
Consulting about Challenging Behavior, the Role of Adult Perception





Hello!

Learning Objectives

- x Participants will gain an understanding of the role and impact of bias in educator practices and early education settings.
- x Participants will become familiar with strategies and tools to confront their own biases and potentially biased practices.
- x Participants will consider how to apply tools and strategies within consultative relationships.



Session Norms

- **Feeling challenged** is frequently part of the growth process.
- **The goal** is not to agree -- it is **to gain a deeper understanding**.
- **Self-reflection** is the first ingredient towards growth and change.

1. Young Children's Challenging Behavior



Typical Development and Challenging Behavior



- x Biting
- x Aggression
- x Defiance
- x Tantrums

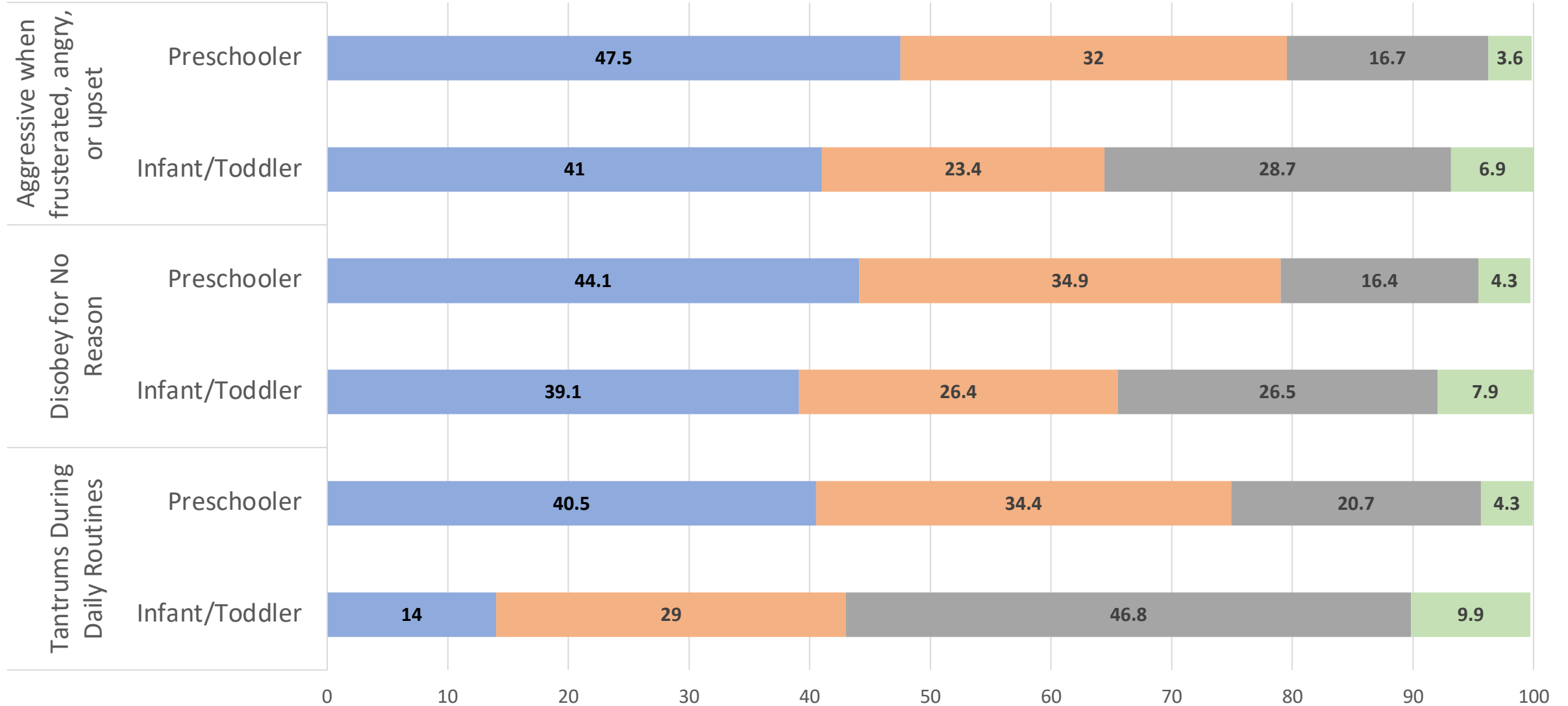
But are these developmentally inappropriate? It depends!



