Simply the Best: Increasing Achievement, Engagement, Belonging, and Joy

[Pamela Donaldson]

My name is Pamela Donaldson, and I am the director for Facing History’s Office of Equity and Inclusion. I'm so excited to be in this space with each of you for this webinar, entitled Simply the Best, Increasing Achievement, Engagement, Belonging, and Joy with our guest speaker Dr. Nicole West-Burns. We have a short housekeeping clip for you to watch before we begin.

Welcome to our professional learning webinar. Before we get started, we'd like to run through some important items to help you engage with the webinar. We invite you to join us on social media and tweet about this webinar using the hashtag #FHONLINE.

Please select the Captions button to access the live captions of today's conversation. If you have any questions throughout the webinar, whether for our presenters or for our team, such as a technical issue, please use the Questions window. The most common technical issues are no sound or a frozen screen.

If that happens, please try refreshing your browser. You can also find the resources we will be discussing today in the Resource List. Please feel free to access these resources at any time during the webinar.

And now, on to your facilitator. Thank you for joining us. And we hope that you enjoy the webinar.
Welcome back. Facing History staff have heard from so many educators and school leaders seeking resources and support as they shift from how they engage young people academically while being sure to center their students’ social emotional needs. Our organization continues to rise to this challenge. And many of those educators are with us today.

If you are a returning Facing History educator, please place an exclamation point in the chat. Welcome back. We also have educators currently attending our three-day Teaching for Equity and Justice Institute. If you are one of those participants in our institute, please place a plus sign in the chat. Thank you.

Are you new to Facing History? Just put down new and let us know that you’re here. However you enter this space, we would love to welcome you.

Since 1976, Facing History has been providing professional development for educators to build relationships with students so that together, they can make connections between history and today. We know the power of using culturally relevant and responsive materials that celebrate our students' unique stories. And we believe that schools are microcosms of democracy.

What better place is there to create active and engaged young people to take on the world than our classrooms? I am happy to introduce our guest speaker Dr. Nicole West-Burns. Dr. West-Burns is an experienced professional development consultant whose work focuses on educational equity issues.

Major components of her work include supporting the pedagogical framework of culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy, utilizing critically conscious practitioner inquiry as a process for school and classroom change. Presently, Dr. West-Burns has been leading professional learning within several school boards.
focused on antioppression and equity, including specific work focused on challenging anti-Black racism in education.

So we are happy to have Dr. West-Burns with our community today. And join me in the chat box in welcoming Dr. Nicole West-Burns.

[Nicole West-Burns]

Thank you so much. Good morning. I was getting ready to say afternoon, but it is still morning, 11:35. So good morning, everyone. I’m so very happy to be with you today.

I’m going to go ahead and get my slides going and get us in because this next hour is going to fly by. And here we go. So thank you, everyone involved here at Facing History for inviting me to be with you, the folks who are making this happen, making this platform run right, providing all the tech support.

Seriously, I could not do this without you. So thank you, Annie and Zawadi and Aaron and Alyssa. And a very special and extra thank you to the person who just introduced me, reached out to me to be involved in this event. My host, Pamela Donaldson, thank you again for inviting me to share some thoughts with you today.

A part of today's session will involve building some knowledge and involve logic. A part of it will involve some lightness and levity and maybe a laugh here and there. But it will always be focused on centering love for my people in all the ways we exist, centering love for all humanity, and love for justice.

As we begin, Facing History is recording this, and so this will be available to you after this event for a set period of time. However, I do ask that there not be any
individual video or audio recording. And I also respectfully ask that if you take any screenshots for your own reference, that you do not share them or post them on social media.

As we begin today, I would like to acknowledge the land where I am located. I live in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. So a shout out if I've got any other Canadians in the space with us.

This signage here that I'm sharing with you was created as a part of an awareness campaign by the city of Toronto a few years ago as part of something called Toronto For All initiative. Working in conjunction with Indigenous groups, they utilize the city of Toronto Land Acknowledgment that I will share with you today.

I acknowledge that I am today on the traditional territory of many nations, including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishinaabe, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee, and the Windhoek peoples, which we know is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples. The sign goes on to read that by personally making a land acknowledgment, you're taking part in an act of reconciliation honoring the land and Indigenous heritage, which dates back over 10,000 years. So I ask as we begin, do you know whose traditional land you are on?

Do you know the history? Do you know the truth? Well, here's a resource that I sometimes share that might be helpful if that's some information that you are seeking. It's called Native-Land.ca.

It's an Indigenous-led organization with a mission striving to create in foster conversations about the history of colonialism, Indigenous ways of knowing, and settler Indigenous relations through educational resources, such as this map that you see here. This is a really cool site. When you go to it, you actually can move
around the world and see all of the traditional lands that we know exist that we are not often taught about.

It is a living document growing with contributions from folks around the world, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous. And so I ask you as we think about the land, where were you born? Where did you go to university or college?

Where did you start a family? Where did you vacation? Do you know whose traditional lands you were on? Do you know today where you are, where you live, work, love, and learn? Please take a moment to reflect.

In addition, I would like to also share with you the city of Toronto's Confronting Anti-Black Racism Unit African Ancestral Acknowledgment. The city of Toronto acknowledges all treaty peoples, including those who came here as settlers, as migrants, either in this generation or in generations past, and those of us who came here involuntarily, particularly those who were brought to these lands as a result of the transatlantic slave trade and enslavement. We pay tribute to those ancestors of African origin and descent.

As I do my work around anti-Black racism in the Canadian context and work with school boards across Ontario, what many educators have not known and do not know is that enslavement of African peoples was a legal instrument that helped fuel colonial economic enterprise here in Canada. It lasted from the early 1600s until it was abolished in 1834. And so what we know is for a little over 200 years, a little over 200 years, Canada was involved in what's called the transatlantic slave trade.

