Advancing District-Wide Racial Equity: The Importance of Theories of Change

Equity Officers Retreat
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Thank You
How I Knew I Was a Teacher

My science lessons changed a life.

By Terrance Green

My first year teaching was rough. There were many times when I felt inadequate, and asked myself, "Why am I doing this?"

There was the honors class full of eager learners that I lost control of. I wanted so much for them to like me that I failed to create the right tone and build the professional teacher-student relationship.

Even honors students will run all over you if you let them.
Presentation Aims

Understand Change Theories + Theories of Change

Consider why each matters for Equity Officer Practice
**Key Concepts**

*Change theories* refer to theoretical & empirically grounded knowledge about how change occurs beyond any one project. They explain conditions and events that catalyze change.

*Theories of Change* are project-specific and related to evaluation that makes the underlying rationale of a project explicit, which supports planning, implementation & assessment of the project.

Reinholz & Andrews, 2020
How We Came To This Work
Contemporary Societal Conditions
A Tragically Unique Window

• School districts have been forced to confront their racial oppression and systemic inequity

• A growing number of districts are taking up equity work in several ways especially hiring district-level equity officers/directors
Study Phase 1: What Do Equity Directors Do?

- 13 Equity Directors/Officers from urban & suburban districts in the Midwest, West, Southwest & Eastern Regions of the U.S.

- 8 identified as women, 5 as men

- 9 identified as Black, 1 as Asian, 2 Latinx, 1 biracial (Pacific Islander and white)

- Conducted semi-structured interviews (60-90 minutes)
Our Curiosities

What do equity directors focus on as **key priorities** in their work?

What **practices do equity directors apply** to address these priorities?

What **theories of change** do they rely on as evidenced by their practices?
Findings: Key Priorities

Individual Change

- Increase psychological safety for minoritized students
- Increase equity in access to resources
- Reduce punitive discipline
- Reduce opportunity & achievement gaps
- More compassionate hearts & minds of adults

Institutional Change

- Eliminate race & class disparities in academic outcomes
- Challenging institutionalized racism
- Making systems more equitable
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Findings: Theories of Change

• Technical-rational approach to change

• “Change hearts-and-minds first”

• Educational equity reform

NOTE: See Ishimaru & Galloway, 2021
Why This Matters For Your Work

• It’s essential for equity officers to make their underlying assumptions of racial equity change explicit

• Without explicit theories of change, districts can engage in “emulation-based racial equity change”

• Explicit theories of change support planning, enactment, and assessment of racial equity work

• Explicit theories of change can create pathways for people to understand & participate in what is being done and why towards racial equity
Questions

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