Challenging Behaviors

Biedzio & Wakschalag, 2019

■ Never ■ Rarely ■ Weekly ■ Every Day or More



Even normative behaviors can be very
challenging.

Relational Impacts

Challenging behavior is linked to:

- x Negative attributions of young children's behaviors interfere with early childhood educators forming strong relationships (Trigg & Keyes, 2019)
- x Failure to recognize mental health, and trauma (Egger & Angold, 2006)
- x Executive functioning skills (Kuhn et al., 2021)



Early Childhood Educator's Most Reported Challenging Behaviors

- X "Defiance"
- X Injuring others
- X Manipulation
- X "Defiant behaviors, physical attacking others, showing no remorse."
- X Head-banging
- X Lying to get out of trouble or to get others in trouble
- X Blatant disrespect



All Behavior Has Meaning

2. Adult Perception



Evaluating Behavior

- x Perceived competence
- x Systemic supports
- x Impact on the classroom
- x Prior experience
- x Ability to consider the child's perspective
- x Adult bias



Why Does Bias Matter?

- x We all have them
- x We are all influenced by biases
- x They have been shown to influence educator's perceptions and actions



Adult Perception and Bias

- x Data on school discipline clearly demonstrates that Black preschool children are far more likely than their White peers to receive out of school suspensions and expulsions (US Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 2014).
- x Walter Gilliam and colleagues (2016) demonstrated that adult racial and gender biases were clearly part of their decision making when evaluating young children's behavior.



Adult Perception and Bias

- x Adult perceptions and biases have been linked to practices in early childhood education settings (Allen et al., 2021).
- x "Adultification, perceiving a child as older and more mature, and anger bias, perceiving anger where it does not exist, are two phenomena disproportionally imposed on Black children compared to White children" (Cooke & Halberstadt, 2021, p. 1416).



Relational Impacts

Young children may engage in challenging behavior because they **need connection** and **adult attention**, but labels given to these behaviors (e.g., defiant, bad, stubborn, etc.) suggest adult tendencies to assume young children can change these behaviors if they choose



Teacher-Child Relationships

For children who were perceived to have more behavior problems, teachers report:

- Higher levels of conflict in relationships (Hamre et al., 2007; Nurmi, 2012; Rudasill & Rim-Kaufman, 2009)
- Less teacher-child closeness (Nurmi, 2012; Zhang & Sun, 2011)