And within the country's borders, people were bought, sold, and enslaved. So this African Ancestral Acknowledgment, it offers a point of reflection on the past. It
provides a context for the present challenges faced by Black communities here, and it supports a desire for a hopeful future for people of African descent.

In this way, this acknowledgment, it's not just about honoring the past, but also about recognizing the legacies of that past, the continued struggle of people of African descent for freedom, justice, and enjoyment of collective and community well-being. These two acknowledgments that I've shared here, they honor two distinct, though interconnected peoples, histories, and commitments to justice.

And as we all know here, we must tell the truth about the past. Chief Justice Murray Sinclair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Canada and others stated this years ago. We cannot have reconciliation without truth.

We know that there are attempts to bar, block, and ban truth in our schools. These efforts are ever-increasing. And all the while, we know we are ever resisting. We are doing what we know we need to do. So let's go. Simply the best is where we're headed.

So I know when some of you saw this title, you probably thought of this queen, this icon, Anna Mae Bullock, also known as Tina Turner. And I'm sure all of us know that she recorded a song called The Best Affectionally, also known as Simply the Best, in 1991. She was born in 1939 in Brownsville, Tennessee, recently becoming an ancestor just this past May, last month, May, 2023.

She was the first woman, a Black woman, to be on the cover of Rolling Stone Magazine. And she gave us five decades of heart and passion in her rock, in her R&B, and in those performances. Proud Mary, keep on turning. Yes.
But I didn't get the title of this talk today from her song. It actually came to me when I heard a song by this group along with El Alfa and Anitta last year, and it was called Simply the Best. See, one day, I got in my car, and I plugged in my Apple phone.

And Apple CarPlay said, playlist for Nicole. And I said, oh, Apple CarPlay, what do you have for me? And I decided I'd listen, and this song dropped.

We're going to take a listen to the beginning. I don't want you to think. I just want you to feel this music. So, DJ Facing History, I'm going to turn off my camera. Let's have some music.

Was that not simply the best? I know you were chair dancing, just like I was. All right, let me get back into my slides.

So yes, I had found a new workout song. But at the same time, I'm always thinking about my work too. So I thought, what does simply the best mean tied to my work in education and educational equity?

What does it mean tied to your role as an educator? How do we create simply the best for our students, for our communities we serve, for ourselves as educators in a community together? So going back, thinking about the land and the history and the legacies, thinking about for whom the current systems were built, for whom they benefit, who is erased, who is considered disposable, who is not centered, who is not valued, whose ways of being, knowing, and doing guide us because that's how it's always been done. And they destroy us at the same time.

Who is not respected in the fullness of their humanity? So simply the best, what would it look like as we think about the students in our school? What might we
consider as we think about schools where Indigenous students, Black students, students whose families experience poverty, students with challenges tied to ability, 2SLGBTQIA+ students, students who are multilingual and come in our schools with a first language other than English, students for whom these systems were not built, were not considered, but had every right to be and to thrive? For them to come in schools and say, this is simply the best, what we're doing here, what we're learning here, this place is simply the best, what does that require of us?

So in this talk, I know many of us, we are engaging in these kinds of conversations in our schools in Canada and the US. I know these are priorities that I have listed here in the work. I've heard more people talking about joy more recently. I've heard folks talking about continuing.

Again, we still too often see these disproportionate outcomes and disparities. So we're talking about raising achievement and eliminating those outcomes. And we say we want engagement for all students, and we say all students belong.

I've actually seen banners in schools. They create banners. Spend lots of money, lots of money on banners that say, all students belong. And I say, really? Because when we look at some of the quantitative and qualitative data, what it tells us is a different story, right?

And so to engage in these things, it's not just a declaration of what we would like to have. But the question becomes, what are we doing? What are we enacting? What are we changing to create these truly equitable environments honoring our students' humanity and working for justice?

So as we look at this list, what might we consider to try to create simply the best on these different fronts? So in this session, I'm going to share with you some of my
thinking, but I'm also going to amplify some of the work of the greats, like this one right here, the brilliant Dr. Gholdy Muhammad, folks who have taught me, folks who can teach all of us, folks who are bringing things to the fore, things that can help us to build our knowledge, our critical consciousness, allow us that space for self-reflection.

What might we do to create simply the best? Well, Dr. Muhammad in her work says, we got to go back. Like the Sankofa bird, we got to go back. She pulls from the work of Black literary societies in the 1800s and explores what they did and talks about these five pursuits, identity, skills, intellect, criticality, and joy.

She talks about their work. And she invites us to think about and explore, what did they do when they came together to build themselves in their pride, grapple with the issues of the world, learn about the world, center identities, build their skills as thinkers, writers, orators, and find joy in their lives, communities, and families, all while facing the oppression that we know that existed? She offers this as a framework for thinking about, how do we fully educate students today?

In an article that she wrote called "12 Questions to Ask When Designing Culturally and Historically Responsive Curriculum, she asked the question, how will your instruction spread and amplify joy? And what she says is that joy is something that is key because it's often neglected. As we prepare teachers and sustain their hearts for this work, teachers deserve joy in so many ways so we can give joy to our students.

It's very difficult and one may argue impossible to give something you don't have. It's especially important to include joy when teaching about Black, Indigenous, and people of color as the world has not centered and started our narratives of genius and joy within these groups of people. Typically, when teachers teach about Black,
Indigenous, and folks of color, it falls with a narrative steeped in pain, struggle, and oppression only. And that has the potential to become that single story, which can strip children of their self-worth.

She goes on to say that joy is needed to balance criticality and help cultivate a child who's happy and feels empowered in the classroom. So I ask you, tied to Dr. Muhammad's brilliance there, tied to what she suggests, how do you hold up that mirror to yourself? How are you bringing your joy so you can give joy?

What is an educator that you do that brings you joy? How can you show up to be your best self, your most full and positive self? What is a self-care strategy for you?

