

A photograph of four children of diverse backgrounds sitting on the ground in a garden, playing with soil. One child is holding a small plant. The scene is outdoors with green foliage in the background.

“A Dream is a Wish Your  
Heart Makes...”

Building Belonging from Birth On

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# Welcome!

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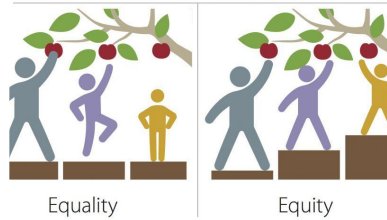
- Who am I?
  - Technical Assistance Coordinator – Midwest PBIS Network
  - PA School Psychologist of the Year (2021)
  - Wife
  - Mommy
  - Puppy Parent to “Biscuit”
  - IUP & Millersville University Alumnae
  - Former Cheerleader
  - Who did I want to be when I grew up: Janet Jackson
  - Disney Fanatic

Once upon a dream....

# H.E.L.P. Framework



History



Equality v.  
Equity



Love



Pedagogy &  
Practices

# What is **Inclusion**?

Inclusion is defined as engagement within a community where the **equal worth** and **inherent dignity** of each person is **honored**. An inclusive community promotes and sustains a sense of belonging.

# Inclusion Efforts

- **Identity** diversity and **Cognitive** diversity are important for inclusion.
- Diversity is **not** enough.
- There is a difference between diversity and inclusion.

When you wish upon a  
star...makes no difference  
who you are....

# What is **Belonging**?

Experiencing **appreciation, validation, acceptance,** and **fair treatment** within an environment.

*When people feel that they belong, they aren't distracted and worried about being treated as a stereotype or a singular part of their multidimensional personhood.*

