Moving Beyond Diversity Toward Racial Equity in Pathways

Guest Host

Dr. Eboni M. Zamani-Gallaher

Associate Dean of Equity, Justice and Strategic Partnerships

University of Pittsburgh

Dr. Ereka Williams

Vice President for Impact-Education

Dogwood Health Trust Foundation

Dr. Heather Shotton

Vice President for Diversity Affairs

Fort Lewis College

Dr. Lorenzo Baber

Director, Office of Community College Research and Leadership

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

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Dr. Eboni Zamani-Gallaher: Good day to you all. My name is Eboni Zamani-Gallaher. I'm Associate Dean of Equity, Justice and Strategic Partnerships and a professor of Higher Education in the School of Education at the University of Pittsburgh. Let me begin by extending thanks to those who are choosing to join us today. We appreciate you listening in, and special thanks to our panelists, our esteemed colleagues that are also joining today.

Today we have Drs. Ereka Williams, Heather Shotton, and Lorenzo Baber who are here to discuss, moving beyond diversity towards racial equity and pathways. So, we want to begin our conversation with each of our panelists, sharing just a little bit about their backgrounds and how they come into the space relative to work that's related to equity, diversity, inclusion, and belonging. Can we start with you, Dr. Williams?

Dr. Ereka R. Williams: Absolutely. And thank you for this invitation to join the panel today and be a part of this conversation. My name is Ereka and I'm a first-generation college student, rural America, first grandchild to go to college, graduate with a degree, and you name it. Native North Carolinian, began as a public-school teacher in rural North Carolina, and while my work has moved me all across the state, I always say that North Carolina is home.

From a public-school classroom to UNC professor ,all along the way I had incredible mentors that always made sure that my background was not a liability but an asset. And so, whether my work was working in communities with eight-year olds, or working in graduate and doctoral programs with 48-year olds, my commitment to equity really extends from my background and very humble beginnings as the granddaughter of two African American men who did not have the opportunity to learn and read.

So I'm deeply connected to equity. It's a part of who we are and what we do in my community growing up. And it's been a part of my work from public school teacher to UNC professor, and now as a Vice President for Education at Dogwood Health Trust Foundation, serving the most western counties of Western North Carolina, dedicated to making generational change for communities that have been at the margins for far too long. Glad to be here today.

Dr. Eboni Zamani-Gallaher: Thanks so much, Dr. Shotton.

Dr. Heather Shotton: Hi, good morning. I'm Heather Shotton, I'm a citizen of the Wichita Affiliated Tribes, also a descendant of the Chi [sp] and Cheyenne people. I currently serve as Vice President of Diversity Affairs at Fort Lewis

College, which is a native American serving non-tribal institution located in Durango, Colorado.

I too am a first-generation college student, the second grandchild but the first in my family to get a graduate education and go on to get a PhD. I fell in love with higher education. During my undergrad experience I was really fortunate to have two indigenous professors that served as mentors for me that sparked a love of research and helped me to see possibilities for myself. And it was during that time that I really developed a passion for the work that would become my career Aad that's serving indigenous students and working with institutions to make our institutions better spaces and more equitable spaces for indigenous students.

And so I'm fortunate to have moved from a faculty position in educational leadership and policy studies at the University of Oklahoma into my current administrative role where I'm able to focus on institutional equity and particularly reconciliation efforts for indigenous communities. So I'm happy to be with you all day.

Dr. Eboni Zamani-Gallaher: Thanks so much, and Dr. Baber.

Dr. Lorenzo Baber: Hello everyone, it's good to be here. So, my backgrounds a little different. I'm a fourth-generation teacher, my great grandmother was an educator in a one room school in Lowes County, Alabama. My grandparents and great grandparents were heavily involved in Lowes County and political movements including the original Black Panther Party. My great uncle ran under that party affiliation in 1966 in Lowes County. So, I grew up with that as an initial background.

And then my parents are faculty, so I grew up across college campuses and was exposed to great minds from an early age. My parent's colleagues like Manny Maribel, Geneva Gay, Bill Hooks, and Cornell West. So as a kid, I kind of just absorbed that in terms of their work and thinking about equity and social justice. And my own path started really when I was an undergraduate and realized the privileges that I had as a multi-generational educator, and as someone who grew up in an academic household. and seeing my friends and peers who had the same individual dispositions as I had in terms of their mind, their ability their work ethic, but were really crushed by the structural inequalities. And so, that's kind of what I've made my work focusing more on structure and less on individuals and thinking about ways at which we shine a light on structures rather than maintain our attention to individual disposition.