So for me, one of my ways to self-care-- and I say one of my ways to self-care from a few years ago because that's what we're going to talk about, how it started-- a good documentary. Now, I'm not anti-documentary now, but let me explain a little bit. In 2019, I did this thing called the TEDx.

And I think most of you here-- many of you here may have seen that. And my topic, as it often is, was related to equity in education. And I was asking and trying to answer the question, what might it look like to have these truly equitable educational systems, something we might dream about, we've never had?

And so I spoke about and asked questions of, how can we consistently be building our knowledge, raising our critical consciousness while we do the same for our students? Not falling back on ways we've always done things that cause harm. And so again, at that point in my life, in order for me to self-care when I just wanted to relax, I would watch documentaries. I know I'm a big nerd. I accept it.
And so I connected these three documentaries to my work. The first one Limitless about a group of women in India who started a running club. The next one, Breaking Habits, about some self described anarchist-activist nuns growing cannabis and giving it to people for their health benefits. And Game Changers, looking at the benefits of a plant-based diet for elite athletes.

These are all great documentaries. You should check them out. But that's not where I'm going. I want to speak about the titles. And that's what I did. I spoke about them as connecting to this work we do.

Limitless, how we must see our equity work not as a quick process, not as a check-off. I know people ask for lists sometimes. What can I check off? No, we cannot think about it like that. It is much deeper. Check it, done, and we move on. Mm, no. We got to commit long haul, no time frame, limitless.

Breaking Habits was about, how are we going to go against the grain to do the work we need to do? And sometimes that means breaking the habits of the things we've always done. And Game Changers, what do we really need to do to change the game?

Well, documentaries were looking good to me in 2019. And then, well, we know COVID. And then we know so many issues in the world. And then we were out of school. And then we thought we were going back to school, and then we were still out of school.

And everyone was pivoting to virtual. And it was all a lot. It was a lot. And I was in need of something different. Documentaries were too real, too much life. I was tired, overwhelmed. My head hurt. My heart hurt.
The consummate learner in me just needed to find an escape, so I found some new shows. Don't judge. 90 Day Fiancé. 90 Day Fiancé: The Other Way. And then inevitably, when those relationships did not work out, 90 Day: The Single Life.

Now, this is a pretty accurate picture of how many of those stories ended. At one point or another, this is what it looked like. In 2018, Merriam-Webster added dumpster fire to their dictionary, an utterly calamitous or mismanaged situation or occurrence, also known as a disaster. So I thought for this talk, I don't think I can make my 90 Day shows connect to my work because dumpster fire is not where we're going in this conversation. Scratch that plan.

As a social scientist, I am always looking for connections, seemingly unrelated things that actually could be connected. But I knew my 90 Days weren't going to work. So I started to think about, what were some other things that I've binge watched in the streaming world, some things that created a space for me to carve out, carve away, a space for self-care so that I could create that space for my own joy?

Is there anything I might have seen that could bring more value, more hope in this conversation? And I discovered a few things that I'd watch that maybe could work. And I did what I do. I made some new connections.

And so here's the first one, Grey's Anatomy. And I connected Grey's, this show, one of my shows. It's been on and off for almost two decades now. And I thought I would connect this to raising achievement and eliminating disproportionate outcomes.

Now, if you know the show and the character's already in your head, you're probably thinking, oh, Nicole, I know where you're going. And certainly, Grey's does
show us achievement, representation, and excellence across categories where we know it exists. And we need to see more of it across race and gender, sexuality, ability.

And that's not the story I'm going to share here. So we all likely know that Grey's Anatomy is an American medical drama. Premiered in 2005 on ABC. Oh, sorry about that.

Now, in season 19, those of us who are fans are waiting for season 20, which it was just announced in April that it's coming. But what some of us might not know about Grey's Anatomy is that this show in its first pitch to another major network, not ABC, it didn't get taken up. As a matter of fact, this show, the executives who ran that network said it was unrealistic. People won't watch it. It's not reality.

And so Shonda Rhimes kept shopping. She kept shopping around for a network to bite. And she eventually pitched to ABC. And, well, the rest is history.

In retrospect, Rhimes said that she later realized why her first pitch got such a reaction. She stated she was told by a room full of old men, her quote, "that no one would watch." No one would watch women and 2SLGBTQIA+ folks owning their own sexuality. No one would watch doctors of color all in a room running a hospital. You go, Catherine Fox.

No one would watch. And we're talking about Black doctors with nobody having to qualify or co-sign their work. Ha, were they wrong. And Rhimes goes on in this 2022 article to say, "You didn't see a lot of things that we were doing. And I didn't really think about them as being revolutionary. I thought, like, we're just making a show that I want to watch."
But what we know at this point is that Grey's Anatomy, like it or not, is considered to have had a major influence on popular culture over the last 20 years. The show has received numerous awards, including Golden Globe Award for Best Television Series Drama and a total of 38 Primetime Emmy Award nominations. So what I'm going to connect to here is that sometimes, when we create something new, new ways, new methods, new innovative things, we're told don't fit because many people are holding on to the ways we've always done it, to the images they've always seen, looking for the same old, same old when new possibilities are endless, and creative genius is out there every day, well, we have to be willing to let go.

We have to be willing to see it. We have to be willing to try a new way. So as we focus on raising achievement, eliminating disproportionate outcomes, what and how are we filtering? What are we assessing?

What are we making space for? What are we willing to try? Are we seeing the value and the genius in front of us or are we like those executives at that first network, missing out on something great?

I share this other example tied to this point. This was from a podcast with Brené Brown. Many of you might know about Dr. Brené Brown's work. Well, she invited her sister Dr. Sarah Lewis on for her podcast. Dr. Sarah Lewis is an associate professor of history of art and architecture and African and African American studies at Harvard University.

