--a concern that I have when working on my school district, though we are Omaha, Nebraska--and a lot of people don't really think about it being as diverse. It is extremely racially and ethnically diverse, and we have a huge refugee and migrant population within our school district.

And then, outside of that, we also have a vast population of students who are English Learners. And so, when we try to get conversations going around anxiety or processing our feelings, or any types of social emotional learning, it can be a little bit more challenging when you have language dependent, or ways of communication, as opposed to figuring out other means of getting people to be able to express themselves.

And so, expression can be in a number of different ways--it could be in dance, expression can be in playing instruments. Expression can be a lot of things that are not specifically language dependent. And so that's what I mean when I say, "Don't necessarily be so language dependent in how you get kids to be able to reconcile or to be at a better understanding of their feelings. Think about other more creative and imaginative ways to help students to express themselves. And just to-

Tiffany Kyser: Okay.

Barry Thomas: Yeah, just real quick, to quickly jump on that second one. (Be)'cause I know we have other people that are going to be engaging in the conversation here. Just when it comes to SEL and the narratives (laughs) that are specific to historically marginalized groups, some low hanging fruit to consider. Specifically, to COVID-19, is unemployment and financial instability has impacted every group, all ethnicities,

Beyond Online Learning:
Towards a Community of Care Facing Death, Dying, and Loss
Virtual Coffeehouse Session 3

INDIANA UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
IUPUI

all races, marginalized, or centered populations--they are all dealing with economic anxiety because of unemployment.

And so that's something that can be definitely addressed as far as what SEL and changing that narrative about it just being something for marginalized students. But also thinking about family and friends from different backgrounds, from different places that are impacted. You know, we're more than likely at this point, where if not two degrees, maybe one degree, if not directly impacted by COVID-19, by having someone that we know personally or that we care and love for, having been impacted and so that's a great neutralizer in that regard.

Barry Thomas: And then, you know, just the anxiety of societal change, like having to wear a mask when you go to the grocery store or not being able to go to your grandparents' house, those are things that are reality that all students, regardless of if they're from a historically marginalized group or not, are dealing with. But I want to pull on this one point about SEL and SEL being something that could be more seen as more specific to marginalized people.

So, oftentimes, when we talk about SEL, we focus a lot on the EL, the emotional learning, but not the social learning. And the social learning is significant, too. If you take a look at social learning and what typically comes along with that is from, what I found is, we try to get kids to kind of assimilate into a certain culture. And that's culture by doing. That makes it so that kids only kind of focusing on living and speaking a certain way.

And it's with that centered culture, or the culture of privilege in our society, that kind of drives our norms and our morays and our understandings and our beliefs. But what SEL with the S in SEL allows us to do is to actually be more liberating. It allows us to take the oppression out of assimilation because we get to explore

A PROJECT OF

Beyond Online Learning:
Towards a Community of Care Facing Death, Dying, and Loss
Virtual Coffeehouse Session 3

INDIANA UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
IUPUI

how social learning can be utilized in a variety of cultural constructs that support development.

So, one thing that comes to mind is, in a lot of different cultures aligning yourselves in circles, as you sit, is an opportunity to actually kind of make everybody (equal), and is a different format of engaging or arranging your community. But in a lot of our classrooms and in our schools, the desks are set in rows. And, so just simply changing though the dynamic of rows to circles provides an opportunity to make it so it's not all the attention needs to be focused on one particular stimuli, like everybody's looking at the teacher.

Barry Thomas: But if you put everyone in a circle, it gives everyone and the opportunity to feel like they're all supposed to be engaging. And that's something that we could do different in society that mirrors Native American culture or Native Indigenous people, and also mirrors Eastern civilizations of Eastern cultures that have a more traditional outlook as far as with sitting in circles.

And that's opening people's minds up--not just the marginalized students--but the centered groups, to get an understanding of how just that one simple change can also create change in society by being more open to posturing yourselves differently to where you're not seen as authorities or less-thans, but seeing everyone on an equal and common play.