Teacher Treatment Towards Students

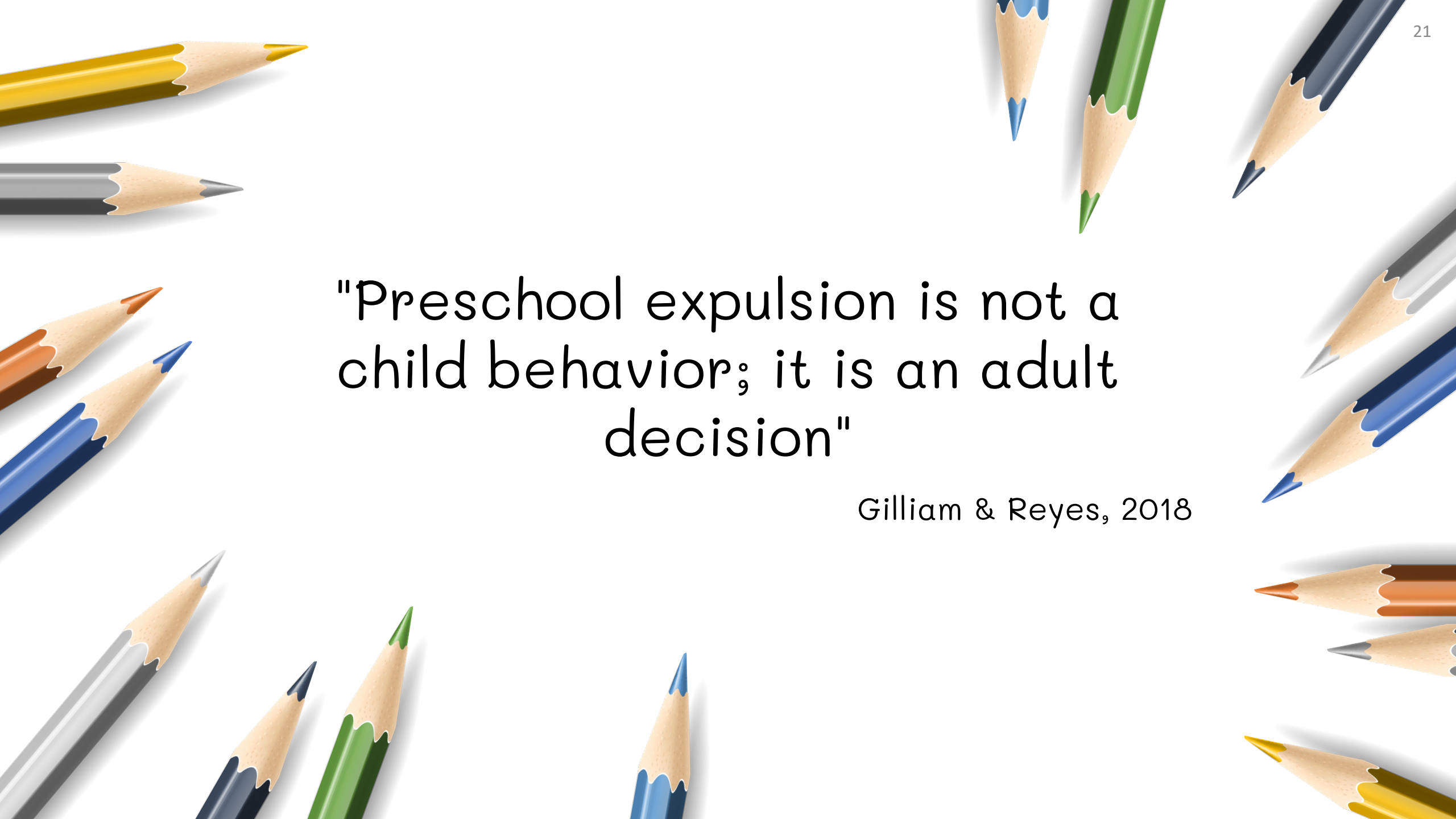
- x Dobbs and Arnold (2009) found that teachers gave more commands to children they perceived as having more behavior problems.
- x Teachers' perceptions on child behavior problems was associated with teachers' negative affective responses. This was mediated by teachers' mental representations of their relationship with the child (Evans et al., 2019)



Harsher Discipline

- Teachers tended to practice harsher discipline with children who exhibited disruptive or aggressive behaviors (Chen et al., 2018).
- Gilliam & Reyes (2018) found that the tendency for a preschool child to be expelled was based on these factors:
 - Teacher's perception that the child's behaviors are disruptive
 - Teacher's fear of being accountable for the child's behaviors that may cause harm to self or others
 - Teacher's perceived level of stress caused by the child's behavior



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"Preschool expulsion is not a
child behavior; it is an adult
decision"

Gilliam & Reyes, 2018

Racial Disproportionalities

- x Black children are more likely to be suspended from school or receive harsher punishments than White children (Gopalan & Nelson, 2019; Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015; Riddle & Sinclair, 2019).
- x White teachers were more likely to have lower behavioral expectations for Black preschoolers; whereas Black educators held higher behavioral standards for this same group of children. (Gilliam, 2016)
- x Goldberg & Ikura (2022) found that teachers reported more conflictual relationships with Black boys compared to other boys, as well as more close relationships with White boys compared to other boys.