And she wrote a book called The Rise: Creativity, the Gift of Failure, and the Search for Mastery. Now, I heard her talking about on this podcast. And she shared one of her stories from her text about Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.
Now, apparently, this great orator who we all know struggled in the seminary in terms of grades. I know you're probably sitting there thinking, how can that be? Because I was sitting there thinking, how can that be? This man who went on to make speeches like I Have a Dream and I've Been to the Mountaintop, speeches that we know helped to do what he would call bend the moral arc of the universe.

Well, according to Dr. Sarah Lewis's work and documented on his transcripts-- and I had to do a deep dive and find these transcripts-- Dr. King averaged a C in public speaking on an ABC pass-fail scale. And you're probably still sitting there saying, what? How can that be? I'm saying the same thing.

Well, he went on to graduate with honors, and his grades did improve. And Dr. Lewis positioned this question to talk about the greats in the world who've experienced failure and found the space to shift, if you will, to use the, quote unquote, "gifts of failure" to help them take the next step. But she also offered what I immediately thought when I heard this as a possibility is, well, what did his teachers miss? That was his genius. Was it too new, too odd, too whatever to be understood, too out there, too Black liberatory to be lauded?

They labeled his innovative style is lacking not quality. We knew it was monumental, historic, and literally life changing. So how do we challenge ourselves not to miss the genius? How do we challenge ourselves not to miss the genius of the students sitting in front of us every day?

So how can you challenge yourself in this way, challenge yourself to be part of conversations and change work that will have the potential to raise achievement and eliminate disproportionate outcomes? Sometimes, this will require you to have a courageous conversation to disrupt a pattern you are seeing, a policy, practice, or
procedure that is not equitable and is harming students. Sometimes, it will require you to speak up, to intervene, to say and do something others may not say or do.

And in the words of Desiree, to do this work, sometimes you just might have to be bad, bold, and wiser. So another show that looped me in, You Don't Know Me. And I connected this one to engagement. Now, if you haven't seen this show--it actually first aired on BBC--this story, ooh, is a lot here.

It involves a relationship. Those are the two protagonists there, Hero and Kyra. There's love, what you think is betrayal, a plot twist, a court case. So much going on. I'm not going to spoil it for you in case you want to watch it. But anyway, You Don't Know Me stood out as I started to think about our engagement with our students.

We can't engage students if we don't know them. So we must know our students to create which will truly engage them. If we really don't see our students in the fullness of their humanity, who we truly are, and value that, we will not be able to engage them because then we really don't know them either. So before we focus in on our students and our work as educators, I want us to think about what we each see when we look at our students.

And I want you to engage in this activity. You can put responses in the chat if you like. We're not going to take it up in that way. But I want to ask you, what do you see in these pictures?

So we have two flowers here, one on the right, one on the left. They both have an orange circle in the middle. If I were to ask you, which one has the larger circle in the middle? Some people might say the right. I always say the right. Some people might say the left. I never say the left. And some people say they're the same.
Well, guess what? They are the same size, but I never see them as the same size. And I do this activity all the time. They're the same size. What about this one, math or physics? Math is always jumping out to me. Math is the book closest to my face.

And people say, Nicole, how can that be. It's physics. No, it's math. No, they all ain't looking right. What about this one? This simple line drawing called Mother, Father, Daughter contains the faces of three people. Do you see all three faces?

Ooh, it's a tricky one. Let me help you. Look at the noses. Bottom right is the nose of the father. Bottom left is the nose of the mother. And center left is the nose of the daughter. Do you see all three now or does it just look like a bunch of play-doh? That's what I'm thinking. Just somebody had some fun with some play-doh there.

How about this one, right, the elephant? Look at all those legs. Now, if I had that many legs, I'd try to close my little circles on my watch. Some of y'all might have that watch, try to closed circles or get your 10,000 steps. We would be good by 9:00 AM if we had that many legs.

But you might be thinking, Nicole, the elephant has four legs. What are you talking about? And do we see me or do we see you? Do we see evil or do we see good? How about this one? This is one of my favorites. ScienceBob.com, another resource.

Do you notice the small grayish dots between the black boxes? They're not really there. They're not part of the drawing. They're put there by your brain. It's called visual vibration. That's what scientists call it.

And basically, it means that when you see patterns of black and white, your eyes confuse the two and blend them into patterns of gray. So we are actually seeing
something that isn't really there. And lastly, do we see the profile or the front view? For me, it vacillates. I'm going back and forth. Oh, I can't look at it anymore.

But what I'm going to say is this. Those are optical illusions. I'm not an expert in all that. But what I do know is that our brains are always trying to make sense of what we have in front of us. And by taking this idea further into our work, some of us are going to see things differently.

When we look at our students, do we see the achiever, the artist, the academically at potential instead of that horrific moniker that I still sometimes hear educators using? And I hope no one on here uses it, that idea of, quote unquote, "at risk." Can we honor all aspects of our students' identities? In order to engage our students, we must see them for who they are, all of who they are, and we must value that.

Villegas and Lucas in their book, Developing Culturally Responsive Teachers, discuss something called sociocultural consciousness. How we see the world, our worldview is shaped in large part by our own identity and life experiences. So we have to unpack that. It creates a lens for our understanding. When we look at our students, who they are, and what do we see? And what does that mean then for how we engage them and what we engage them with in our classroom and schooling spaces?

Sometimes, I think and I hear about people talking about being nice and kind. And I think nice and kind is good. We want to make sure that all of our students feel included. And nice and kind is good, but it is insufficient. It is the least that we can do.

In defining caring for students of color, Sonia Nieto in 2009 told us nice is not enough. And here, she is speaking about students who come to school with a first
language Spanish. But we can think about the many ways in which this intersects with many identities of the students we see in our classrooms.