I'm also from, I claim Greensboro, North Carolina as my home although we moved around a lot. Dudley High School, I know you knew that I worked in

admissions. So, I've been across all hundred counties in North Carolina, including the western part of the state. So, it was nice to hear Dr. Williams talking about the most beautiful state, I feel like, other than Illinois of course, Illinois is my second home now. So, again, good to be here and I appreciate the opportunity to be part of this conversation.

Dr. Eboni Zamani-Gallaher: Really appreciate you all sharing a little bit more about your back-stories, your backgrounds, and how you come into the space. Especially given your expertise in relationship to education and training, most especially post-secondary but knowing that all of you have a P 20 prism with which, you look at some of our grand challenges. And wanting to also provide better vehicles, if you will, and on ramps that are so pivotal for communities of color that are often systematically not having the same types of opportunities or experiencing equitable outcomes in the same degree as other groups of folks. And so, as we think about some of the renewed commitments and opportunities and how community colleges have been uniquely poised to help change some of that. There's both promise and peril in the institutions in terms of what we can enact, and what we can scale up relative to equitable experiences and outcomes.

So that said, we're really very excited that each of you are part of the REACH collaborative. REACH for those of us listening that may not be as familiar with this initiative is the Racial Equity for Adult Credentials and Higher Education Collaborative. It is a multimillion-dollar effort that is supported by the Lumina Foundation, where again, we are really seeking to acknowledge and address educational pathway needs most especially for adult learners of color that are 25 to 64 years of age.

And so, while this is a sizeable investment and a timely one. We also know that it is where we have the charge of how to reimagine what we could have in the way of possibilities and communities on how adult racially minoritized adult learners engage. And so, with that, I want to have our conversation really speak to some critical, what we call EDIB, or sometimes people just say DEI or DEIB, but in the mix where the E may stand for equity and or equality. Diversity, inclusion, and belonging, but knowing that much of these efforts are driven by the need to again, think outside of the box, think about how we can work together to build stronger campus environments and climates where particularly again, Black, Indigenous and Latinx adult learners can thrive and learn.

So, while it's commonplace for us to hear terms like diversity and inclusion, and in recent years we've heard a lot of rhetoric around equity as well as equality, and of those two, the latter have been referenced more. We do know that recently justice and belonging has entered the mix in terms of more and more institutions, whether it's in a statement re-envisioning their values or mission and rewriting those or having the right rhetoric.

And I often say that we need to, right size the rhetoric with the reality. So, when you all consider racially minoritized adult learners in various post-secondary pathways, but most namely community colleges. What do you consider are the necessary efforts to build community sense of belonging and how we might carry out practices that are in fact welcoming and supportive, inclusive, as well as equitable? Dr. Baber, can we start with you?

Dr. Lorenzo Baber: Sure. Well, it's a very deep question, especially for community colleges because of its foundational mission to provide egalitarian pathway to post-secondary success for everyone, but particularly those who are from minoritized or marginalized population. So, I think the first step in that process as we think about is really making sure that we center racialized equity in our pursuits. I think that the overall attainment goals that are really strong help everyone. But I think that sometimes we get lost, or we think about it in a more pluralistic position where we want to bring more people to the table. So, we get kind of skittish to talk or center race. And we know that if you don't center race, if race becomes kind of a third-party benefit towards which, in a relationship between the community college and the attainment goals, if racialized equity is kind of the third party of that, we're never going to reach that goal or that potential to really focus on racialized equity. So, I think that's the first step, having those uncomfortable conversations among policy makers, among leaders, administrators, faculty. I think we have to focus on students and I think that's good, but I think it's more of a "and" then a "or". And that we have to bring others to that table and really focus on that because students come in and out.

It's policies, practices, structures that are consistent, so if we don't change those things as I mentioned in my opening outside of individual disposition, which again is part of the equation or formula, but can't be the only step. And I think sometimes it's seen as the first and only step again, shifting that focusing on individual dispositions and shifting that just sends a bad signal to our students to say that they are solely responsible in their shift, the ways that they shift is the sole responsibility for meeting these goals.

Dr. Eboni Zamani-Gallaher: Dr. Shotton.

Dr. Heather Shotton: One of the things that I always think about when we're thinking about particularly racially minoritized adults. Is what are community needs, and how are we helping students to respond to those community needs? How are we incorporating those community needs into how we work with and serve all of our students but particularly adult students.

I also think that Lorenzo raises a number of really excellent points, in that we have to look at our existing structures and the way that we have formed our

programs and support systems in many institutions is based on a student population that doesn't actually reflect what our current student population is.