Barry Thomas: So that's just one thing that came to mind when I was thinking about, "How do we get it so that SEL is not something that's just for marginalized people?" But also approaching SEL with, through the ideas of thinking (laughs), there's this Toni Morrison quote that, that she referred (to). I'll paraphrase: it's, "If you have, if I have to get on my knees in order for you to feel taller, then you have the problem."

A PROJECT OF

And I think a lot with what transpires in our society with marginalized people being put to feel less than, gives a false sense of superiority to those that are in the center. And that false sense of superiority creates psychological impacts that manifest through chauvinism, through inferiority complex, through narcissism, and all these other pathologies. And so, if we take a moment to get our students a clear understanding about the challenges that come with, or the challenges that come with oppressed folks, and how it not only hurts those individuals who are marginalized, but it actually hurts the individuals who are doing the oppressing. I think that's a real conversation that we definitely need to have about those impacts on people that are seen in a privileged or superior role in our society and how that then makes them feel differently, psychologically, and warps the reality for a lot of those people. I've gone way too long at this point.

Nickie Coomer: No, thank you, Barry. Thank you so much for sharing. That is great. So there have been a couple of follow-up questions in the chat, I think, are going to relate actually to our next question. So, I'll go ahead and present the next question, which is, how do we as educators and professionals serving, excuse me, as educators and professionals serving educators, support students and families who have experienced loss and are grieving losses due to inequity and unjust policies?

How do we support educators and doing this without pathologizing students and families in a deficit view? And so, Lindsay, do you want to go ahead and start us off with this question?

Lindsay Bergman: Yeah, so, I think we really need to look at our schools and our districts as more of a global community. We really need to focus on community wellness as a whole rather than pathologizing. So, as Barry said, "We've all had an influx of trauma." So, we really plenty need our Superintendents kind of having that 30,000-foot view of the district's wellness, which would include both the faculty and students.

June 18, 2020-KH

Beyond Online Learning:
Towards a Community of Care Facing Death, Dying, and Loss
Virtual Coffeehouse Session 3

INDIANA UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
IUPUI

Then you have your Principals having that 20,000-foot view of their individual school's wellness while the teachers need that 10,000-foot view of the wellness of their classrooms. Barry gave a lot of wonderful examples of how they can incorporate that into their classroom, and looking at the community as a whole, and trying to work through that with really great solid interventions. Barry, thank you for those.

We really need to understand the trauma that's related to the systemic injustice so that we can frame students' individual experiences within a relationally defined wellness. So, we really need to be able to look at communities broadly and consider the places where school leaders can just adjust policies, to be more equitable, and it's going to be extremely important.

Nickie Coomer: Thank you, Lindsay. I'll go ahead and open it up to the group. Does anybody have any questions or comments as a follow-up to what Lindsay was talking about there in terms of considering not just students' individual experiences, but the experiences as they're situated within classrooms in school communities? And what it means in terms of thinking about wellness, relationally, or thinking about wellness as a community?

Ginny Winners: Hi, I'd like to give a brief comment. This is Ginny Winners.

Nickie Coomer: Hey, Ginny.

Ginny Winners: Can you hear me?

Nickie Coomer: Yes.

Ginny Winners: Oh, okay. So, one of the pieces that I think is really important is, as I work with-- I'm a consultant at a Regional Educational Service Agency. And what I am finding,

A PROJECT OF EQUITY CENTER

Beyond Online Learning:
Towards a Community of Care Facing Death, Dying, and Loss
Virtual Coffeehouse Session 3

and we work with 32 districts, so as schools are preparing to try to begin some sort of re-entry, whether it would be hybrid or two days off, two days on, I think one of the hard parts is that, traditionally in schools, teachers are uncomfortable and many times staff are uncomfortable to really talk about the social injustices that people have labored under and struggled under.

And, so, therefore, I think one of the ways in which we can help our professional educators and the students is to try to normalize and begin to open up conversations about those things. For example, the lived experiences and the protests that are going all over the country right now--we can't ignore those things. We have to create a safe space for kids to have an opportunity to talk about and interface with it, because I guarantee you they're feeling it, their parents are feeling it, if they're in communities that are stressed by that anxiety, as well.