So we must understand that if we are really truly doing anti-oppression work, it requires more than nice and kind. As she says, "A warm, friendly, helpful teacher is nice, but it isn't enough. We have plenty of warm, friendly teachers who tell the kids nicely to forget their Spanish and ask Mommy and Daddy to speak to them in English at home, who give them easier tasks so they won't feel badly when the work becomes difficult, who never learn about what life is like at home or what they eat or what music they like or what stories they've been told or what their history is.

Instead, we smile when we give them a hug and tell them to eat our food and listen to our stories and dance to our music. We teach them to read with our words and wonder why it's so hard for them. We ask them to sit quietly and tell them what's important, and they must to get ready for the next grade. And we never ask them who they are and where they want to go."

Caring within a structure plagued by inequality takes multiple forms. And at some moments when we think we are caring for students, we got to ask ourselves, are we actually harming them because we are failing to counter for a social structure of oppression that is actually engaging students in ways that are harmful to their humanity.

Another genius that I'll share with you today, the work of Dr. Alfred Tatum and his most recent text, Teaching Black Boys in the Elementary Grades. His work offers us a model to explore supporting young Black boys as scholars, supporting them in multiple ways. So as we think about this idea of engagement, how are we thinking about engaging them? He notes his program was designed as a program to
challenge and interrogate oppressive norms, low level basic teaching that does not engage Black boys that we too often see in educational spaces.

He encourages us to think about intellectual and textual feasts. He discusses disciplines that creates space for relevancy--not often how we think about it, cultivating engagement intellect, asking us to think about how we're connecting our students to these bigger ideas and understandings of the world. Not simplistic monolithic notions of relevancy or relevancy only tied to one way of looking at identity, but relevancy connected to many things, many things students might be curious about.

What is their math identity, their science identity, their literary identity? He invites us to think what do they wish to be smarter about. When we create that intellectual space, we create a space for engagement.

And so we have to think about our plan for them. He says that means we go in with a plan. That means we go in with an ideology. And so from his book, Reading for their Life, I share with you a poem he wrote called Ideology by Dr. Alfred W. Tatum.

You know, it strikes me there's no ideology when it comes to educating me. You would rather I read Shakespeare for the sake of Shakespeare's survival not my own. I want to survive, too. Shakespeare and I can coexist if you insist.

But help me understand that I exist in this coexistence. Fight for my right. After all, I'm still alive. Shakespeare's dead. You know that, right? I'm not even sure if he cared about me the way you want me to care for him.
Will he help me get off the block? I'm not convinced he's the answer, in part or fully, to the social ills plaguing young Black brothers. But I will read and take a knee if you give me a chance and show me how.

I care about love, but I want to be loved, too. It's hard to read about love in a loveless environment. I don't care who is writing. Your imprints upon my psyche are just as real as the imprints on the page. I cannot pay attention to one while you expect me to ignore the other.

So when it comes to educating me, strengthen the ideology. The next time someone wants to water down the curriculum and have me read some bull, stand on top of the table and shout, hell no. Let them know I'm someone's child.

When it comes to educating me, strengthen the ideology. Three final phrases to help you in this plight—fight for my right to be, fight for my right to be, fight for my right to be. Just fight for me. Every time I fight, I seem to get in trouble. Fight for me. Shape a positive trajectory, please, Shakespeare.

The brilliance of Dr. Alfred W Tatum. And so I ask you, as you think about your students, if you really know your students, to engage them, to fight for their right to be in all ways, shapes, and forms. What is shaping your ideology?

On the topic of belonging, we move on to The Queen's Gambit. This was a good watch. Orphaned at the age of 9, prodigious introvert Beth Harmon discovers a masters the game of chess in the 1960s. And Mr. Shaibel right there pictured there with her, the caretaker at her orphanage, he taught her the game. And he guided her and he believed in her.
And so the movie goes on and shares Beth's life, lots of challenges. She's the only woman in the room at times competing at top levels. It's a good watch, as I said. But it also made me think about belonging.

How do we create a sense of belonging, all spaces for all of our students? So in my work, I think about disrupting the stories we hear and the stories we know about who belongs in what spaces, who sees themselves as belonging. So educators here, how are you creating a space to push back to dominant narratives about who belongs where to create counter narratives that disrupt status quo?

So we must think about what does belonging mean for those who face oppression be it by class, religion, gender, ability, race, sex. What must we do? Well, have to understand first what oppression is and how it operates. And what we know is that oppression is prejudice plus power. It operates on multiple levels. And I appreciate Young’s definition that it reduces the potential for all people to be fully human.

And so I like to share the power triangle to make it clear that our work must address this at all three levels-- at the individual level whether it's intentional or unintentional. At the level of ideologies, those cultural prevailing ideas in our society, those stereotypes and prejudices, we must address. And the policies, practices, and procedures that are systemic, we must address. And we always must understand that intent does not equal impact.

And so how do we counter oppression as we create classrooms for belonging? We've got to think about who is in the room. And I borrow that title from the work of Julie Bisson featured in Derman- Sparks and Olsen Edwards text, another great resource-- Anti-Bias Education for Young Children and Ourselves.
Now, it says young children and ourselves but I kid you not. K to 12, we can all learn from that text. And in this Who is in the Room, it's focused on a list of questions, asks us to think about how do we plan for who is in our room, how do we set up our classrooms, to honor some ways of being knowing and doing, some ways of birth some ways of living, and others not so much.

So take a minute now and think for yourself. Think about an elementary classroom, an early elementary classroom maybe where you were in, and ask were you in the room. Did you feel comfortable? Did you feel cared for? Did you feel safe?

Did you see children and adults who look like you and your family represented in the learning materials and decorations? Where there art materials in your skin tone were you encouraged to reflect yourself? Were there props that enabled you to act out stories from your home? Were there books with main characters like you?

Did the school celebrate the holidays of your family? Did you hear the music you hear at home? Did snacks and meals include foods from home? Did the teachers speak your home language? Did you see reflections of your family structure, daily life, the neighborhood in the learning materials and curriculum?

