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Rotterdam School of Management, Erasmus University, Netherlands

**WORKSHOP**

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TITLE: CHANGEMAKERS! ACCESS AND EQUITY IN OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME

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As per the EDI conference statement, “resistance and backlash to equality, diversity & inclusion have been notably growing in recent years. Resistance can manifest in different ways and on different levels. On the micro level, resistance manifests with the (non-) acceptance of social change by the individual. On the meso level the focus is on how diversity resistance manifests within organizational settings. Resistance on the macro level may manifest at the level of a wider discourse on issues around equality, diversity & inclusion, such as in the form of white male backlash. Lastly, resistance can be passive, hidden or active.”

The workshop that we propose for the EDI conference uses the above statement as a springboard to explore the roots of inequity and resistance to change in nonprofit organizations (NGOs). The workshop will present theoretical frameworks and “lessons learned” drawn from the experiences of practitioners at nonprofit youth organizations documented in the book, *Changemakers! Access and Equity in Out-of-School Time* (Hill & Vance, In press). In addition, two of the workshop presenters will further expand on these lessons via case studies of their own organizations and personal experiences working in nonprofits.

*Background*

A tenet of the Out-of-school Time (OST) youth field[[1]](#footnote-1) is that all youth deserve positive and engaging learning experiences. Organizations, programs, and professionals must respond to the existing and emerging needs of the increasingly diverse children and youth and the communities in which they live. Historically, the field has sprung from, and been grounded in, communities experiencing racial and/or economic inequities. Ironically, nonprofit organizations are often, (because of their paternalistic roots) grounded in a deficit view of the people they serve, and the field has yet to meet the needs of the most underserved communities (Hill & Vance, In Press, Afterschool Alliance, 2014, Dawes, 2018).

Equity and access are terms used too often without definition. We define equity as when young people have the tools, resources, and other supports they need to achieve desired outcomes such as self-sufficiency and well-being (Hill & Vance, Eds., In Press). Equity is often confused with equality, where everyone receives the same resources; however, a cookie-cutter set of resources is unlikely to meet the needs of all youth. We define equity in the youth context as the set of resources that helps to meet the unique needs of each young person (Hill & Vance, Eds., In Press). We define access to mean that programs are available in all communities and that youth and their families know about them.  Access also means that organizations are intentional about creating systems and structures to help youth and families enroll in programs, and, once enrolled, provide ongoing supports so that they continue to participate and thrive.

*Resistance*

Trying to understand the roots of inequity, and to implement change, typically gives rise to tensions and resistance, especially when organizations and nonprofit professionals try to engage all youth, notably the under-resourced and underserved - and when infrastructure, funding, and mindsets have not kept pace with the evolving needs of youth and their communities. The obstacles to social change are manifold -- including roadblocks created by funders via the grants process (Fabiano, in press) as well as overt racism and unconscious bias manifested in a wide range of cultural practices and policies at organizations (McGee, in press, Sharpe, in press). The proposed workshop will articulate obstacles and resistance to social equity and provide “lessons learned” and recommendations grounded in theory and practice to promote and institutionalize change.

**Workshop structure/format**

1. Overview of the barriers to access and equity in the youth field. This overview will identify salient barriers to access and equity, including structural classism and racism, e.g., “creaming” for clients and participants with more resources; inequity structures embedded in the funding and re-application process, and lack of culturally competent and/or ethnically diverse staff and appropriate professional development.
2. Case studies at two levels

*Individual/Micro level:*

Devan Blackwell, M.A. will speak on the emotional tax of racism in the workplace (Travis & Thorpe-Moscon, 2018). Emotional tax is “*the heightened experience of being different from peers at work because of gender and/or race/ethnicity and the associated detrimental effects on health, well-being, and the ability to thrive at work*” (Travis & Thorpe-Moscon, 2018, p.xx).

As the only male employee of color working in a large publicly funded organization with nearly one hundred employees, Devan will describe the multiple micro-level aggressions that contributed to his emotional tax. This included being told that ideas would “sound better” coming from someone else; being tutored on how to present, interact and behave in professional settings (the assumption being that he did not know); and being reminded by fellow staffers of color that he must be mindful of how he reacted to professional slights and workplace injustices for fear of being seen as “an angry black man” rather than assertive.

However, over the course of four years, Devan purposively took advantage of resources and opportunities that were available to him because of his employment at the agency, such as a competitive fellowship, which resulted in his acquisition of professional social capital (Hill, et al, 2018). This put him on track to become a more influential leader in the youth field. The lesson learned is that people of color who experience emotional tax in the workplace can, in spite of resistance, succeed and thrive professionally. They can experience difficult situations which foster purpose and resolve in the face of adversity. One recommendation is that being conscious of and prepared for, potential bias may help people of color to persevere, and recognize that the bias affecting them is external and changeable, rather than due to an inner flaw.

*Organizational/meso*

Ruth Obel-Jorgensen, MSW, is the Executive Director of the California School-Age Consortium (CalSAC), a statewide organization that builds professional networks that provide training, leadership development and advocacy to ensure that all young people have access to high quality out-of-school time programs and to create a more equitable future for the state of California. She will describe the equity practices employed by the CalSAC staff and board team, how they train and support others on these practices, as well as the resistance the team has experienced including: White constituents feeling upset and excluded about the focus on leaders of color; Discomfort on the part of management with the explicit focus on racial diversity in recruitment and selection processes; People who have held leadership roles for years upset that the criteria was changed and now they are not guaranteed a position.

Ruth will share some of the most impactful and successful strategies employed by CalSAC, for example, facilitating leadership retreats for out-of-school time professionals that rely on and promote a multicultural approach to leading organizations, groups, and individuals.

3. Some solutions and recommendations

Addressing resistance to equity and access requires multi-layered solutions. Beginning with self, individuals must question their own implicit biases, strive to understand their own privilege and power, and gain tools and strategies to push back against oppression, especially when they are the target.

We cannot, however, rely on individuals to initiate this critical exploration and learning on their own. Organizations, particularly those that work with and on behalf of vulnerable populations, have a responsibility to assist their employees to develop a critical and reflective lens and to engage in equity practices. There are multiple pathways that organizations can utilize to achieve this goal. Organizations can begin by explicitly naming equity as a value. This sets the tone for current and incoming employees. Naming equity as an explicit value is not enough. It must go hand-in-hand with equity practices. Creating a *leadership-sanctioned* ongoing internal committee, such as an equity group, is one such practice. An equity group may be charged to examine the structures and mechanisms that may hamper access and equity, and provide suggestions and recommendations to make change at an organizational level.

Organizations can also develop professional learning experiences that will encourage employees to engage in critical reflection and exploration. For example, training on implicit bias, the use of inclusive language, or participatory sessions where employees discuss how the organization promotes or hinders equity and access. Most importantly, organizations need to create a safe, or brave, space for employees to talk about equity issues as they arise.

Each of these practices must be grounded in the lived experiences of the individuals that the organization serves. This requires organizations to seek a deep understanding of how participants experience systems, including their own. Brave spaces are thus needed for participants, and in these spaces, employees are there to listen and learn with open hearts and minds.

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1. In the United States, OST refers to afterschool programs, summer programs and any community-based work with youth (including youth experiencing homelessness, (un)employment, GLBLTQ issues, etc.). In the international context, the term most commonly used is “informal education” or youth work and is most aligned with the social work discipline. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)