And so, I wonder if we begin to have some courageous--it's hard--courageous conversations about it and appropriate, of course, for the grade level that you're teaching. But open that up so that students don't feel that they can't bring that with them to school or into the school learning experience. To give you an example at our agency right now, many people are struggling with some of the social injustices that have occurred and are afraid to talk about it.

You know, I find that just intriguing because what it does is it adds another layer of anxiety and another layer of angst and keeps us from really moving towards wellness because we're afraid to bring up the tough issues. So, if anyone has any insights about that, I would be greatly appreciative.

Tiffany Kyser: Thank you, Ginny, for that share. And as folks are gathering their notes and their reactions to Ginny's comment, and also Lindsay's, I just want to mirror back this

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14 | P a g e   June 18, 2020-KH

Beyond Online Learning:
Towards a Community of Care Facing Death, Dying, and Loss
Virtual Coffeehouse Session 3

INDIANA UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
IUPUI

idea of, you used the term, Ginny, "normalizing conversations, courageous conversations." Barry used the term "liberatory conversations." Lindsay used the term "equitable conversations" around what is happening. Centering the lived experiences of how people are responding to and interpreting what is happening and understanding why, from their perspective, that's happening, pushing relational.

So how do we engage not only relational, but dialogical? How do we engage in dialogue in ways that practice us in that normalized, normalizing of the conversation of how do we engage in conversation that's hard and how do we engage in conversation that centers injustice? So those are two kind of big takeaways that I received from you, Ginny, and, off the heels of Lindsay's comments, so thank you.

Nickie Coomer: Thank you, Tiffany. Sarah Dennis has her hand raised.

Tiffany Kyser: Sarah, please.

Sarah Dennis: Yeah, no, Ginny, thank you so much. I think what it made me think about was the overwhelming predominance of white teachers in the United States still, and the white fragility concept that Robin DiAngelo writes about. And it goes back to something Mr. Thomas said about the unfortunate and internalized superiority that some white people, most white people, get from systemic historic injustices. And, I think having conversations with white teachers and white principals and I think we have to name it.

And I think we need white collaborators and co-conspirators to have those conversations in community with People of Color. I think some white teachers will get their backs up. I mean, they'll just, they'll feel attacked and they feel defensive

A PROJECT OF

June 18, 2020-KH

Beyond Online Learning:
Towards a Community of Care Facing Death, Dying, and Loss
Virtual Coffeehouse Session 3

INDIANA UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
IUPUI

and very fragile. I read Robin DeAngelo's first book. It's called, *What Does It Mean to Be White?* Which I actually liked a little bit better initially, when she talks about white racial illiteracy.

And when Mr. Thomas was speaking, I was like, "That's a perfect example of somebody, Person of Color, with like a calculus degree and white people have like an elementary school education degree in racism, because a lot of people haven't experienced. So, unless they've read and watched documentaries and talked to people, they don't know.

And so, finding those collaborations with white, anti-racist, you know, people striving to do anti-racism work, myself included, and doing it in collaboration and solidarity, white and People of Color. I think there's not a lot of opportunity there, but we have to be realistic about the white fragility and name it and normalize it for the social emotional for the teachers that it's okay that you were not, I mean, it's not your fault that you were never taught this in school.

The system doesn't want us to know: that's the divide and conquer, and that's how it's been successful so long as it's kept us separate and it's actually kept white people incredibly ignorant about racism.

Tiffany Kyser: Thank you for your comments there. I'll defer to Nickie because we have a couple of hands (laughs) that just fired up and with those comments. But I'll just make the connection that I think, Sarah, your comment around this idea of when we, due to Ginny's encouragement, center and normalize and have tough conversations about oppressive conditions such as racism, sexism, classism, xenophobia, homophobia, linguicism, etc.

A PROJECT OF EQUITY CENTER

To Lindsay's point, framing it within the construct of, I think Lindsay's, the term of a "global community," and she kicked off her comments and Lindsay, I'll turn it back over to you if I'm misrepresenting your comments of leadership and Superintendent and understanding each role within that system.

Sarah Dennis: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Tiffany Kyser: And what you're talking about, Sarah, is, sort of, I think some kind of move, as I interpret as an Educator of Color of this sort of, and Dr. Di'Angelo talks about this too, this sort of amnesia, this naivety. And I would push back slightly and say that folks that have benefited from white skin privilege may not be as aware of racism, but are deeply aware of racism and their benefit of racism, and have a decision on whether or not they're going to engage in that and disrupt that.