Now I know for myself, some of these are yes and some of these are no. And how many of your students would answer with no to how many of these questions? And so when we think about belonging, we must think about what school is like every day for some students.

And at the height of COVID, the executive director of Being Black at School asked this question. Dr. Kelly Wickham Hurst asked, what if quarantine homeschooling is better for Black children? And she asked this question because we think about the violence to identity that happens sometimes in school. Now acknowledging that
schools can provide safe spaces at times, schools can provide meals, mental health supports programs that we know are valuable, social connections that we know are valuable.

And at the same time, the argument that Dr. Wickham Hurst made is that some students may feel safer every day not being in school because we must acknowledge the trauma and horrors that can exist by physically being in a building with cultures of racism, colonialism, classism, heterosexism, Islamophobia, anti-Asian sentiments as well, ableism. We could go on. We know it's out there.

So she suggests that it may have been a better experience for many students not to be in school when, in fact, these are some of the things we're facing. It's not a simple being in school is better for all of our learners, again, recognizing that certain things are provided. Because often, when they're in school, they're often not in the room.

And so I go back to the movie The Queen's Gambit. I go back to this idea of counter narratives. I'm going to stick with chess, for example, for a moment. And I'm going to ask us to think about an article by Maya A. Jones a couple of years back where she highlighted these 17 and 18-year-old Black chess masters, James Black Jr., Joshua Colas, and Justus Williams.

For those of you who are NBA fans, Williams said, for the record, I'm like the LeBron of chess. Colas is like the Curry of chess. And Black Jr. is like the Paul George. But he said he was making a comeback.

When we think about belonging, we think about faces of representation, these aren't the faces we get to see typically. But they exist. And they create a counter-narrative that is important for Black students, and it's important for everyone.
This resource, The Chess Drum created by a professor at Florida A&M University, highlights chess activities within the African diaspora. Do we know it? Do we show it? As we teach about who belongs where, we also got to make sure we're teaching about the trailblazers to show the intellectual legacies, to think about Dr. Lisa Delpit's work with intellectual legacies of our students.

Do we know the intellect they come from? This is Jamaican American Maurice Ashley born in St. Andrews, Jamaica. He became the first Black Grandmaster at age 33 in 1999. And recently, we've heard about Rochelle Ballantyne here, this 26-year-old law student who is on the quest to be the first US Black woman master.

In the 2022 article in Black Wall Street Times, she concludes by saying, it's because I'm Black and a girl that people think it's impressive. But it's not. I just love this game. And there are other young people out here like me who are good at it, too.

So how do we share these stories that create the counter narratives that show our students that they all belong so that they know that if I can see it, I can be it? That's what challenging dominant narratives does.

And lastly tied to belonging, I share the brilliant work of Dr. Cynthia Dillard, Learning to Remember the Things We've Learned to Forget, Endarkened Feminisms, Spirituality, and the Sacred Nature of Research and Teaching. This educator and researcher describes the power of our energy. And I invite us to think about that as we think about our work daily.

In a segment, a passage in this book called To Change the Energy in the Room, she's discussing a friend of hers who actually had a stroke. And she wanted to help her friend, so she ordered a book that had been written by a brain scientist who'd
also had a stroke and then wrote about it. And so the author of this book that she's describing became nonverbal after her stroke.

And so I'll share a snippet from this narrative of Dr. Dillard describing what had happened. It says she was unable to use her voice to speak. She found herself being much more attuned then to energy, sensing rather than always speaking, when a person entered the room, particularly the nurses.

She could sense whether the nurse was present to her as a patient or was thinking about getting off early from work or another problem. She could sense the nurse's disposition in how she would hand her food on the tray or in how the nurse pulled the blinds and how the nurse listened or not what she was trying to communicate. She could simply feel the energy of the nurse.

Mostly, she could feel whether the energy of those around her assisted in her healing or literally made her sicker, whether it served good or served to bring negativity or grief. So she asked someone to make a sign to post over the door to her room. And it simply said the following. Please be responsible for the energy that you bring into this room. And she goes on to say, and that is how we might look at the profound work of being teachers.

So what energy do you bring? Is it as Dr. Yolanda Sealey-Ruiz discusses an energy that demonstrates critical love, which she defines as an ethical commitment to the communities and students you serve? Is it an energy of care?

Is it an energy I got you and we’re going to get through this together? What is the energy you bring? As we think about building communities of caring in our classrooms, how might we think about our collective energy together to transform and change and create that space where all students feel they belong?
And the late great Toni Morrison once said this brilliance as well. When a child walks in the room, does your face light up? That's what they're looking for. Seemingly small things can create a huge energy that says to others you belong. So educators here, how do you foster teaching and learning environments to tell your students they belong, belong in any space they may enter, belong in any room wherever they choose to dare to dream?

And coming back to joy, my last show is a Canadian show, a Canadian movie called Keep Breathing. It follows Liv Rivera, a no nonsense New York City lawyer whose plane crashes on its way through the Northern territories in Canada. Lost in the woods with only the clothes on her back, Liv must look deep within herself and her past to find the strength to survive.

Now you are probably sitting there thinking, Nicole, how in the world? Like, you've made some connections. OK, I'm going to acknowledge that. But how in the world are you going to connect this to joy? Well, OK, I'll be honest. I'm really not. It isn't about joy. But I did get stuck. It's connected. I'm going to go there.

I did get stuck on the words keep breathing. I was stuck on this concept of keep breathing. And it reminded me of the brilliance of Dr. Bettina Love's book. Keep breathing, just survive was what she was trying to do.

But we know we've got to do more than that. If we are really going to find joy, we must do more than mere survive day to day and the same for the students. So collectively, how are we setting up the conditions?