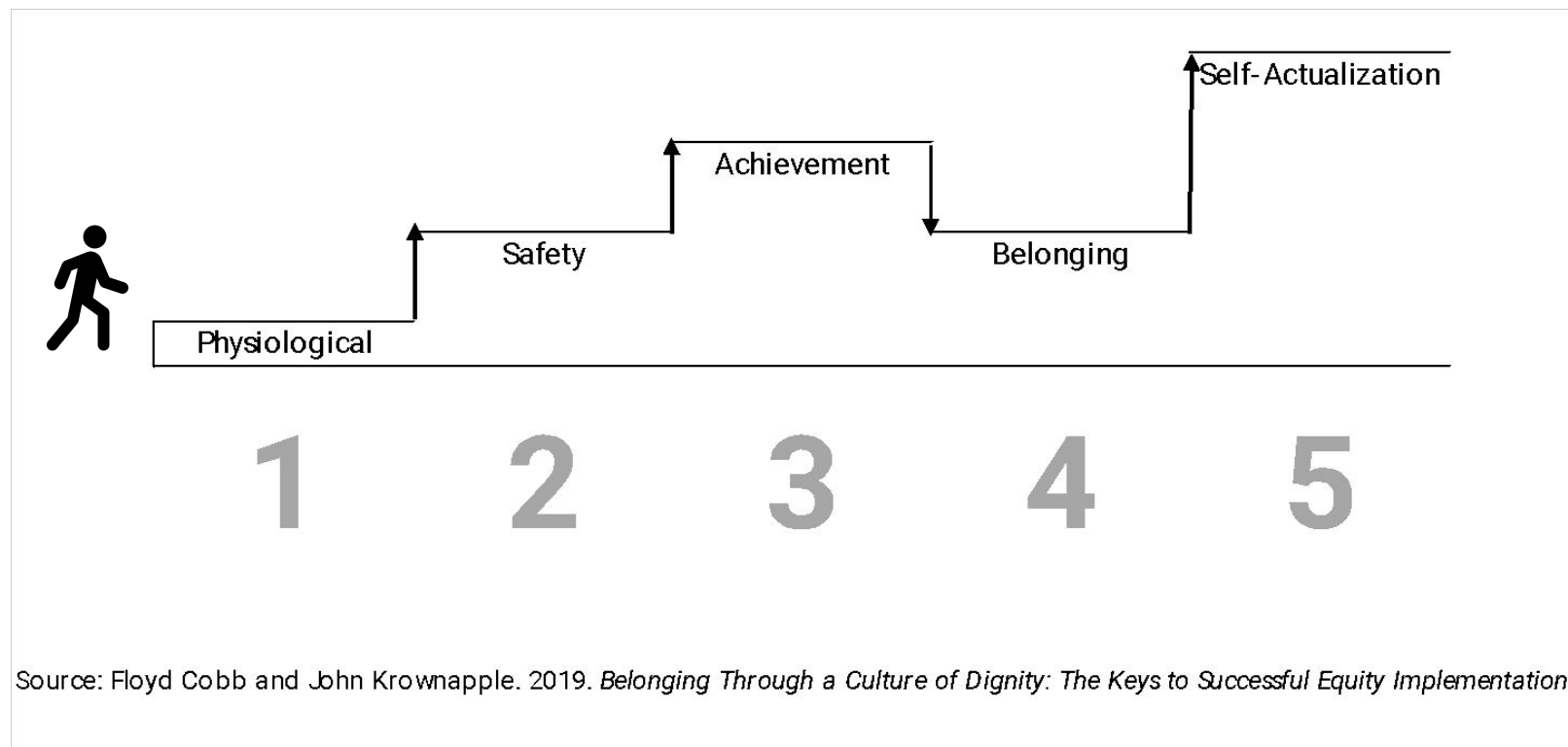


# The Value of **Belonging**

Reflection: Describe a time you felt the need to change or hide something about yourself, to conform, or to achieve something *in order to* gain acceptance or feel good about yourself.

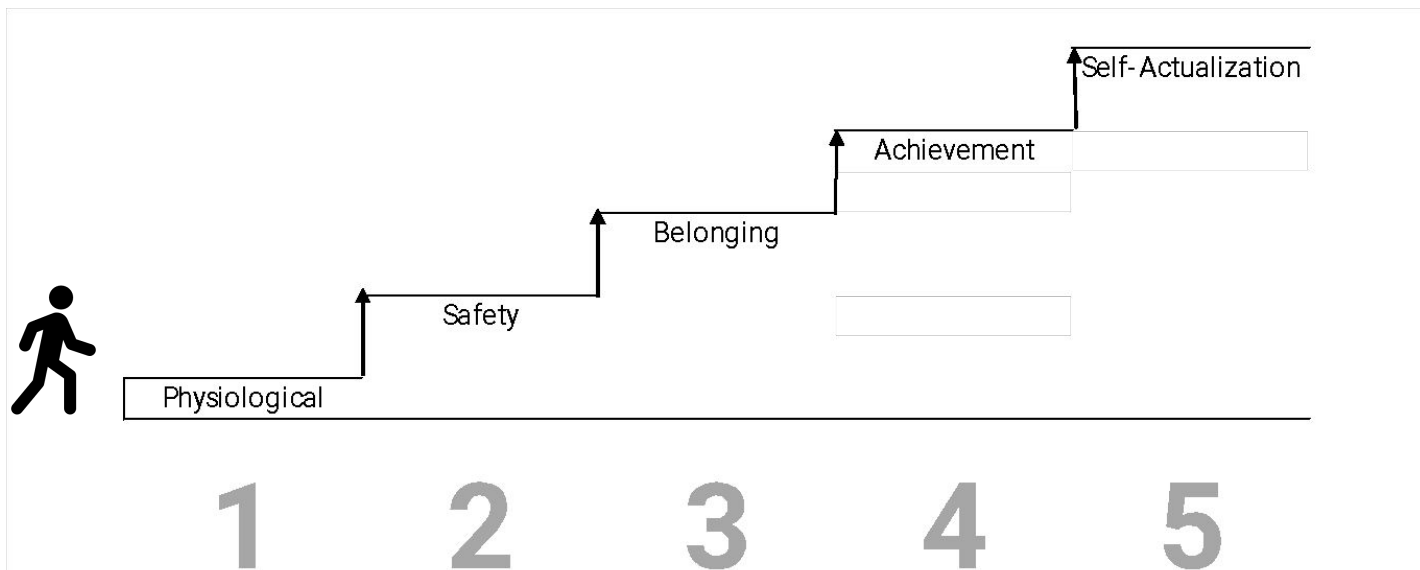
- Belonging is just as important as access.
- *Belonging Uncertainty* (Walton & Cohen, 2007) – has the potential to undermine goals such as student learning or the recruitment and retention of a diverse staff.

