This disorientation is a cost of leading from the outside in; when leaders constantly roll out a new "what" (initiative, curriculum, textbook, assessment system, etc.), the adults in the system often begin to splinter and work at cross-purposes.

The first antidote to this pattern is taking time to name a clear and compelling moral purpose that will drive a different kind of conversation about what really matters. Leading with the "why" allows you to evoke a higher purpose and calling that speaks to people's emotional core, which brain research has shown is key to change efforts. Once invested in the call and mobilized around a clear imperative, you will find colleagues much more willing to learn and grow, even when the going gets uncomfortable.

Shift the Discourse

An important part of the work as you move from awareness to action is learning to create spaces for people to listen to each other, express emotions (thoughts and feelings), and build connections. As leaders for equity we must also engage stakeholders in a new kind of conversation about race, language, class, power, and equity. We call this *shifting the discourse.*

Too often, attempts to talk about the root causes of inequity result in negative, deficit thinking that blames students, families, "the district", our colleagues - anyone who can scapegoat to externalize the problem. We may fall back on false dichotomies to label colleagues as right or wrong, victims or perpetrators, enlightened or ignorant. As previously discussed, when you fear or feel that you are being judged, it is hard to engage in productive dialogue. The very process of talking about race or any form of difference can shut people down, triggering fears of being labeled a "racist" or "too sensitive".

> **"** *"The current dominant discourse in schools is a hegemonic cultural discourse. The consequence of this discourse is to maintain existing schooling practices and results. We call this hegemonic discourse* **Discourse 1."**
> *- Eubanks, Parish, & Smith*

Tackling inequity is not about retelling the story of how all the people of color have been victims and how all white people overcame their racism. Instead, it is about learning to **listen** to one another's individual experiences, to **value** each other as human beings, and to **take collective ownership** of the need for change. This is the foundation of an equity imperative.
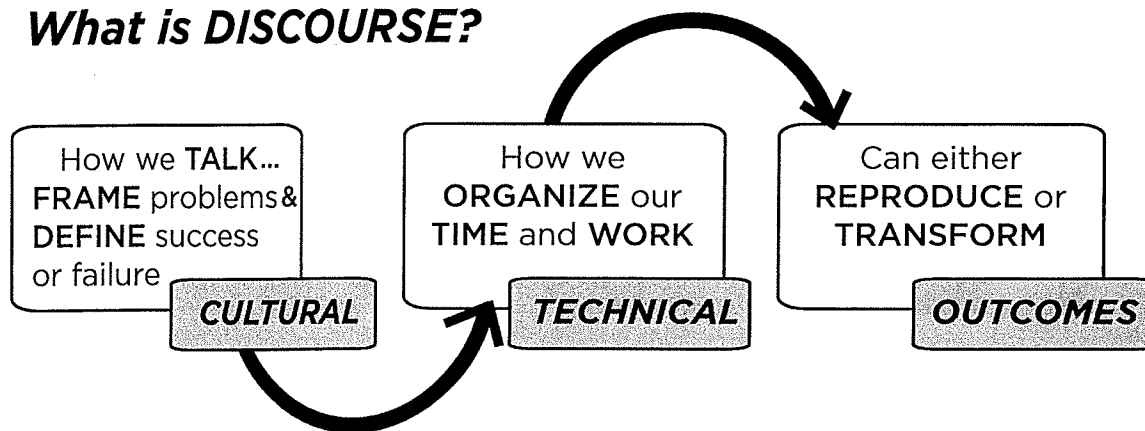
As you commit to tackling inequity, it is critical to examine how you are thinking about and talking about the issues at stake. When we put our attention to shifting the discourse, we refuse to adopt facile explanations and simplistic language to address complex problems. In the Golden Circle, shifting the discourse falls in the cen-

tral "how" circle and can literally make or break progress on an equity imperative.

In their article "Changing the Discourse In Schools", author Eugene Eubanks and his colleagues offered the notion of *"Discourse 1"* to symbolize the current default ways of thinking and talking about inequity in schools:

> Existing cultural patterns, ways of thinking and accepted practice tend to conceal significant problems and contradictions. Symptoms often get identified and treated as causes and the problems persist. ... The consequence of this discourse is to maintain existing schooling practices and results. We call this ... Discourse 1 (Eubanks, et. al 1997).

What is DISCOURSE?

How we **TALK**... **FRAME** problems & **DEFINE** success or failure	How we **ORGANIZE** our **TIME** and **WORK**	Can either **REPRODUCE** or **TRANSFORM**
CULTURAL	*TECHNICAL*	*OUTCOMES*

In our urgency to promote change, it is easy to fall into Discourse 1 (D1) patterns, like:

- Blaming students and their families for performance gaps

- Unconsciously perpetuating stereotypes of children of color or poor children

- Looking for a silver bullet or quick fix solution - putting band-aids on problems that require surgical-level care.