And so do our existing structures, do our support systems actually reflect the needs of the students who are represented at our institutions and how are we making sure that we are being inclusive of a diverse array of student needs, particularly for adult students with families, students who come from a tribal community.

And what are those particular needs and how do we make sure that we are serving those needs and not basing our programs off of outdated models or a student population that isn't actually represented at our institution. So really centering students, and making sure that we're working to meet their specific needs.

Dr. Eboni Zamani-Gallaher: Dr. Williams, if you might also chime in on what you consider necessary in terms of efforts to build community and sense of belonging and carrying out practices that are in fact welcoming and supportive, inclusive, and equitable. And then I want to shift gears and ask you something right behind this.

Dr. Ereka R. Williams: Absolutely. I think building off of Dr. Shotton and Dr. Baber's response, it's really going to be anchored in this notion of how have we centered the realities of the community that we are sitting in the middle of, the whole notion of community college?

To Dr. Shotton's point, are we really wrapping the institution around those needs or are we expecting the students in the community to conform to institutional expectations? Learning is really about an invitation, and do we have processes, protocols, programs, et cetera that are being superimposed or do we have processes, programs, efforts, resources, et cetera that are responding to?

And so much, if we're really being honest, so much of what we do, we're doing it because we've always done it without regard for who's found success and who has not? Whose voice has been centered, and who has not? And, from my work over the years with institutional effectiveness and data and assessment, for me, sometimes if you want to get institutions attention, you have to talk the narrative of accountability in that piece.

So, let's put the data on the table, let's unpack your metrics, let's disaggregate data by every micro group available in that community and who's showing up? Who is truly finding success? Who's being retained? Who's completing the

pathways? Who's getting transferred onto the four-year? Who's in what type of programs?

Is it acceptable that young women that look like me, somehow can't get into the nursing program on the campus? Is that just the way it is, and have we made peace with that somehow at our institutions? Cause I know that's the narrative that I've heard quite clearly in quite a few places. We want them, to Dr. Baber's point earlier. Ereka, we really want them here, but they just don't seem to make it through this course and that course. So are those courses, gateway courses, gatekeeping courses, barriers, what's the issue? What supports are we putting in place? And what message have we sent to that community of learners and to our community at large when we continue to validate the success of some at the expense of others?

So, I think on a macro level, our institutions must get honest. We must get uncomfortable about what it is that we've done, why we've done it, and how we've done it, and not sit the onus and the responsibility on the learner. They're showing up to us, giving us everything they've got, we need to make sure that we're not putting barriers in the way.

Dr. Eboni Zamani-Gallaher: Trying not to go on to full amen and definitely being a bobble head to many of the points each of you raise. So, staying with you Doc, tell me. Okay, so this acronym, right, we go back and forth, talking about DEI, EDIB, like the B is now a thing where that's more recent than not for some. But as we think about, you were talking about again with the realities, what does it look like to move beyond diversity and toward racial equity and pathways and why it's important? Especially, as you just called us to critically think about and to interrogate what does it look like when you have a critical mass of particular groups, subgroups of students, especially Indigenous, Black and Latinx learners that are not in a pathway? And the institutional response there in is, Oh well, we'd like to have some, but somehow they just don't know how to navigate it here. So, can you talk to me more about moving beyond diversity?

Because what happens more often than not is, or at least in my opinion, I see and feel this tension of once we kind of preface equity with racial equity and pathways, it's kind of hard to have a sustained conversation versus equity writ large and equity being any and everything. So, talk to us a little bit about why it's really important? And Dr. Baber mentioned this too in terms of how it has to be a centerpiece of what we talk about, just curious about your thoughts with that?

Dr. Ereka R. Williams: Absolutely. I go to my hat as department chair, for a while I ran a couple of departments and there are a couple of ways

institutionally at that level that we hold a lot of power, we the institution. And how we choose to use it or exercise it can again be an on ramp or an off ramp. From the assessments that we choose to use and the way in which we employ assessments, have student voice, have the multiple ways that students show up knowing, and showing what they know have been accounted for in our assessment processes. The curriculum, the choices of materials that we use, faculty in some of our fields and our disciplines, thinking or believing that curriculum is neutral and that what they're using to teach biology to teach these things...Ereka, these aren't really race-based courses, this is biology. This is why I laugh almost saying that, but these are things you know, you hear these things when you're an administrator and you're working on centering race, racialized equity into conversations and helping an institution, a department, a college, a unit rethink their approaches for equity in their curriculum, assessment, et cetera. Really helping colleagues understand that their curriculum, their practices, and the language of their syllabus. There are so many elements of that instructional component on a campus that will either bring students into the center or push them further out beyond the margins.