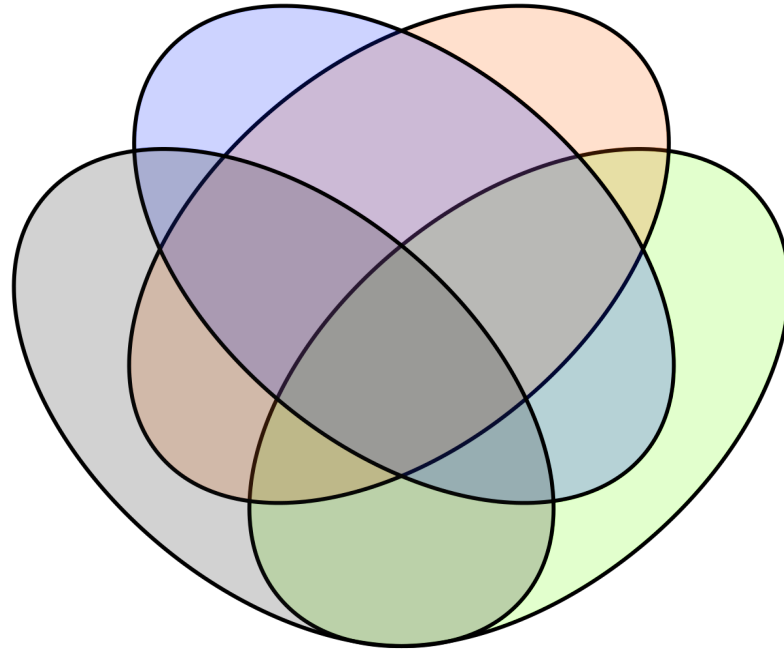
Racial Disproportionalities

- x Black children who were perceived as nearing-adolescents were misperceived as angry at a greater rate than their white counterparts (Cooke & Halberstadt, 2021).
- x "Black children have been 18 times more likely than White children to be sentenced as adults rather than children in the justice system" (Poe-Yamagata & Jones, 2007).