Discourse 1 Example: The Achievement Gap

A prime example of D1 on the national scale is the ubiquitous phrase, the "achievement gap". In *Young, Gifted, and Black: Promoting High Achievement Among African-American Students*, Dr. Asa Hilliard challenged this framing as "problematic" for multiple reasons.

First, he unmasked the fact that the achievement gap is used to refer almost exclusively to the performance difference between African-American and white students, which signals that "something more than achievement is being discussed when the gap language is used." Second, Hilliard makes a persuasive case that the achievement gap discourse "establishes European average achievement as the universal norm, no matter what the quality of achievement may be, even if it's mediocre" (Hilliard 2003). In failing to question the norm, Hilliard contends that we foster "normative mediocrity" and shortchange all children, particularly when looking at their achievement on an international scale.

Dr. Hilliard also noted that the gap dialogue tends to focus almost exclusively on underperforming students while ignoring those in the norm group, thus propagating a "blame the victim" mentality. As a consequence, the "achievement gap" discourse:

1.   Perpetuates deficit thinking about students of color and their intellectual capacity, perhaps even intensifying unconscious biases.

2.   Obscures the fact that by all international measures, the U.S. standard for "success" is actually quite low.

3.   Deflects attention from what Hilliard calls the "quality-of-service" gap, captured in Jonathan Kozol's famous treatise *Savage Inequalities*.

Hilliard concludes that the achievement gap discourse may actually "contribute to a continuation of relatively mediocre results in general, and to a continued depression of the achievement of African students in general" (Hilliard 2003). By focusing attention on **outcomes** rather than **causes**, the "achievement gap" keeps us mired in a Discourse 1 cycle: tinkering around the edges of the problem and therefore reproducing the same results.

By contrast, educators like Dr. Linda Darling-Hammond and Dr. Pedro Noguera have advanced a counter-narrative embodied in the phrase **"opportunity gap"**. This simple semantic shift opens the floodgates of conversation around what root causes have shaped current performance gaps. In her book *The Flat World and Education (2010)*, Dr. Darling-Hammond cites several drivers of the opportunity gap:

- Poverty and lack of social supports

- Limited early learning opportunities

- Re-segregation and unequal schooling

- Unequal access to qualified teachers

- Lack of access to high quality curriculum

- Dysfunctional learning environments

Each factor carries with it a long history, and each is reinforced and persists through a combination of individual, institutional and structural oppression.

As a leader for equity, your willingness to introduce the language of "opportunity gap" can launch new types of discourse in your community. By asking colleagues to study and understand the factors above, you will foster a richer understanding of and empathy toward students who are struggling. It is important, however, not to allow an examination of these factors to create an excuses mentality (i.e. the "pobrecita" syndrome cited in Chapter 2). An opportunity gap analysis should accelerate your community's equity imperative, not trigger a "poor babies" mentality that depresses academic rigor.

Professor Gloria Ladson-Billings offers another powerful shift of discourse in her offering of an "education debt" to describe the current gap. By evoking the historical legacy of racism and lack of access to learning, Dr. Ladson-Billings reminds us that:

> - We are all responsible.
>
> - We have divested from communities that are the most vulnerable.
>
> - We have, as a nation, perpetuated unethical and immoral treatment of these very communities (Ladson-Billings 2012).

If Discourse 1 serves to reinforce patterns of inequity, **then what would a Discourse 2 approach look, sound, and feel like?** There are no easy answers, no scripted guide to Discourse 2 (D2) that we can offer you. However, Eubanks and his colleagues do offer some critical attributes of D2 to look out for, which are captured in the chart below:

Discourse 1	Discourse 2
Singular truths	Multiple stories
Improving what exists	Addressing root causes
Answers & technical fixes	Inquiry & adaptive challenges
Externalization/blame "Look out the window"	Internal reflection "Look in the mirror"
Limited time & ability	Getting started anyway

At its heart, Discourse 2 is a paradigm shift that challenges the assumptions behind our current responses to inequity. When we move toward Discourse 2, we commit to:

- Interrupt our default tendencies to throw facts, interventions, or programs at struggling children

- Slow down and really interrogate the root causes of the problems we face

- Look in the mirror at our own complicity in the problem

- Listen deeply to the stories of the young people and families we aim to serve

- Get started, somewhere, no matter how big the boulder may feel or how high the mountain may appear.

Conclusion

By leading your colleagues through a meaningful reflection around discourse, together you can:

- Uncover and test the invisible beliefs and assumptions shaping your current strategy

- Analyze the patterns of discourse and where they are or are not serving you to make progress toward equity

- Analyze the actions you take in relationship to underlying beliefs, assumptions and discourse

- Understand your current outcomes in the context of all of the above factors.