Or if they're going to choose adamant support or neutrality and perceive neutrality as not having a choice or not making a choice, I should say. And so, I think this idea of what is your school community, what are your non-negotiables as a school community? Are you a school community that's going to be complicit in harming students and not allowing students to have a voice and not allowing a level of wellness for all? Because if some students are well and some students aren't, well, your school community is not well. Nickie, I'll, I'll turn it back to you.

Nickie Coomer: Great, thank you for that framing, Tiffany. Um, Ginny your hand is up.

Ginny Winners: Yes, it's interesting because I really think he really clarified, really the experience in one of the things that I've been doing and having groups. We have a social justice seed program, equity program that we, dialogues that we have every--all during the year. And so, we had our last session, last week and I asked, I tried to frame it, so that people would feel safe and that we would have an opportunity,

June 18, 2020-KH

too. And I love that a term that globe, the wellness of the global community. I love that.

So, I asked them two questions. I prepared in this way, I said to them to both groups, "What do you feel, do you feel, and think as you hear your colleagues of Color share their lived experience of pain, passion, and pathos? And what decisions might you be making on whether you will participate or in disengage while you're listening to it?" I asked them to just be conscious of what they were experiencing.

And for some reason that helped people have the permission to really engage. And they really engaged in a courageous conversation about social injustice. And we were able to benefit, the whole group, was able to benefit because they've heard it from different racial perspectives. So that was one thing I try to do to normalize it, so we could have that conversation. Because of the extent to which we don't talk about is the extent to which we are crippled.

Tiffany Kyser: I will. Thank you, Ginny, for that. And just, as we're thinking about, this idea of perhaps being unable, so just extending and kind of reframing, the term "crippled" to this idea of how we may recognize and push ourselves to recognize perhaps areas or capacities that we're lacking and committing to grow because we don't want to unintentionally situate through language or conflate ability with physical ways that we kind of engage and move in this world.

But I really appreciate your comments, Ginny. Any other final questions for Lindsay? Or Lindsay, do you want to build on anything that's been shared or clarify anything that has been shared or any responses to your opening, to the question before we move forward?

June 18, 2020-KH

Lindsay Bergman: I think they all had very good comments. I think he did a really good job of explaining the fact of what I really liked what you said Tiffany was, "If some of your students are well and some of your students are unwell, your community is not well; therefore, your whole community is unwell."

Tiffany Kyser: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Lindsay Bergman: So really taking the time to look at it globally and making sure that we're all considering just because most are well, there's still some that need help to get through this and we can all work together to do that and to help those that are unwell. So, I really liked how you kind of made that comment and tied it together, so thank you.

Tiffany Kyser: Thanks, Lindsay. And just for clarity, and then we'll move to our last prompt. This idea, what I'm encouraging is, and this is another discussion about what is well in the construction and the normalization of wellness. But this, I, what I'm trying to sort of offer, is reframing the gaze, who do we traditionally, to the second sub-question, who do we traditionally pathologize as needing help that we need to "save," that is not well, and who do we not?

And in this space really reframing, if we think about, as Barry said, "The social component of social emotional learning." If we think about who is complicit in systemic oppressions, it helps provide, hopefully, some new insights and the different ways we need to look at curriculum, we need to look at colleagues, we need to look at conversations, we need to look at the various tools that we use to negotiate teaching and learning.

And, so, if my school community and the leadership in my school community are okay with the system that it's leading, harming students and family, and being

June 18, 2020-KH

Beyond Online Learning:
Towards a Community of Care Facing Death, Dying, and Loss
Virtual Coffeehouse Session 3

INDIANA UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
IUPUI

complicit and perpetuating policies and practices that continue to harm and continue to result in disproportional outcomes that harm students and families. I don't know if that is a well decision, I don't know if that decision is centering wellness.

So, when I'm talking about troubling and reframing wellness, encouraging us to think about what is the unit of analysis or what are we gazing at, or in a, when we're reflecting on supporting social emotional health and wellness or mental health and our school communities, who are we thinking about? And is that in itself problematic? How do we shift?