3. Consultation





The Intersection

When Adult Bias Meets Young Children's Challenging Behavior



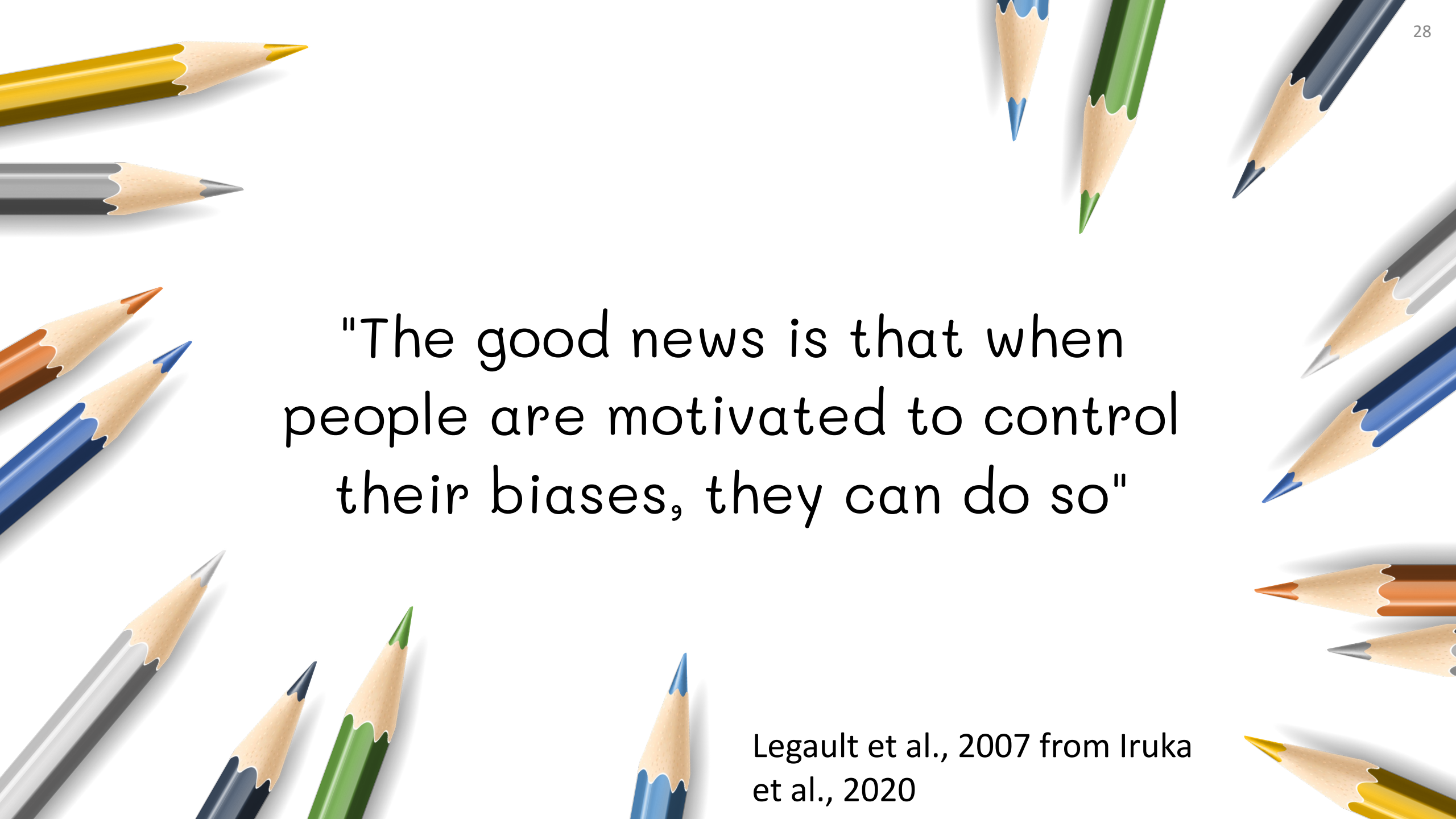
Addressing Children's Behavior

- Consider root causes
- Change the environment
- Address skill deficits
- Build adult capacity
- Use positive behavior supports
- Provide/connect children to mental health supports

