



Wellness for Educators Webinar

Empowerment through Healing: Understanding and Responding to Race-Based Trauma in Education

Guests: Dr. Tia Madkins, Dr. Nicol Howard, and Shomari Jones

Recorded: 1-20-2021

Dr. Kathryn Kennedy: Welcome, everyone, to today's webinar and happy Inauguration Day. My name is Dr. Kathryn Kennedy and I am the founder and executive director of Wellness for Educators. We are a 501c3 non-profit organization invested in and passionate about supporting educators worldwide to be resilient. To do this, we share research-based trauma and equity-informed somatic practices and strategies for well-being and social and emotional learning such as yoga, mindfulness, meditation, qigong, spoken word, sound, art, and more. For those who are not familiar with areas of somatics, these are practices that integrate mind and body. You can learn more about us at well4edu.org. Today we're talking about empowerment through healing, understanding and responding to race-based trauma in education. And I am so honored and grateful to welcome our three guests who also serve on Wellness for Educators' board of directors.

First, we have Dr. Tia Madkins, who is an assistant professor in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction in the College of Education at the University of Texas at Austin. Her research focuses on supporting teachers to design inclusive STEAM and computing classrooms and engage equity-focused pedagogies with minoritized students, especially Black girls. Dr. Madkins taught PK through eighth students in southern and northern California prior to earning a Ph.D. in education at UC Berkeley. Welcome, Tia.

Dr. Nicol Howard is an assistant professor in the School of Education at the University of Redlands. She has served as co-chair for ISTE's Digital Equity Network, chair of the American Education Research Association's Technology Instruction, Cognition and Learning SIG, and co-

chair for the California Council on Teacher Education or CCTE Technology SIG. Her research focus are STEM and computer science education experiences for Black girls, technology integration in K through 16 classrooms, and teacher education. Her writing has appeared in ISTE's publications, the Corwin Connected Educators Series, and various educational journals. She is also co-founder and co-editor for the Journal of Computer Science Integration. Welcome, Nicol.

Shomari Jones serves as vice chair on our board and he is the Director of Equity and Strategic Engagement at Bellevue School District in Bellevue, Washington. He leads staff in thoughtful exploration of institutionalized racism and its impact on student learning, and mentors students to raise their social awareness and help them feel more connected and engaged in the district and their communities, which has resulted in a community-wide conversation bringing to light racial and socioeconomic inequities. He serves as a powerful advocate for and witness to the experiences of students of color to help district leaders identify, confront, disrupt and dismantle structures that limit the potential of those students. He developed several student empowerment initiatives, like Students Organized Against Racism or SOAR, Breaking Out of the Margins or BOOM, and Sistahs Having Outstanding Uniqueness Together or SHOUT, as well as parent advocacy groups like the Parent Alliance for Black Scholars. In 2019, Shomari was recognized as a "Leader to Learn From" by Education Week. Welcome, Shomari.

So, thank you all so much again for being here. Before we start our discussion, Shomari, Tia, and Nicol invited me to do a short grounding practice. So, you can do this standing up or sitting down, whatever is most comfortable for you. Once you are where you are comfortable, I invite you to close your eyes if that feels okay for you, or have a soft gaze. And you're welcome to turn off your cameras if you feel more comfortable doing so.

Place your right hand over your heart and let the left hand rest on your left knee, or your thigh if you're seated, or at your sides if you're standing. Begin by inhaling for a count of four. Hold the breath for a count of four. Exhale for a count of four. And hold the breath out for a count of four. This is also called box breath, also calm heart meditation. So, you begin by inhaling for a count of four, holding the breath for a count of four, exhaling for a count of four, holding the breath out for a count of four, and continue at your own pace for five rounds.

While you're doing that, I'm going to talk to you a little bit about what this practice is about. This practice is from yoga, which translates to to yoke, or to bring together, or unite. And what we're uniting in this practice is our body and our mind. Oftentimes we get so busy in our lives that we lose that connection between our body and our mind. We allow so many inputs into our lives that we forget about taking care of ourselves and creating the space that we need to go inward. And in yoga, and a lot of the practices that we do, we concentrate on going inward to heal ourselves. One of our biggest superpowers is to create that space. Yoga and meditation can also help us create a larger window of tolerance, so that we can handle the challenges that we face every day, no matter how big or small.