How do we shift the way that we think about, and our roles and our many identities, both personally and professionally, to those that are leading systems that continue to re-harm and re-wound every second of every minute of every hour of every day.

Ginny Winners: Mm-hmm (affirmative), mm-hmm (affirmative), that's good.

Tiffany Kyser: Our last prompt is, as school systems are preparing to support, as school systems are preparing to support students dealing with deaths associated with COVID-19-related illnesses and or loss of loved ones, violence, or removal of family members from the home because of disproportional incarceration, what approaches would you recommend to ensure school leaders are planning from a strength-based approach to promote social emotional wellness, versus planning from a deficit perspective to treat, to fix, or to "save" students and families? And Mykish, I think that you're going to kick us off with this reflective prompt.

Mykish Summers: I am. It's interesting. (laughs) Part of the recommendation, I should start off with just saying ditto to almost everything everyone said in regards to that. But I think

Beyond Online Learning:
Towards a Community of Care Facing Death, Dying, and Loss
Virtual Coffeehouse Session 3

INDIANA UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
IUPUI

in talking about recommending--the recommendations for school leaders, first and foremost--it starts with having school leaders be aware of what it is and what kind of approach they have right now.

Somehow, we just talked about a system that, if you have a school system where some are well, and some are not well, but you're kind of negating the not well part. And you're like, "My school overall is fine." Then you're not really aware of where you're starting from. So, even how Sarah talked about having that hard conversation. Listen and say, "Now, what is the approach that we typically use in our school? What does that look like? And is it, does it have any kind of strengths at all? And any kind of effectiveness and being very mindful of that." And then, working then, working back from there on the reframe of what's happening.

Mykish Summers: One of the things that I thought about what we do, I do a trauma-informed care training, and we talk very often about how we do things to people and not with people, and not partnering with them. So even as we look at a strength-based approach, part of that starts by asking those who you deem needs help, or even just your school as a whole, what will be helpful? Death in this regard or a loss in this regard, in the COVID-19 world, touch each and every one of us, in some regard, even if it wasn't a death, a physical death, it could have been just the loss of that social piece for being in school, the loss of friends, not having those interactions.

Mykish Summers: So being very, very mindful of everything that can be considered a loss and everything that can be considered a trigger and those things, and being, backing back up there, from those strengths and utilizing resources of the parents and the other teachers and things like that, in regards to say, "Okay. What's best practice here? What's being used? What's effective? And not things that we just think is effective, because we did that with them. It's things that we've got feedback to

A PROJECT OF

June 18, 2020-KH

Beyond Online Learning:
Towards a Community of Care Facing Death, Dying, and Loss
Virtual Coffeehouse Session 3

INDIANA UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
IUPUI

say, "Hey, that was really helpful for me. That was something that helped. It would actually help if you would do this."

Listening to the parents and those things, they're going to tell us what you need. They're going to tell the school leaders what they need in order for, a lot of times, those things to be effective. And then having an open up enough mind to say, "Hey, let's implement this as a whole, because we want our whole school to be well, so let's implement this." And not having that place of where you're like, "Oh, I'm bound to these kinds of laws or these kinds of things." If you want to change a system within your school, you have the power to do that, and empowering those school leaders with that as well.

Tiffany Kyser: Mm-hmm (affirmative), any questions or follow-ups? Thank you for that wonderful response.

Seena Skelton: All right, Tiffany.

Tiffany Kyser: Yep, go ahead.

Seena Skelton: Yeah, I want to follow up and just ditto what Mykish just stated. And, Lindsay and Barry, just wonderful points. And I want to support us and encourage us to think about, and it's just really connected to what you just shared as well, Tiffany, to think about characterizing wellness in terms of wellness of the system, as opposed to wellness of individuals.

And really be honest or authentic, if a young person is dealing with loss and all the different myriad ways that we've all experienced loss, but also in very specific ways. So Mykish talked about this notion of loss not only due to dying or death or illness, but also loss due to that social interaction that we're used to engaging in

A PROJECT OF

because of social isolation. What, you know, that they, their healthy expression of that manifests itself in various different ways, right?