But ALSO...consider the role of adult perceptions

Confronting Adult Perceptions

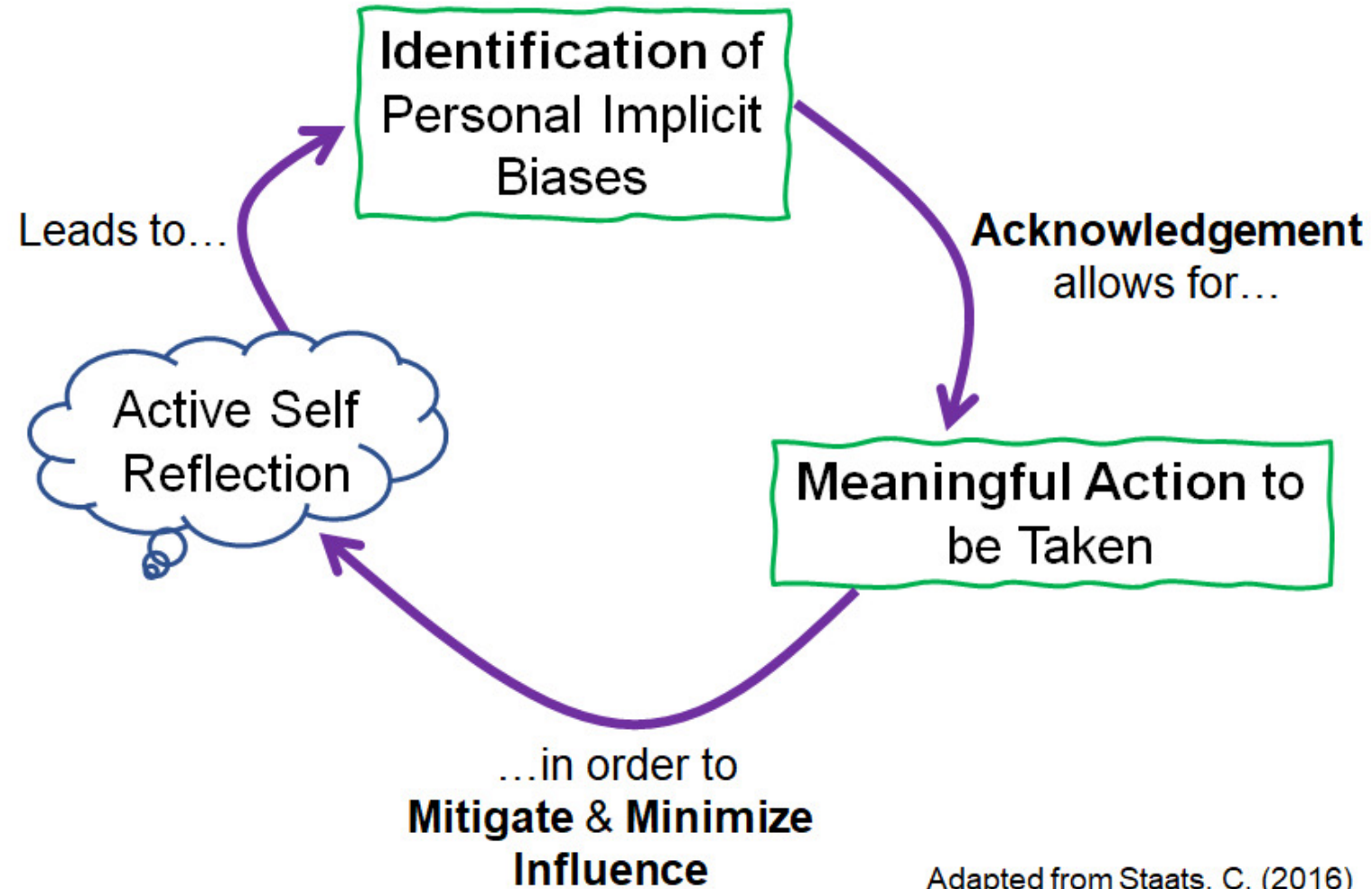


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"The good news is that when people are motivated to control their biases, they can do so"

Legault et al., 2007 from Iruka et al., 2020

Self Reflection



Adapted from Staats, C. (2016)



Think about the Systems



