“Us” and “Not Us”
“Othering” in Education Policy and Practice

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How many of you are involved in education, and in what ways?

- Students;
- K-12 Teachers;
- K-12 Administrators;
- Higher Education faculty or administration;
- Policy makers;
- Partners/collaborators;
- Parents;
- Additional connections?
A Note on Terminology

• “African American” and “black”
• “Latino”
• “First Nations People”
• “Asian”
• “White”

• Will these terms cause undue discomfort today?
West Wind Education Policy Inc.

• Consulting company organized to help state leaders imagine and enact a system of education that overcomes historic and persistent inequities and engages each and every student in learning
Theoretical Framework

• Ours is primarily a political analysis
  – Power
  – Authority
  – Policy

• Our framework for Systemic Equity Leadership includes Critical Race Theory, Learning Organizations, and Adaptive Leadership
Mental Models (Senge, et al)

- The way we reflect on, clarify, and improve our internal pictures of the world, and to see how they shape our actions.
- We ask, what about our thinking allows the situation to persist?
- The tools of othering helps define mental models.
What do we mean by “othering”?

- Term “othering” coined by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, an Indian literary critic/theorist as Post-Colonial critique.

- Othering is “a process by which the empire can define itself against those it colonizes, excludes and marginalizes. [...] The business of creating the enemy…in order that the empire might define itself by its geographical and racial others.”

What do we mean by “othering”? 

- In the context of race in the U.S., othering operates to exclude and marginalize people who are not white.
- Whiteness is the norm through which individuals determine who is “us” and who is “not us”.
- Othering is a way to enact racism.
- Justifies existing power inequalities in a democracy.
Common Stories Used to “Other”

- Intellectually inferior
- Dangerous
- Primitive
- Hypersexual and asexual

... i.e., Different, Deviant, Deficient, Abnormal, Unworthy
Othering in U.S. History

Images of First Nations People that depict them as

– Primitive and
– dangerous

“justified” their oppression and the violence white European colonists (colonizers) perpetrated against them.
Othering of First Nations People

Source: Che Butler & Luhui Whitebear, 2006
• Africans and African Americans are portrayed as primitive, sub-human, un-evolved, and intellectually inferior

• The image of the gorilla, monkey, ape, or chimpanzee serves to “other” African Americans toward this end
Civilized versus primitive


Dangerous (WWI)
Evolved versus ape-like

Historical?

• These images and stories are alive and well today
Othering of First Nations People

Source: Che Butler & Luhui Whitebear, 2006
Fall 2006 at Dartmouth

- This was the cover of the Dartmouth Review.

- [www.cnn.com](http://www.cnn.com) 11/30/06

Source: Che Butler & Luhui Whitebear, 2006
Natives are people not mascots

The New York Post has headlines such as “Tribe on Warpath” and “Take the Tribe and Scalp ‘Em” when the NY Yankees play the Cleveland Indians.

Where is the honor?

Source: Che Butler & Luhui Whitebear, 2006
Mascot at a Game

Source: Che Butler & Luhui Whitebear, 2006
Would Oregon allow this at a game?

• Students to wear afro wigs and black face?
• Perform half time shows as priests or nuns?
• Play gongs and slant their eyes with their fingers?
• Wave toy crucifixes every time the team scores?
• Yell “Kill the Mexicans!”
• How is this different than the way Native people are ridiculed at games now?

Source: Che Butler & Luhui Whitebear, 2006
"Native mascots and symbols are all that the kids at school know about my people, and they make fun of me for following traditional ways. These fake images make me feel sick inside. They make fun of who I am. They imitate and mock our sacred feathers, dance and music. We honor our leaders, not use them as entertainment."

Wayne Crue, 12 years old
(Shoshone-Bannock)

Source: Che Butler & Luhui Whitebear, 2006
• "When someone says you are hurting them by your action, if you persist - then the harm becomes intentional."

--Barbara Munson (Oneida)
Historical?

• These images and stories are alive and well today
Dangerous? (2008)

We claim this is racist and the images of George Bush that follow aren’t.
I apologize for this latest entry, I can't find a chimp making a face as dumb as this one.
-Rich
What’s Your Take

• Do you buy the idea that the display of President and Michelle Obama with the Monkey in the middle is racist, while the display of former President George W. Bush next to monkey images is not racist (even if it is mean spirited and perhaps even offensive)?
The Use of Othering in the U.S.