# Sacrificing Belonging for Access



Source: Floyd Cobb and John Krownapple. 2019. *Belonging Through a Culture of Dignity: The Keys to Successful Equity Implementation*

# Putting Belonging Where It Belongs



Source: [Floyd Cobb and John Krownapple](#). 2019. *Belonging Through a Culture of Dignity: The Keys to Successful Equity Implementation*

# When Belonging is Absent – Employees

- Emotional Labor and Psychological Toll
- The Pressure to Perform Perfectly
- Navigating Assaults on Dignity

# Five Essentials for Workplace Mental Health & Well-Being



Office of the  
U.S. Surgeon General

Almost there.....

# 10 Elements of Dignity

- Acceptance of Identity
- Recognition
- Acknowledgement
- Inclusion
- Safety
- Fairness
- Independence
- Understanding
- Benefit of the Doubt
- Accountability

Source: Leading with Dignity, Hicks, 2018.

When we honor others' dignity,  
we strengthen our own.

- Donna Hicks, Ph.D.



# 10 Temptations to Violate Dignity

- Taking the Bait
- Saving Face
- Shirking Responsibility
- Depending on False Dignity
- Maintaining False Security
- Avoiding Confrontation
- Assuming Innocent Victimhood
- Resisting Feedback
- Blaming & Shaming Others
- Gossiping and Promoting False Intimacy

Source: Leading with Dignity, Hicks, 2018.

# Dignity

“When we look through the lens of dignity, equity comes into clearer focus.

Dignity answers the questions:

- Why are we doing this work?
- On what foundation are we building?
- What are we working for?”

Source: *Belonging Through a Culture of Dignity*, Cobb & Krownapple, 2019, p. 95

When we know better, we do  
better.

- Maya Angelou

# Environmental Scan

**Climate** is the “heart and soul” of the environment (Freilberg & Stein, 1999)

- Do people feel like they belong?
- Can they call their environment their own?
- Or do they feel alienated?

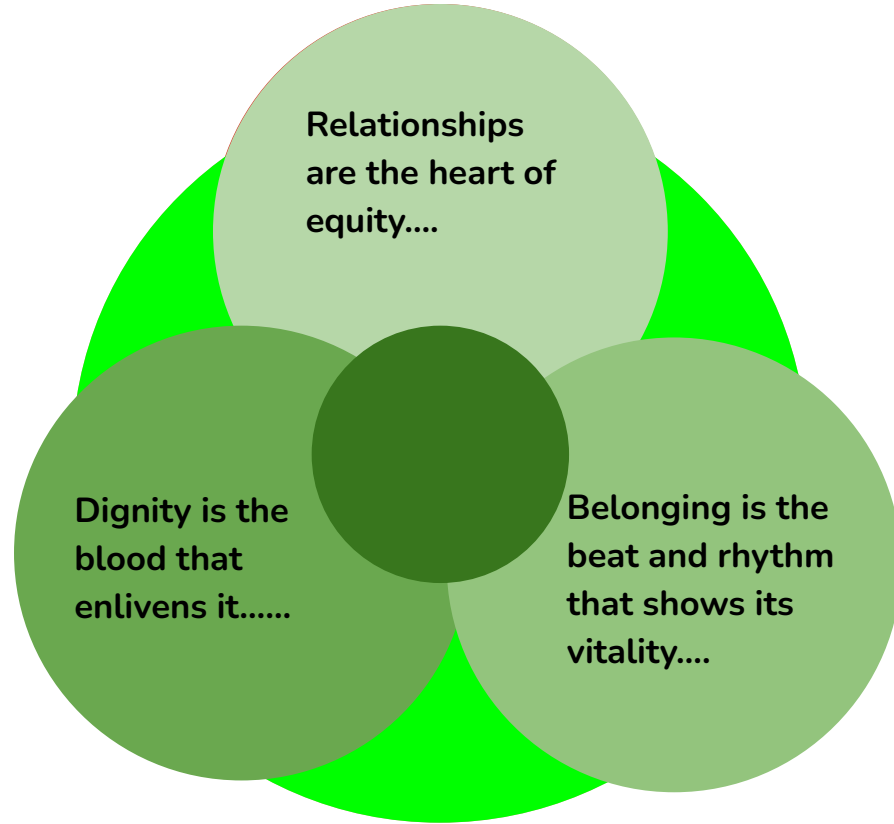
**Culture** is the “way we do things around here”.....