Classroom

- ❖ Engagement
- ❖ Discipline
- ❖ Evaluation

School

- ❖ Office referrals
- ❖ Special education/gifted education
- ❖ Culturally relevant practices
- ❖ Representation
- ❖ Home-school collaboration

District

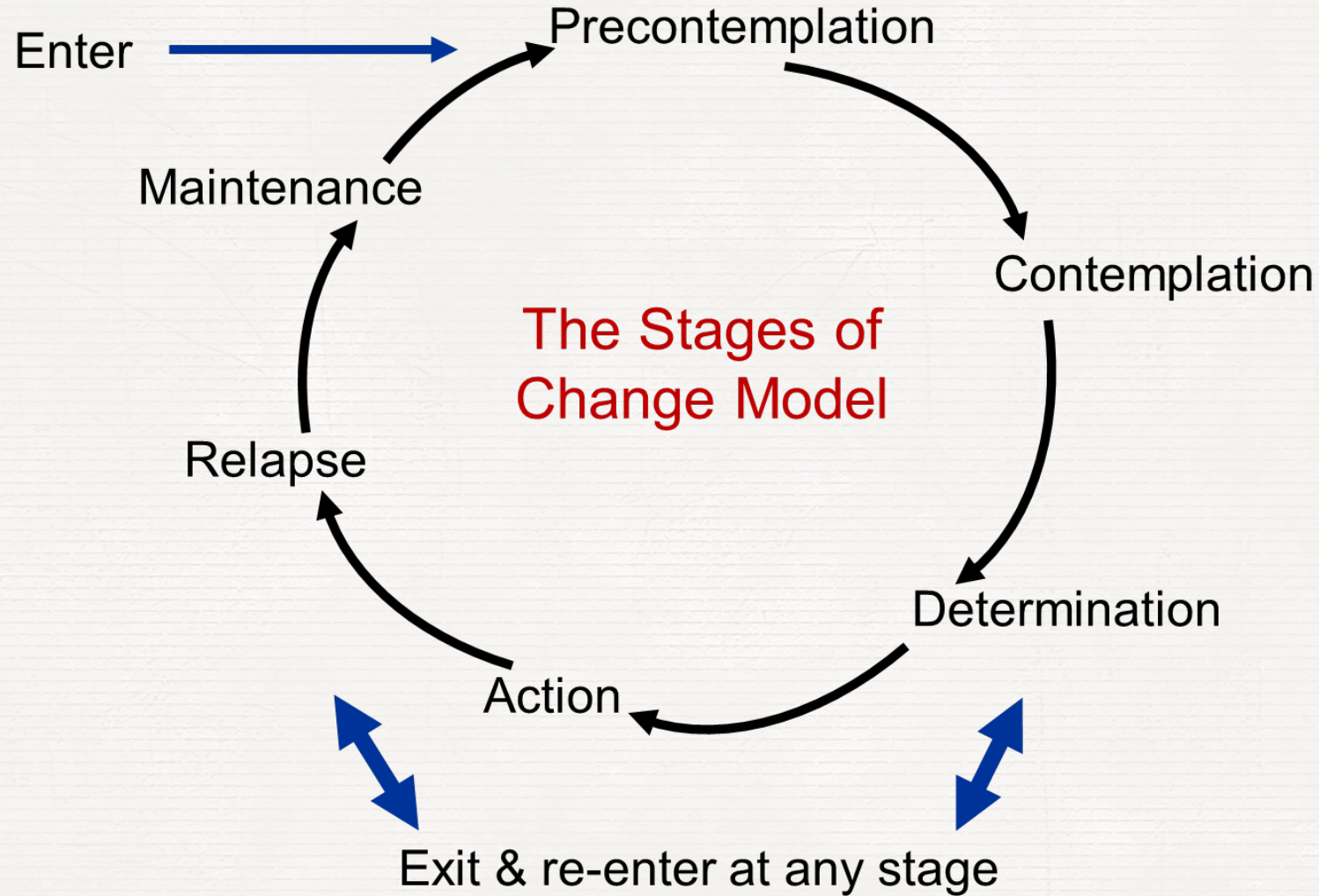
- ❖ Discipline/restorative approaches
- ❖ Special education/gifted education
- ❖ Culturally relevant practices
- ❖ Representation