So, I think as an administrator in a two-year institution, department head, dean, associate dean, whomever we hold responsibility for making sure that our processes are centering students' voices, realities, and the multiple ways of knowing. Not just as canonized, historical kind of pan western view of things that does not recognize equity, diversity, belonging, inclusion, justice, et cetera.

Dr. Eboni Zamani-Gallaher: So, Dr. Baber, Dr. Shotton, would you care to also comment on that question?

Dr. Heather Shotton: Well, can I just say ditto. I mean, I'm not sure how much you can add to that response because I think it's right on point. What I will say is that when I think about moving from or moving beyond diversity, and how do we really think about a push for equity. One of the things that is important in my own work and throughout my career has been to really push this conversation of institutional readiness.

So, our institutions express a desire to be more diverse, whether that's having a more diverse student population or faculty and staff. But the important question that institutions often don't ask is, are we ready to receive those students? Are we ready to serve those students in a way that is just and equitable? Have we looked at our institutional policies? Have we looked at our curriculum? Have we looked at the way we actually serve these different populations to make sure that we're ready to receive these students? Because it's not enough to bring diverse student populations onto our campus, we have to actually be ready to serve them in a way that honors different knowledges, that honors various

cultural backgrounds and experiences and those are things that I think are really important.

So, taking a look at all of the things that Dr. Williams talked about, looking at curriculum, how is our curriculum inclusive for a chemistry class, and there are ways to do that. I'm witnessing and watching faculty do that every single day, to think about diversity and equity and justice in a chemistry class.

How do our programs unintentionally exclude certain students that we say we seek to serve by virtue of being based on outdated models or certain populations? So, I think that really for me, it's this stepping back and looking and asking ourselves first and foremost, are we ready? And can we take a look at our policies, our structures, and our systems to make sure that we're not unintentionally creating barriers or even intentionally upholding barriers for students of color?

Dr. Lorenzo Baber: I would just add or double ditto. The question I've always had in my mind over the last, especially over the last I would say year or so, as we're out of the shadows of summer 2020, the racial reckoning, and like I'm just going to be blunt, white people are getting tired of race talk, right? And it's only been like, what, two years? And we've done it our whole lives so to me the question in my head and Dr. ZG knows, I love music. And so, for me it's like the question the Bee Gees asked in the seventies, how deep is your love?

I actually love the PJ Morton cover a lot better. But the question I have in my head is, how deep is your love? You say you love us, and obviously they're talking about a romantic version, but I'm talking about a version of humankind, human love, agape, if you will.

How deep is your love? It's easy to say it in the moment of a George Floyd or Brianna Taylor, to say, we love you, we're going to do these things. But how deep is your love? And this gets to Dr. Williams, are you willing to change your pedagogy? Are you willing to take risks with your curriculum? Are you willing to center the racialized experiences of your students and make that the center of everything that you do?

That's the question that I have and if you know the lyrics of this song, one of the things that they talk about is that, we live in a world of fools, I think that's appropriate. And if you're not going to love us, just let us be, that's another lyric.

Because to me it's like we can create our own corners of the university, of the community college and do our work. We're willing to engage in that work, to scale it up, to sustain it. But you got to show us some love. You got to show us

and you got to show us how deep that love is otherwise to me, and the onus is on them, not on us, because the work becomes our work.

When they say we're doing it, it's really we are doing it and that's just not sustainable, that's not scalable. And so, I think that is the larger question and it gets into all these things. Show us how deep your love is for us, beyond the moment where it's quote unquote "politically correct" or the thing to do. The mission statement, the things like where are those two years later? How did we act on those? How did we sustain those?

So those are the questions that I have, especially in a moment where they feel we're outside of the racialized reckoning, when we all know that's going on every day. And so that's what I would confront and challenge our colleagues to do.

Dr. Eboni Zamani-Gallaher: And talking about love, really makes me also want to give a shout out to Joy Gaston Gales who's our current President for the Association for the Study of Higher Education. Because it really just begs a head nod to her in a sense of this year's theme is about humanizing education for ASHE. And so, Dr. Baber, as you were just making your remarks, it really kind of, I think leans into what she's calling us to do. To think about humanistic education, the humanity and the readiness that Dr. Shotton just talked about. It's not just the onus being on the students, as Dr. Williams mentioned, but that it should be squarely placed with us to assess the extent to which are we ready? Not that they're ill prepared but how do we hold ourselves...the accountability piece that you all are talking about.