So, the manifestation of dealing with loss, it is healthy to manifest and to express loss. And so, we also know that we all express emotions in different ways. One of the things that we do often in schools that traumatize children is we punish them for their expression of healthy emotion, right? We somehow pathologize our students, our young people, for expressing their emotion as if they ought to be emotionless, right. If they're not supposed to manifest them express a sense of loss.

That loss manifests itself in sadness; sadness is demonstrated through a variety of ways. So, the healthiness or wellness of our system is determined by the extent to which we are able to create the conditions that lovingly support our students as they demonstrate the emotions--the real authentic, healthy emotions--that they're experiencing, rather than labeling them or punishing them. And if their emotions manifest itself in anger, when people experience loss, they get angry, right?

Tiffany Kyser: Mm-hmm (affirmative), mm-hmm (affirmative).

Seena Skelton: Like that is a healthy expression and demonstration of loss.

Tiffany Kyser: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Seena Skelton: So, what are we prepared to do as educators? And creating our system that if our young people demonstrate anger in a particular way, rather than the automatic response is a punitive response or reactionary response, or to characterize the behavior as oppositional, as defiant, as bad, or all the other ways we can characterize behavior that we may consider disruptive in our classrooms.

How do we characterize those behaviors as these are healthy responses to feeling loss, these are healthy responses? So how do we then create the conditions that our system can embrace our young people when they're feeling this way, when they're demonstrating their emotions in this way--in a way that's loving, in a way they're supportive, in a way that really wraps our arms and hearts around them, as opposed to characterizing the behaviors as misbehavior and thereby responding in a punitive and negative way.

When we only have those ways of responding to behaviors that we may consider disruptive, that is an indicator of it, an unwell system or an unhealthy system. So, as we think about this notion of wellness, let's think about it in terms of wellness of our system to support very typical, healthy responses, to the feeling of loss, to the feeling of grief, right, to the feeling of mourning. So, I just wanted to sort of frame that and put that out there as we sort of wrap up our discussion.

Tiffany Kyser: Thank you, Seena. Mykish, any responses or further unpacking?

Mykish Summers: I do, one of the things that Seena said that hit the nail on the head with me, and when we talk about trauma and we talk about those things, and one of the things we quickly like to say about kids all the time is, "They're not self-regulated, they not, they're out of control. Their emotions are crazy." However, as an adult, I just tend to function a little better, right?

And you may not see me screaming out loud, but I'm screaming in my head, and we haven't taught them those things. And then, instantly, now kid is defiant and oppositional, and now we want to treat them, and we want to get them treated. We want to send them to a next step, or they get punished for that, so then it becomes this continuous thing over and over again. We talk about very often I'll talk about the reframing of that, right?

A PROJECT OF

Beyond Online Learning:
Towards a Community of Care Facing Death, Dying, and Loss
Virtual Coffeehouse Session 3

INDIANA UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
IUPUI

Mykish Summers: A kid that is bossy could be a good director or a leader, right? But if I continue to look at that kid as bossy, then that's what I see. That's all I see, it goes there and that's how I, that's the interventions that happen, and there's nothing strength-based about that, because we have decided that being bossy is a negative and those things. And then we push all that off and then it continues to go to the next step and the next step with those things.

So, like you said, as looking at that, the wellness instead of the individual as a whole. How does a whole school approach that? And as more mindful, in a whole school is being challenged to have a reframe constantly, that I'm even challenging you when you make a comment, "Hey, remember what constraints could be pulled out of that." So now there's some accountability as well to work towards that wholeness.

Group: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Barry Thomas: And if I could, if I could jump in with that, on that as well, if it's okay.

Mykish Summers: Please.

Barry Thomas: The idea of responding with anger when dealing with loss, there was a part in my initial response that I had, I kind of cut out because I was worried about being, about timeliness, but how centered students might be dealing with SEL and, and taking that stigma off of it being for marginalized populations. There are some adults that do not know how to handle loss appropriately.