- “Words carry weight, hauling behind them unspoken codes, images and histories.”
- Historical meanings
- Individual and group
- Equality is not equal to equity
Let’s talk about “othering”

• What are some examples of “othering” from your lived experience?
  – Othering sets up difference from the norm
  – Common portrayals include intellectually inferior; dangerous; primitive; hypersexual and asexual
Part II

The Impact of “Othering” in Education Today
Images and Mental Models

- When a school is described as 90% black and Latino, what mental images would many people have of that school?
Impacts of Othering in Education

- **Othering & euphemism, code speak:** urban, inner-city, disadvantaged, diverse, “challenge” of changing demographics, tolerance
- **Othering & practice:** curriculum, instruction
- **Othering & data:** achievement gaps
- **Othering & policy implementation:** special education, discipline
What does the term “racial achievement gap” mean?

What do we mean when we say there is an “achievement gap” by race?

What words do we use when we talk about racial achievement gaps?
Why Disaggregate?
A National Perspective

From the national perspective, an equity-focused reform strategy:

- Exposes that many schools are NOT providing students of color with opportunities to learn.

- Identifies schools serving students of color very well—and broadcasts that information

The Education Trust
An Example

Average ACT Scores by Parental Income and Race/Ethnicity in Ohio, School Year 2005-2006

Source: Ohio Department of Education
Ohio’s “Gaps”

Average ACT Scores by Parental Income and Race/Ethnicity in Ohio, School Year 2005-2006

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Ohio’s “Gaps”

Average ACT Scores by Parental Income and Race/Ethnicity in Ohio, School Year 2005-2006

Source: Ohio Department of Education
Problem: Perpetuating Mental Models of the Other

• Unfortunately, these data reinforce existing/hidden beliefs (mental models) about the intellectual inferiority of children and communities of color

• These mental models are borne out of the process of othering
The Way We Define the Problem Locates the Solutions

- If the problem is *underachieving students*, the solution is...
- …to fix the kids (i.e., *remediation*)
  - Supplemental Educational Services
  - Double-dosing
  - Reading First
- …or to fix the parents (i.e., *parent “involvement”*)
If the Problem is Underachieving Students...

- Defining the problem this way allows us to focus on “fixing the kids” and not fixing the system.
- It allows us to shift the burden/blame onto students, their parents, and their communities.
- And it reinforces deficit thinking about students of color and their families.
Othering and Disproportionality

- Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) and disproportionality
- Ohio’s original response: You may not have disproportionality
- Wisconsin’s response: Here are ways to understand the underlying causes of disproportionality
How Can We Eliminate the Impact of Othering?

• How can we alter our practice so we do not reinforce deficit thinking related to students of color?

• How can we change the way we think? How can we change our mental models?
Possible Solutions

- Support conversations about race
  - Study race and white privilege
  - Support professional development
  - Facilitate conversations
  - Actively seek out counterstories
Reconsider Equity Statements

- Old Fashioned Racist
  - Stereotype-Bias-Prejudice (S-B-P)
  - No Discrimination
- Reformed Racist
  - S-B-P
  - No Discrimination
- Non-Racist
  - No S-B-P
  - No Discrimination
Possible Solutions

• More holistically capture and examine the student experience
  • Talk to our children
  • Look at micro-aggressions
  • Examine their experiences and our mental models
Possible Solutions

• Ask different questions

  • Shift from talking about “achievement gaps” to addressing “racial disparities”

  • Ask what the data reveals about the system

  • Look for outliers and seek out their stories
Possible Solutions

- **Augment the data:** Collect more information than just performance on standardized exams
  - School climate surveys
  - Ethnographic research (student experiences, teacher beliefs, forces at play)
  - Etc.
Possible Solutions

• Support conversations about race?
• Examine the student experience?
• Ask different questions and broaden the frame?
• Augment the data?
• Your ideas?
Questions To Leave You With

• What are our roles in disrupting patterns of racial disparity?

• What changes are we willing to undergo to improve student performance?
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