But one of the things as we're having this conversation that comes to mind, and early on as Dr. Shotton was entering the conversation, she made mention of reconciliation. And that is so much an important part of what is needed as we talk about our readiness. And Dr. Bum[inaudible] says, what is the willingness to change, to step outside the frame, color outside the lines, beyond the traditional white canon of what we are given as who creates knowledge, who gets to be knowledgeable and is included or excluded from that experience? But when I think about Dr. Shotton's work in particular and how much for us to have culturally sustaining practices, really begs of us to have that reckoning, have reconciliation, understand that is part and parcel to decolonizing practices, which have to be in told for us to provide culturally sustaining pathways. And that there's indigenous ways of knowing and being and histories, right?

And testimonials in terms of a shared understanding that is woven across the experiences of colonized folks and racially minoritized folks. So, I just want to kind of pickup with that and ask Dr. Shotton, if you could talk to us a little bit more because, to Lorenzo's point, Dr. Baber talked about what I really like to

say as akin to Johnny come latelys. So, there's been a racial reckoning for some as of late, for others this has been perennial and not just perennial, but it is date. And so, the exhaustion of dominant society mainstream with centering race is really starting to show.

So, with continuous reinforcement that is needed as some people rediscover or some discover for the first time that all of us are not empowered, all of us have differential access that there isn't a particularism say such as sexism that trumps all the other "isms", particularly if you are a raced individual in the society. And so, the reconciliation as an important part of the process of decolonization, can you speak to that? As we talk about what is very necessary in the need of individual and interpersonal and institutional growth, if we're really about the business of walking our talk.

Dr. Heather Shotton: Absolutely, first of all I think when we think about reconciliation, it requires an honest look within at our institutional histories. Both our individual institutions but also the institution of higher education in what's currently known as the United States, particularly when we think about decolonization.

What has been the history and purpose of higher education, how has that impacted particular communities, especially Black and Indigenous communities? How has that higher education been utilized or weaponized in many instances and what is the intergenerational impact of that relationship with higher education and certain communities?

And then what are our individual institutional histories? And we all have them, right? So, let's think about where institutions reside, what land they...whose land they occupy? And that's a critical question. And so, because of that, what are our responsibilities that are related to the land that we occupy and our individual histories? Whose labor, whose bodies built our institutions and at what cost to what communities?

Right? So, I mean really thinking more about black and Indigenous communities and our institutional histories. Then we have to think about our particular responsibilities. So, what are our responsibilities to reconcile what has been? How have Black, Indigenous and Latinx populations been impacted by our institutional histories and what are our responsibilities?

So, I think about for our Indigenous communities and when we think about institutional histories in higher education in general the impacts on language loss, on cultural intentional erasure of culture and identity historically the impacts on health and wellness and overall wellbeing intergenerationally. So now what are our responsibilities to be in service to or to focus on those areas

within communities. And I'll speak particularly for indigenous, not for indigenous communities, but to indigenous communities, right? So, when we think about our institutional responsibilities to revitalizing indigenous languages, to fostering and supporting tribal sovereignty and self-determination within indigenous communities and tribal nations. To contributing to wellness by way of how we serve our students, how we're in partnership with communities and how we're helping to create pathways for indigenous students to return to their communities and build their nations.

So, really the ways that we go about upholding those responsibilities might look different from institution to institution, but they have to have at the center one, an honest conversation and a look within to our own histories, our own impacts on Indigenous communities, on Black communities and what are our particular responsibilities and how do we seek to uphold those responsibilities by way of all the things that we talked about just a few minutes ago through curriculum, through pedagogy. How are we creating inclusive and equitable environments? And so really, I always return to really centering relationships and responsibility in that work for our institutions.

Dr. Eboni Zamani-Gallaher: Thank you so much for that. because as you were talking and I was, kind of processing it, it also made me think about the extent to which there is a way in which this has to evolve or evaporate in the sense of how folk can develop their racial consciousness. And similarly, how they can activate, implement and understand and ground practices relative to reconciliation.

Take action steps toward decolonizing the curriculum and the institutional climate and context to proactively remove barriers for those that are most vulnerable and underserved and overlooked. And so one of the things I wanted us to talk about as well is while representation matters, we do understand that there are scores of pathways, especially when we talk about the credentialing attainment pathway of those high skill, high demand, high wage, having very little diversity relative to folk of color in those pathway programs.

And so what's more, while we know representation is important and that greater representation is critical, again it's not just a bean counting exercise and so why isn't it that we have more? And then even if we were to have a critical mass, why isn't that enough to produce racial equity? How do you reconcile that? Dr. Baber?