And I have to smile because I keep--I'm reminded constantly of the initial protests that have been taking place. Society, where there were people armed, going into state capitals because of their freedoms being restricted and regulated by the government. And those individuals were hot, they were angry, they were visceral,

A PROJECT OF

June 18, 2020-KH

Beyond Online Learning:
Towards a Community of Care Facing Death, Dying, and Loss
Virtual Coffeehouse Session 3

INDIANA UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
IUPUI

and they responded to the loss of their perceived freedoms in a very, very strong way.

Barry Thomas: And a number of those individuals, I could see potentially having roles in schools or being parents of our students. And as our students are looking at the world's reactions to loss. Okay. That is what we need to also think about too. My daughters are on their social media daily seeing protests and people being angry. Not just now, but Charlottesville and further and further back.

And so, we need to also think about how our students are reacting are learned behaviors specifically in today's social context. And today's social context is pouring nothing but a ton of negative examples, of what we perceive as negative examples, of how to react to loss. And I think it's a great conversation to have about the differences of loss of freedom for some, whereas, like your body is being restricted, right? So, I can't go get my hair done. I can't go get my fingernails clipped and that's a freedom lost.

But for so many marginalized people and populations, I can't want this. I can't go to the other side of town or I have to have my hands, in my voice, a certain way, if I'm interacting with the police, that's my body, that's my body being restricted and regulated by social norms and customs. And so, there's some connection points that I think we can make with people who are feeling a loss of freedom here.

Now having something to compare with the constant loss of freedom of marginalized people to have a better conversation about how do we work towards a means to where everyone can kind of see there's some commonality in all of our, as we talked about, global experiences.

A PROJECT OF

Tiffany Kyser: Thank you, Barry. Ginny has her hand raised, so I want to go to Ginny and then pivot back to Nickie for any other questions before we move to wrap up. Ginny.

Ginny Winners: Actually, I was, I think that was early. I was just trying to, when we talked about the idea of the system not being ready to really handle or mitigate or support students with regular expressions of grief. I, as Superintendents come together, I just wondered if there are some places where I could get some examples that I could share with people, 'cause sometimes people don't recognize that's happening.

Tiffany Kyser: Could you mind re-asking the question, I want to make sure that I'm clear on your request to the group?

Ginny Winners: So, are there examples? Early on someone said, oh, where was it? "Well, what are some of the things that might demonstrate that a deficit perspective to treat or fix, 'save' students, families looks like and sounds like from that higher view with the Superintendents?" 'Cause I, I find that oftentimes, it's business as usual for them, so they don't really realize that they're approaching it that way.

Tiffany Kyser: Okay. I see, I replied and I replied in the chat, but I opened this up to anyone. So, my thoughts are shared with Ginny in the chat. Does anyone have any, sort of non-examples or ways in which perhaps the school community falls into the trap of, um, perceiving particular students and families with deficit views through either policies or practices?

Ginny Winners: Oh, okay. I see it.

Tiffany Kyser: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ginny Winners: Thank you.

A PROJECT OF

June 18, 2020-KH

INDIANA UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
IUPUI

Tiffany Kyser: You're welcome. Mykish.

Seena Skelton: Tiffany, I have some-

Tiffany Kyser: Go ahead.

Seena Skelton: Right. I mean, there are many, many examples where our education leaders' sort of operate from a deficit perspective, even if it's unintended. But some very specific ways in which Superintendents, district leaders, and school boards can begin to think about their system differently in terms of pointing the wellness of their system and that's the resource allocation, right?

So, you have a budget as a school board, you have a certain amount of funds that you have to make decisions about how you're going to allocate those funds, to think about allocating funds in ways that support students, right? To provide resources for supporting not only students and families, but also the educators in terms of the capacity to address the myriad of emotions that we're all experiencing and will no doubt continue to experience as school districts plan to be open for reentry.

To think about it from a deficit, from my perspective, a deficit approach would be, "We're going to have children with a lot of behavior problems, we need to allocate more money for school resource officers for alternative to suspension, expulsion settings." To like those kinds of solutions, right?

Tiffany Kyser: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Seena Skelton: That really will most likely exacerbate the removal of students from school and from learning.

A PROJECT OF

June 18, 2020-KH

Seena Skelton: This is speaking about policies that would say, "We had X amount of funds. We're going to allocate funds to increasing our number of school counselors in our school district, the number of school social workers, to our school psychologist, to providing more times so that educators can have more planning time, they can collaborate with one another.