Key Beliefs

- x All children can succeed
- x Strong and affirming relationships
- x Excellence includes recognition of diversity and individual difference



Consultation: Meet People Where They Are At



Pay Attention (and Draw Attention) to Language



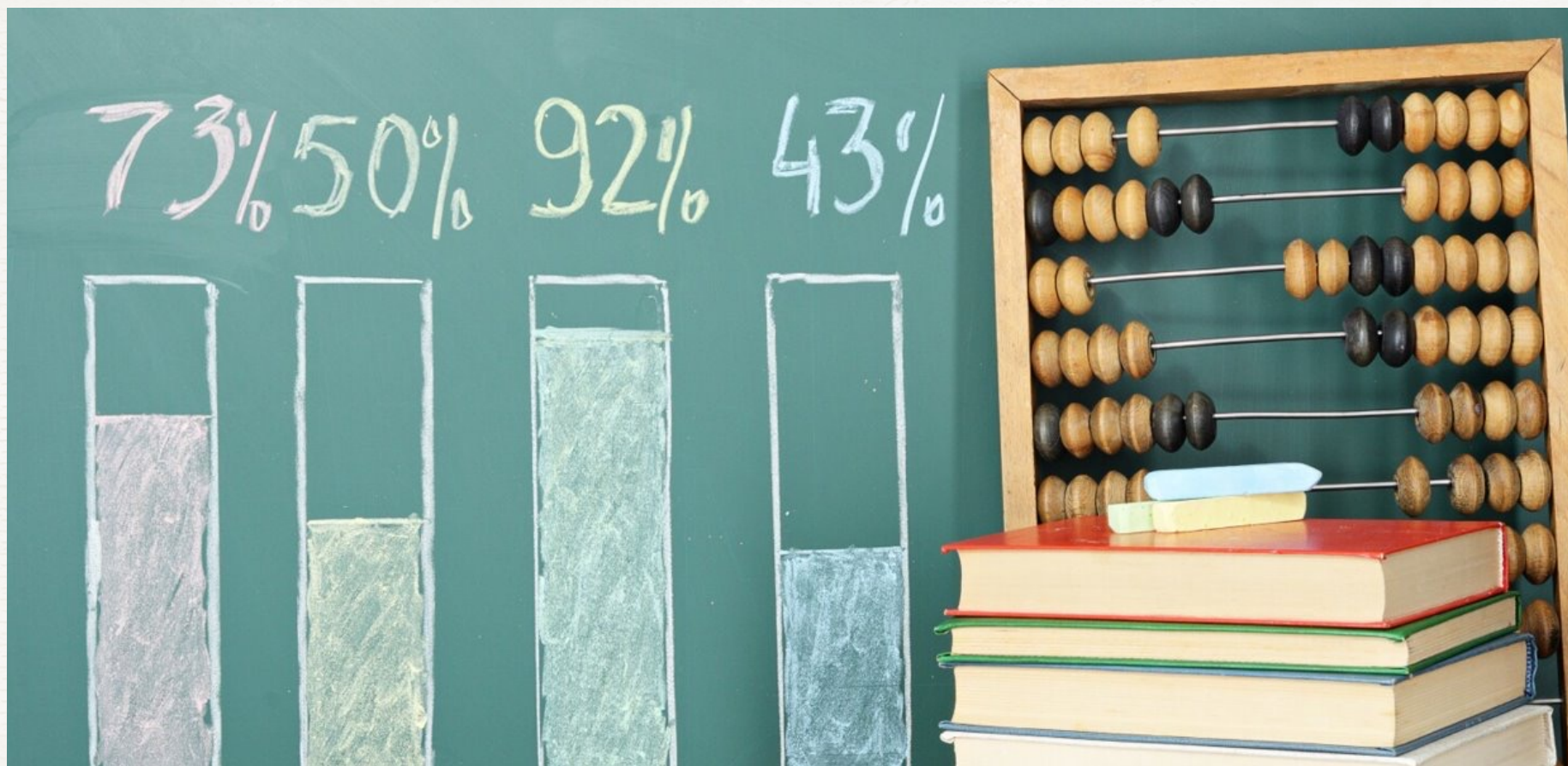
Language Patterns and Meaning

- What words do people use?
- Is their language coded?
- Is there consistency or inconsistency across students?

Intervene carefully:

- Why did you choose those descriptors to describe that student?
- What is your evidence that the student is willful/defiant/etc.?

Share the Data



Careful Questioning

We cannot always change bias, but we can help others recognize their biases

- Offer alternative explanations
- Use open questioning
- Lean in to the "wondering stance"



Consider

A first grade, 6 year old, Biracial boy who is new to the school. The class and school demographics are about 70% White and 30% Black. The teacher is White. The student has a history of trauma, including foster care and multiple caregivers.

Early in the school year the student begins having big behaviors that frequently require moving other students out of the classroom (e.g., turning tables, throwing chairs). Academic performance is not a concern.



Consider

You consult and put some positive behavioral interventions in place. However, it quickly becomes clear that the teacher is not able to implement them with fidelity.

By about six weeks into the school year the school team is talking about another placement for the student.



Consider

What are some possible sources of bias—implicit or explicit-- in this scenario?

How might you help the school team recognize any biases that are showing up?

What are some possible ways to intervene—either earlier on or once a change of placement is being considered?



Consider

How might your perspective or approach shift if you learn that the school has a history of pushing boys of color out of the classroom?



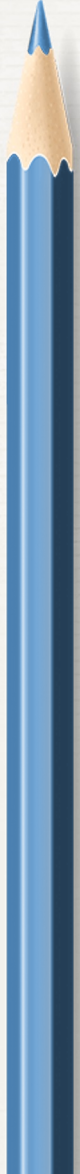
The Long Game



Selected Resources

- x Girvan, E.J., Gion, C., McIntosh, K., & Smolkowski, K. (2017). The relative contribution of subjective office referrals to racial disproportionality in school discipline. *School Psychology, 32*(3), 392-404.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/spq0000178>
- x Iruka, I. & Curenton, S. (2020). *Don't look away: Embracing anti-bias classrooms*. Gryphon House.
- x Michael, A.S. & Penick-Parks, M.W. (2017). *The guide for White women who teach Black boys*. Corwin Publishers.
- x Williams, J.M. (2018). *Unconscious bias: An educator's self assessment*. https://marylandeducators.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Toolkit_UnconsciousBiasSelfAssessment_Rebrand_8.18.21.pdf





Thanks!

Any questions?

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