Dr. Lorenzo Baber: Thank you. Well, I think it goes back to my original point that we focus a lot on the individual student and shifting their dispositions to become successful as opposed to focusing on structure and organizational development and I think it's important. One of the things that we talked about at

the Council for the Study of Community Colleges Conference last April, we had a luncheon and I invited colleagues including your colleague at Pitt, Heather McCambly, to talk about community colleges as racialized organizations.

And I think that is a key part. So we we're using Victor Ray's work, on racial organizations and I think it makes sense for community to college. The development of community colleges happened around the 20th century, which Dubois prophetically stated the biggest problem of the 20th century would be the problem of race, right?

So the degree to which differences of race would be made to deny particular people their rights and their opportunities and privileges. And so I think thinking about community colleges as racialized organizations is actually, I know it kind of goes against kind of the mission and the egalitarian perspective that we like to have on community colleges but it makes sense in some ways because it was developed around the time, in a century where whiteness was not established, but maintained. So we know Pree[sp] and Cheryl Harris talks about this in her work, that whiteness was established through law, right? Through law, and as such, organizations became forms of whiteness.

That's what Victor Ray is talking about. And so during this century we were, community colleges, were at least acknowledged, established, and developed is the same century where whiteness was organized and established and developed. And so thinking about community colleges as racialized organizations, I think is a way of thinking about your question, Eboni, in terms of why isn't critical mass enough?

Because it does not deconstruct the organizational practices of community colleges, of community college systems. Our conversation was even focused on funding and the ways in which the widest pathway, think about it, the widest pathway for people of color to postsecondary education is also the most chronically underfunded postsecondary sector.

And we're like, that's just a default...like there's no question about that. And so why is that? Why is it that, think about that, the widest pathway for post-secondary access for people of color is also the most chronically underfunded, and that's a fact.

That's not an opinion. There was just a study, I can't remember who did it, but 8 billion they calculated, was the shortfall of community colleges. And so, I think when we think about that as a fact, we have to think about the ways in which that is not by coincidence that is actually strategic.

And particularly in the 21st century where neoliberalism is the most bipartisan perspective that we have now. That everything operates in connection to capitalism, to the economy. So even, and I'm just going to be frank, even the attainment rate, this is the process that Obama started in 07', like we want to be 60% and reclaim ourselves as the highest working adult population, the highest proportion of working adults with a post-secondary credential. Remember what the rationale was? It wasn't for racial equity, it was for workforce, it was for the economy that matters. And that gets back to my original point, racial equity was the third-party benefit of a relationship between attainment and capitalism.

And so, I think that is what we have to challenge and that's what we have to consider and center as we move forward otherwise, it is just band-aids to a problem that needs more than that.

Dr. Eboni Zamani-Gallaher: Speaking of band-aids. So, Guided Pathways many have found there's some great promise in the sense that Guided Pathways has created greater efficiencies and has been effective in providing what is a more navigating way that students can move in through and out of post-secondary, namely community colleges. So, this navigational capital that Guided Pathways gives on one hand has helped us to see that there are larger numbers of students that are matriculating and higher numbers that are graduating however when we disaggregate that data, we see that a racial gap exists. And so, while Guided Pathways has a lot of promise, it is not the panacea that we would like for it to be. And so again, as we're thinking about centering racial equity and promoting culturally sustaining practices, to be clear, Guided Pathways was not created at the onset with that in mind, it's been additive and it's something that has been attached kind of after the fact.

So, can you share with us what you feel are some ways that Guided Pathways programs, because all six of the states that are within the REACH collaborative, are states that are actively engaged and utilize the Guided Pathways framework and model. But we've not seen where we see on a larger scale that Guided Pathways as a framework has generated racial equity in higher ed. So, any comments there about what might be some ways that Guided Pathways could be useful in advancing racial equity? And if so, how so?

Dr. Ereka R. Williams: I think the potential is there, when I look at language attached to helping students get on path. Anything we can do to make the unknown known, the abstract explicit to decode the language, there's so much from the...we have this P 20 lens on the screen here. I think about schools in general and schooling and the history of America, whether it's a family showing up for a parental conference for their middle schooler, there's so much language and acronyms and things that families have to navigate to try to understand what the school is saying to them about their child.

The same goes for our higher education, two-year and four-year spaces. And so, what is a credit hour? What does it mean to get credit for prior learning? What does it mean when it says I have to do this experience to move on to part two of the program? When I think about some of the implementation goals of Guided Pathways, I think that there's the potential to demystify, to make explicit processes that could be very, I guess just cloudy, murky, for those that don't have access to that world and that sphere.