Tiffany Kyser: Okay.

Seena Skelton: To think about how we're organizing our school day. If we're thinking about a hybrid in terms of in person or virtual, how are we making sure that we're creating time and space for educators to come together and to meet and to collaborate together, to collaboratively problem solve about the various challenges that they might be experiencing and making sure that they're connecting with families and children. And so, you know, those are policy decisions, right, that are made at the school board level.

Tiffany Kyser: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Seena Skelton: Those are leadership decisions that are made at the district level. And so those are examples that would indicate, for me, a shifting from a deficit approach of, we must control and manage students' bodies versus a strength-based wellness system approach that we must use our resource to create conditions and allocate and create conditions, so that all of us within our school communities are supported.

Ginny Winners: Thank you so much.

Nickie Coomer: Thank you, Seena. We're just about at time.

Nickie Coomer: Hello, hello? You have something that you'd like to add?

June 18, 2020-KH

Beyond Online Learning:
Towards a Community of Care Facing Death, Dying, and Loss
Virtual Coffeehouse Session 3

INDIANA UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
IUPUI

Nope, okay. I'm going to go ahead and move on. All right. I'm going to go ahead and move on to our close. And I'm so sorry, this conversation has been really, honestly the word that's coming to my mind is "thick." So, I appreciate the opportunity to be a part of it and I thank all of our conversation starters and participants. And before we go, I do want to point out some of our resources.

So please don't forget to stop by our website for an array of resources and supports related to COVID-19 and be sure to join our Flipgrid, our COVID-19 resource page. And, also as a part of the session, you will have a customized, password protected, Virtual Coffeehouse Series E-forum. And this is where we'll be sharing resources and responses related to trending issues of equity in education.

So also, a special thanks to our design team here. And that is it. So, thank you so much for joining. I always have my, I try to get like fancy mugs for this part, but I just want to do a "cheers," and say, thank you again for joining us. We've had three Virtual Coffeehouses scheduled throughout the summer and we're covering, we've covered, an array of topics and I believe we have one more scheduled for August. That is it and I will go ahead and close this out.

Tiffany Kyser: Diana, do you want to guide us and give us a brief picture before you give us the rest of our instructions?

Diana Lazzell: Yeah, so thank you all for attending today's session. I ask that you please follow us on social media at Great Lakes Equity Center on Facebook and @GreatLakesEAC on Twitter. Participate in a discussion directly after this event by answering the question, how are you going to use what you learned here today? I ask that you

A PROJECT OF

June 18, 2020-KH

Beyond Online Learning:
Towards a Community of Care Facing Death, Dying, and Loss
Virtual Coffeehouse Session 3

INDIANA UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
IUPUI

now prepare yourselves for a group shot that will be shared on social media. Are you ready? All right. Three, two, one. Thank you.

Tiffany Kyser: We also, before you log off, would ask as an organization of continuous improvement. We want to know how you felt about today's Virtual Coffeehouse session, we would ask that you take about five to seven minutes, if you have the time to complete our post-session questionnaire. Diana will be providing a link in the chat. It's a link that is also on the customized E-forum for the Virtual Coffeehouse as well.

So again, we deeply appreciate your feedback and if you have the additional five to seven minutes to complete the post-session questionnaire, we greatly appreciate it. In closing, to echo Nickie and Diana's sentiments, we deeply appreciate you taking the time to attend, to share, to educate, and hopefully you feel renewed or moving towards a spirit of renewal of affirmation and a sense of community during this time in our nation's history, and on our own respective trajectories as professionals to prepare as best we can as education leaders to support students and families in our context.

I also want to give a special thanks to our conversation starters, who led us with their expertise to use throughout today, and a deep appreciation for those that were engaged, either in chat, but also, I was scanning and everyone appeared to me to be very deeply reflective and involved. And so, really I'm very appreciative and grateful for your attention. And with that, we'll move to close, have a good rest of your day, stay safe, and hopefully we'll see you at our final Virtual Coffeehouse this fall. Thank you.

A PROJECT OF