Along with the scaffolds for high academic achievement, removal of disproportionate outcomes, we must create spaces where students can see all
kinds of possibilities and opportunities. We must know who our students are so that we can engage them and create those counter-narratives, share those counter-narratives, not box them off on what we believe is relevant only for them, relying upon simplistic notions of identity and not accounting for their intersectionality.

As Dr. Christopher Emdin once said, we must not bend to ordinary when our students' lives are extraordinary. And so as I reiterate the words of Sonia Nieto, nice is not enough. If we're truly going to create spaces for authentic connection and advocacy for students who face marginalization in our education systems, we have to acknowledge that oppression and we have to fight back to it.

Being nice and kind is good. But our students that face barriers need nice, kind, and equity and justice. So how are we thinking about serving them especially for the ones for whom the student-- the systems, excuse me, have not worked? Think of these questions. And think of these questions asked to you by them.

Do you welcome and honor my identity? Do you help me see myself in positive ways in the curriculum and in the overall school environment? Do you push against stereotypes that might guide your actions? Do the issues of the world that impact me and my family matter to you, too?

Do you recognize the barriers I face and not approach me from a place of pity from a partnership rooted in critical social justice? Are you working to be better, to be better every day? Are you caring for yourself and finding joy so that we can find joy together?

Nora Allingham, 1992, the former director of the Anti-Racism and Ethnocultural Equity team at the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, reminds us that we
must think about all of these things. She says children learn from what surrounds them, not just what the teacher points them to.

So the curriculum is the textbooks and the storybooks and the pictures and the seating plan and the group work and the posters and the music, the announcements, the prayers and the readings, the languages spoken in the school, the food in the cafeteria, the visitors to the classrooms, the reception of parents in the office, the races or race of the office staff, the custodial staff, the administration, the displays of student work, the school teams and sports played, the clubs, school logo or emblem, the field trips, the assignments and projects, the facial expressions and body language of everybody, the clothes everybody wears.

It goes on and on. She then says, I would not, for a moment, suggest we can control all of this. But we better be aware of it. We can be sure our students are. And then she says, I have no intention, even if you had time, of giving you strategies of how to cope with everything. But if we don't start thinking of what the effect of all of this is on all of our students, we will never develop strategies that will work. Thank you, Nora Allingham.

So as Dr. Alfred Tatum says, the work we do, it's not just about education, learning, and literacy. It's about our students' lives. And because of that, he stated he will not be an accomplice to basic. And so I ask, will you?

So at this point, I'm going to actually move us now into an activity as we talk about--as I talked about sandwiching in joy, starting with joy and ending with joy, I'm going to move this into a quick activity that I hope you'll engage with me in the chat. And I'm going to share this activity with you. It was shared with me.
And it's an activity to help remind us of the ways in which we might self care. Self care is important for us as educators in our daily work. As folks who are striving for change, as folks who are doing this, as my mama calls, the heavy lifting every day all the time, we got to make sure we're taking care of ourselves.

So I share this activity with you. It was created by a friend of mine at one of my stores, Dr. Rhonda F. Ballard, clinical psychologist. And it's an activity that I got to do with her pretty early in COVID times when things were-- people were really starting to talk about how do we take care of ourselves through all of this.

And this is something that she created and she gave me permission to share in my work with educators because it's so important that we, again, are taking care of ourselves and finding those ways to affirm ourselves and reminding ourselves of those things that validate and comfort and enhance us versus those things that are distressing and destructive and invalidating.

So what I'm going to ask you to do is get a piece of paper, or you can use your phone or your computer. You don't need-- you can have a pen or pencil. If you have an index card, that's great. And we're going to think about some categories.

And don't put anything on the card yet. I'm going to show you what it looks like. And we're going to think about people and ancestors. We're going to think about places. We're going to think about some things and we're going to think about behaviors.

So I'm going to stop sharing my screen. I'm going to come back. I'm going to talk with you about what each category is. And then as you write down responses, I'm going to see if anyone would be willing to put some of these ideas in the chat and share. So I'm going to pop back out now.
And I'm back in. All right. So the first category, let's see. Oh, no. I made the chat super big. I don't know how I did that. Oh, I'm making it super small again. OK, I can see it.

The first category, everybody, is where we're looking at people are ancestors. So whose shoulders do you stand on? Who gives you strength? Who's reminding you of who you are and allowing you to have the energy to show up and do what you need to do? So who are those people? Who are those people that you call upon?

Who are those people that enhance, that empower you? When you're with them, you don't feel like the air is being sucked out of you. When you're with them, you feel like you're like blown up. You're big. You come away feeling stronger? So who are some of those people? Let's see if we can get some folks to put some things in the chat.

And you can name people personally. You can think about-- so I got my secular saint candles here. I always think about the energy and the spirit of Harriet Tubman, James Baldwin, and Toni Morrison. It doesn't get much stronger than that.

Who are those ancestors whose shoulders you stand on? So let's put some stuff in the chat. Let's see what we got. So I think I made my screen super big and I got to scroll back down here. All right, so enter any reflections.

Fannie Lou Hamer, thank you, yes. Tina Turner, Dolly Parton. And these can be famous people. Maya Angelou, for sure, my dad, grandparents. Thank you, yes. I stand on the shoulders of both my grandmothers, one who grew up with privilege and one grew up in poverty.
Oh, it went too fast because they're moving. My first principal, OK. Yeah, yeah, yeah. We're getting some great ideas in here. Keep them coming. These people that have been so important in our lives, right?

I can think about my partner, Aisha. I think about my daughter. I think about-- I mentioned some of those ancestors there. All right, here we go. We are-- Gloria Gaynor. So we are adding them in.

So we can see all of these people, these people that remind us of our strengths. So when we're feeling low, when we're feeling like we need a lift, how do we call upon their love, their energy, their care, something to remind us, something to remind us of who we are and the strength we bring and what we can do?