As long as we do what everyone has said repeatedly, as long as we keep race center in this work, as the institution, the onus is on us to make sure that whatever pathway or whatever element we're using, that we are disaggregating who's finding success and who's not, and how are we centering their realities, their experiences, their needs, in the heart of that strategy.

So, making sure students are clear about what it takes to move through the program, making sure they're clear about expectations, making sure we're clear about what supports they need. Dr. Baber talked earlier about the different experiences that he had, fourth generation, et cetera, compared to some of the peers of his growing up who had the same potential, the same capacity, the same degree of intelligence, but had different resources, different access.

So, if they show up to us, if they show up to our institutions with some of these gaps that happen on the K-12 side, what are we doing on our side, on the two-year, four-year side to mediate those gaps, to put structures in place to support? Maybe they do need some more support with some prerequisites that some show up with.

What are we doing as an institution to make sure those pre-reqs and those other bodies of knowledge that they need to find success. Cause let's just be honest, there is some skill and some things involved with some of these pathways that requires certain expectations for prior learning.

It doesn't mean it's not doable, it means that as an institution, as a program, we need to find a way to embed those and scaffold those into processes, either within the beginning courses or something contextual to what they're showing up and needing. But we don't just simply not open up that pathway because they didn't show up as an AB student in Algebra II in high school.

There are ways to mediate what they need, and how are we making sure that our pathways are not gatekeepers? So, I think that the pathways hold potential, but as it's been said before, we can't decenter race, race has to be at the center of all of this if we're truly committed.

Dr. Lorenzo Baber: Can I add real quick? I think that the pathway, it's about Guided Pathways to a credential, which I think is important. But I think also we can't lose for what. And as I mentioned before material wellbeing is, I mean, I'm sipping my organic green tea, like I like, which is not cheap.

So, I like nice stuff so material wellbeing matters. But also, as we think about communities of color particularly, we have a collectivist culture. And from my experience, when individuals get their credential, they don't see themselves as successful until they translate that credential to improving their community, to helping their community, supporting their community, investing in their community.

And so, I think as long as we couch the to the credential for community engagement, a collectivist perspective, I think that's just as important as the to the credential. And when we think about Guided Pathways and what we're guiding those folks towards.

Dr. Heather Shotton: I think that both Dr. Williams and Dr. Baber make really critical points that when we're thinking about Guided Pathways, I always think and go to and ask the question who's determining what that pathway is? Are we considering multiple pathways that can look different for different folks? So, when we think about this notion of a streamlined approach that doesn't fit all communities and what is the motivation? Especially, Eboni, you mentioned this and Dr. Baber spoke to it too. When we think about how neoliberalism is really present in our conversations about the value of higher education and the value of a degree and the conversations that are going on right now about return on investment.

But when we think about our communities, it's not about our individual return on investment. It's about how we're reinvesting in our communities and how we are utilizing education to uplift our communities, to build in my community, to build tribal nations. So how are our Guided Pathways reflecting those values and the motivation that the students that we're talking about have for seeking higher education.

Dr. Eboni Zamani-Gallaher: Each of you in different ways have talked about the extent to which pathways for whom, to what extent, to what end, and in what? And so, how pathways may be an engine of opportunity or may actually be a gatekeeper as opposed to a gateway to additional educational, social, or economic mobility. And so, as we think through the various nuances of education and job training pathways, as we understand sometimes inadvertently, or to Dr. Baber's point, sometimes with intentionality, there's ways in which there can be program tracking. We understand the sector with the widest lane as Baber reminds us in terms of broadening participation or access is the

community college sector, which also happens to be most chronically underfunded.

And so, we see many different examples of pathway obstacles that get in the way of equitable outcomes for adults of color. And so as we think through our efforts and initiatives and how we might provide advisement for state leads, for folks that have their boots on the ground in the colleges and in the communities, and wanting to again, be very diligent and steadfast in making sure that they don't reproduce disparities in completion and matriculation and the placement of the graduates or the subsequent earnings because of this differential access of who's put on a path and which path.

And Guided Pathways, again there's some fidelity as a reform, it has chipped away at a handful of these challenges. So can you share with us what you would suggest as strategies for how we might move the needle even more so, for racially minoritized adult learners who experienced and have been on the receiving end of many of these challenges? And particularly in lieu of, again, we're still in the midst of a pandemic and communities of color have experienced the worst of this pandemic.

So can you share with our audience and practitioners and community colleges in particular, how might they move the needle? How can we continue to chip away, I know we talked about centering race as part and parcel of that, but talk to us more about some other ways that we can be clear to, to not inadvertently or unwittingly reproduce disparities for adult learners of color.