- To what extent does the organization honor dignity through individual behaviors and its organizational practices and policies?

# Sample Casualties of Conditional Belonging

- Drop Out
- Anxiety
- Othering
- False Dignity
- Self-Segregation
- Conformity
- Exhaustion
- Negativity
- Gangs, Cults, & Radicalization
- Emotional Numbing

# Belonging through Dignity



How far I'll go.....

# Life is a highway.....



What should we



start,



stop,



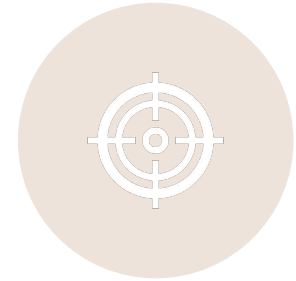
or continue?



# Surface Pressure



WHAT IS OUR “WHY”?



WHAT IS OUR MISSION,  
VISION, AND ULTIMATE  
GOAL?

# The bare necessities

We need to hear from those we serve.

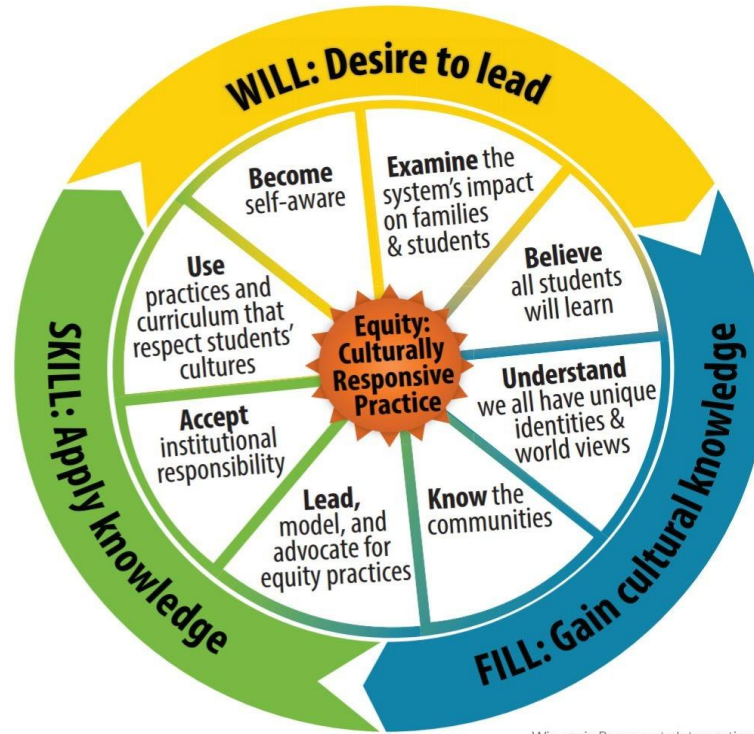
Are we listening?



# Into the Unknown.....

- Are we seeing the outcomes we value?
- Is our system shifting?
- Are we retaining our staff of varying backgrounds?
- What are the learners saying?
- How are families/communities responding?

# Circle of Life....



I've got a dream....

# Where does the dream begin.....to build belonging from birth on?

- You need other dreamers.
- You need an “authentic” why?
- You need a logic model
- You need to create a groundswell
- You need to empower the other dreamers

# What gets in the way of the dream?

- Time
- Priorities
- Leadership support
- Societal pressure
- Legislative processes and delays
- Burnout

# How do we honor dignity in ourselves and others who are trying to understand or resist the dream?

- Authentic Listening
- Develop Trust
- Encourage Vulnerability
- Engage in empathy
- “Go to the Balcony” – R. Heifetz
- Own responsibility

Source: Leading with Dignity, Hicks, 2018.



# Lessons Learned

1. Build your coalition of the willing.
2. Never be afraid to dream for yourself and others.
3. Policy drives practice.
4. Understand that no one owns the work of work worth doing - be ok with no credit.
5. There will be barriers to your dream, but it doesn't mean the barriers will always be there. Navigate the journey.

“For there is always light. If only we’re brave enough to see it. If only we’re brave enough to be it.”

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-Amanda Gorman

Thank you!

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