All right, the next one-- I see we've got a lot of good ones in here. Mi abuela, my abuela, great. We've got a lot of great ones in here.

Let's move on now to places, those places where you feel comforted and rejuvenated, those places where you feel mentally and physically and spiritually safe, those places where you might not be able to go because I know I wish I was on that beach right now and I can't go there. But sometimes, I might need to envision that.

What are those places? So I see we're still on people. I love that y'all got a lot of people. This is great. Let's get on to places. I don't want them to cut me off. You know my time's coming.

Anywhere in nature, among the birds. Yes, Paris. Anything-- and I know nature, the beach resort. And you know what? It can even be a place in your house. Like, I have a special seat, you know. I sometimes share it.
But do you have your My Seat in your house? My sofa, my spot? You know those are always good. And a good book, that's a good place. Praying the rosary, a book. Yeah, lake, library. Oh, I know water is so healing.

So some of the-- corner of the couch. All right, I get you. I'm with you, Daniel with the corner of the couch. That's me, too. All right, thank you everyone for sharing these. The mountains, lagoon, Big Sur. Ooh, OK. Lots of great ideas-- stadiums. Oh, nice.

All right, let's go to the next category. And these are things, so things that have been a special meaning to you. Maybe it was a special gift, a family heirloom, maybe some fancy shoes. I have a friend who's got a shoe thing.

Maybe it's your gardening tools, plants, nature. What are those things, those things that you might have that make you feel special? Actually, this top that I'm wearing was given to me by a former student. So this is something that's very special to me.

So what are those things that you have that they fill you as well? They bring back a fond memory or make you feel good. Music, for sure. When I have the Black Eyed Peas, we couldn't play that at the top of the session just because of the way this format works. But starting, thinking about bringing music into our classroom spaces, starting our school day with music-- really powerful.

I see so many wonderful things, blankets. I hope I can get to read these later because they're moving so fast, I can't keep up. Whale butter dish, piano, my husband's sweatshirts, my grandpa's frog collection-- how wonderful. All right, those are all great.
And now, let's move-- grandpa's suspenders? OK, let's move into behaviors. I love it. I love it all. So these are the things that we do in our lives that are productive, enhancing, empowering, relaxing. So what are some of those things for you? Is it taking a nap? Is it going to yoga?

I see we got a couple of yogis. I'm a yogi, too. Yoga's one for me. I also go to what my daughter calls old lady water workout, which is actually Aqua Fit. No shame in my game. But what are those things those behaviors that help you? Journaling, gardening, yes. Yes, reading, walking the dog. Zumba, I used to do Zumba. Lovely, lovely.

All right, wonderful. Look at all these wonderful things. Gym, naps, gardening, yes. So I think about this. You can keep going. Hula, oh, a hula hoop. I forgot about that. It's been a long time. These are great-- crossword puzzles, binge watching. I know, right? You know I'm guilty of that.

So what I'm going to do, you can keep going in the chat. I'm going to go back up and I'm going to go back into sharing my slides so we can wrap up because we just have a few minutes left. Thank you everyone for participating in that. And I hope you found some joy as you engaged in thinking about those things, taking care of yourself and filling your cup.

All right. So again, you could have this in any format. And I think about creating one. I seriously think about creating one and putting it here on the wall in my office so that I can always remind myself know when I kind of come on and I need that strength and I do. I call upon the ancestors. And I think about these things very consciously and very intentionally so that I can get myself to that place to show up and do what I need to do.
So thinking about this might be just one way of self care. But certainly, it might be a way that could be helpful for you. And so you can have your card and you can fill it in like I did with all of those things that are important— the people, places, things, behaviors, et cetera.

My mother had said, are you really going to tell people you watch that 90 day stuff? I said mama, it's OK. They won't judge. They won't judge. We're all family.

So as we wrap up here, everyone, thank you again for your participation. And as we think about these things, doing these things, engaging in these things, we must think about what are we doing to change them. We can't simply say, this is what we are doing. We have to think about the actions that we are taking. We have to think about the ways in which we are moving things differently because that is what is required.

Engaging in the ways in which we've done these things, we know students have been left out. We know students have been harmed. We know they have been based upon systems that were about hierarchies and power and division. And that is not where we're going.

So as the Black Eyed Peas and El Alfa and Anita and the queen, Tina Turner, told us, simply the best is what we're going for. So educators, take care of you. Continue to be part of creating change that is simply the best for your students and yourselves. And with that, I will stop sharing. And Thank you, everyone, for your participation today.

[Pamela Donaldson]
Wow. Can we show Dr. West-Burns some love in the chat? What a powerful, powerful and inspirational talk. Dr. West-Burns has given us. So much to sit with and reflect on and also lean into. So thank you so much, Dr. West-Burns, for taking the time to speak to our community.

And thank you for the participants who decided to come today. It's your summer and you decided to spend this time with us. Please continue to engage with Facing History. We have a number of webinars and professional learning opportunities coming up.

And also, connect with your local regions if you're interested in learning more about our work. And most importantly, take care of yourself and find your joy. Thanks, everyone. Thanks, educators, and enjoy your summer.

Thank you. Thank you, everyone. Bye-bye.

Thank you for joining us for this learning opportunity. The resources from the webinar can be accessed from the resource list window. You will receive an email with links to these resources after the webinar.

Your completion of this webinar gives you one hour of professional development credit. And you can download your certificate of participation via the window below. You will also see a very brief survey. Please take a couple of minutes at the end of the webinar to fill out this survey. We really value your feedback.

We will keep the webinar open for the next five minutes so you can download your certificate, complete the survey, and open the resources. Thank you for joining us, and we look forward to seeing you at another online professional learning opportunity soon. From all of us at Facing History and Ourselves to you, take care.
Wherever you're joining us from, we wish you peace, health, safety, and community.

[MUSIC PLAYING]