Dr. Ereka R. Williams: I would say the primary thing for me always comes back to the student voice. Making sure student voice is at the center of our decisions from the most macro level part of our institutions to the classroom, to the most granular level of what we do on our campuses and on our platforms, and you name it, every day.

I think if we genuinely see this as community and receive students as community and center their voice and their realities with our decisions day and weekend, semester and, et cetera and stay close to that, stay very close to that. That seems to be at the heart of it all because the moment that we move away from not listening to our students and their needs and where they are we're getting further away from being in service to them and true teaching.

And I think about Dr. Baber brought up Bell Hooks and her work teaching community, this is service, this is commitment, this is an act of service. And if we're showing up in an act of service to these students and these communities, we have to keep their voice at the center, which means their needs, their realities, et cetera.

Dr. Heather Shotton: And I'll just add onto that in connection to centering students, it also requires that we center the communities from which they come. How do we understand those communities? How do we understand the cultures and the needs of those communities? What are the cultures, the backgrounds and experiences that our students represent and how are we being responsible to and in relationship to their communities?

Dr. Lorenzo Baber: Yeah, and I think the third leg, so we have students, communities, and I would add again going back to structures at the community college. So, for example, making racial equity or racialized equity, a standing item in all conversations, in all meetings in all agendas.

Thinking about as you create new policies recalibrate existing policies, ask those questions. DL Stewart had a great piece in inside higher ed a few years ago about the questions that we need to ask, who's going to benefit from this? Who is going to be harmed for this intentionally, unintentionally? Even going back to who's in the room when these decisions are being made?

Those are all important, so I think if you put together students, communities, and organizations, I think that is in a way kind of a three-legged stool, if you will, to raise racialized equity. I think doing one of those things, or two of those things don't really push the needle. I think you have to do all three of those things and probably even more. But I think those are three that I would emphasize in this conversation.

Dr. Eboni Zamani-Gallaher: All right, so as we wrap up, there are various features of culturally sustaining programs and pathways. You all provided us some really good advice, in terms of what individuals can do to make a difference, how we should foster culturally responsive educational practices irrespective of the educational tier or whatever our sphere of influence is.

And so, as we close and think about again, problematizing guided pathways, thinking through the various features of culturally sustaining programs and pathways. And again, within the credential attainments process of how we can hold one another, ourselves individually, as well as our institutions accountable for said practices that are culturally sustaining. Are there any final thoughts you care to share as we close today's conversation?

Dr. Lorenzo Baber: I'll just say that I don't want to dismiss the initial steps that folks in states and organizations are taking towards this effort. I want to make sure that we acknowledge that but just challenge them or challenge all of us to continue to move forward and think deeply about these things beyond kind of, these high-level moments. I think it is really what...it's a huge challenge, but I think it really is what's the thing that will move us forward at least closer to

what our goals and really our mission and our values are in terms of community colleges. That anyone, anytime, anyplace, anywhere, has access to their dreams and realizing their dreams through the community college. So, that's how would end my comments.

Dr. Eboni Zamani-Gallaher: Dr. Williams, any final thoughts? Parting words?

Dr. Ereka R. Williams: Well, just I guess to double echo to Dr. Baber's comment there that, these spaces genuinely should be for all. And you know, hats off to my colleagues in this space that are set in on these paths to do something different. I look forward to seeing where this goes in the future and very thankful that they're engaging in these processes. So, lots of work to do and I wish them the best in it and here to support it. So thankful for it.

Dr. Eboni Zamani-Gallaher: Dr. Shotton, the last word.

Dr. Heather Shotton: That's pressure. I'll just add here, I think that what we have to remember is that we have both an opportunity and a responsibility to do things differently and I think if we can keep that at the center of our work, that we can do things differently, that we can upend structures that do not serve the majority of our students and that create barriers for minoritized students.

We have both an opportunity and a responsibility to create those changes and to do things differently. And I think the last few years have demonstrated to us that we can do that. And we have to, I think, hold onto what we've learned and carry that forward with us as we're thinking about serving minoritized students and always centering those responsibilities.

Dr. Eboni Zamani-Gallaher: Thank you for all the pearls of wisdom, the mic drop moments that you all have provided us today. Again, I want to thank, special thanks to Dr. Williams and Shotton and Baber for this conversation about moving beyond diversity toward racial equity and pathways. Again, it’s not a one and done, but is very dynamic and fluid and ongoing. And we encourage you within your respective sphere of influence to continue the dialogue, to have the difficult and the very necessary conversations and to keep race centered because it matters more than ever. Thanks so much.