Continuing your breath where you are. And on your last breath, return to your natural breath. And just take notice of any changes in your body or your mind. Without judgment, just noticing.

All right. Let's come back together, breathing naturally, and getting ready for our discussion here. Thank you all so much again for being here. Nicol, Tia, and Shomari, I'm going to go ahead and start our questions. So, whoever wants to jump in first with these questions, feel free. So, first, could you describe your experiences with race-based stress and trauma in general, and in education specifically?

Dr. Nicol Howard: Sure. I can jump in. In general, I would say I have stories. I've got stories. And my stories go back to younger days, just being young. And, really, I'd say at a time when sometimes I didn't even realize what I was encountering, but I was internalizing much of it, and there were things that were said when you're young. And so, I think there's some overlap when you say in general, because thinking of when we're younger, we're usually in a school setting for a large portion of our day. And so, some of those experiences can happen in the grocery store or at school, and they range from hearing things such as you're so pretty for a little black girl. Statements like that that you then internalize and as a young child, you don't know how to respond. And I'd also say that racial discrimination that I've encountered in some ways as I was growing up led to disassociation. Having me want to step away from certain situations and become less vocal. And so, my experiences have brought me to where I am today in that I do speak up in those instances, and I know you'll ask us some questions later. And I can speak to some of the stories and things that I've encountered in environments that are not just education-specific in how I handled this situation, so I can offer some strategies. But I'd say those would be in general. So, in general, the experiences led to some dissociative behaviors, and then I had to reverse those behaviors and learn to be much more vocal.

Shomari Jones: I'd love to piggyback on that, Nicol. Thank you for the offering. I think that this is a very-- it's a great question for especially those of us of color to reflect upon, because for me, not until I began intentionally seeking to eradicate challenges for students that I serve, that I get to the point of self-reflection all the way back to what Nicol is referring to. To a time frame of when those very same oppressions were bestowed upon me by others. And I will say that one of those things that is really challenging-- it's a challenge to our education system now. It's a challenge to the people in it and the white people in it, is this indoctrination of teaching folks this wayward way of extreme whiteness, devoid of the contributions of and the greatness of people who look like me, which then in turn further invalidates my brilliance. And it causes me to perform in ways where I think that this is good enough because this is what people have told me is good enough because their expectations are less. And so, I firmly believe that there is a lot of experiences that we collectively have as folks of color and the experience of going through the traditional K through 12 system that have impacted us. And then they call it the gap. We didn't create that gap. That gap is put onto us by the lack of opportunity that we've been given as a gift from white people to be able to contribute in the way that we are fully capable of contributing. Tia?

Dr. Tia Madkins: I think, like both of you, I have lots of stories but I'm happy to share because I think that's one way that we heal, is by sharing our stories and talking through it. It helps us to process. I think, as human beings, one of the best ways we can process what's happened to us is to tell the stories. And so, for me personally, things that have happened to me. I'm constantly being racially profiled, even just in Costco the other day. I have lots of stories about that. Over the summer, I was racially profiled in one of our local grocery stores to the point where they accused me of stealing and came out to my car and demanded to see my receipt. And so, I do research in computer science and in tech and thinking about helping teachers and students to understand the ways that technologies can be racist and the ways in which they're created to do that, but also to track us, and so that experience was not lost on me. And I gave myself time and space to cry and to deal with it and then once I got myself together that evening, I typed up a wonderful three-page letter, and by the next morning had a response from the head of the research team there at that local grocery store and compensation for what I had endured. And so, I think that is not an uncommon story, though, unfortunately. In terms of education, uniquely, lots of things that have happened both that are stress-based, right, your need to perform. I taught in a school in L.A. where I was only one of two black teachers at the entire school and so I was constantly being watched in many ways. I know that's very, very common too, for lots of teachers. I even had a parent take her child out of my classroom once she found out that I was black. She had not been there the first couple of days of school and once she came to pick up her son herself and saw that I was black, the next day she was in the principal's office requesting that her son be removed from my class, and he was. And so, there are lots of instances like that. I'm happy to share more, but I'll leave it to others too if other folks want to jump back in.

Shomari Jones: I do want to jump back in really quickly because I think that this question is really one that we, as a community, need to discuss a lot further and it's unfortunate that we don't have the-- we're not all in the same space to be able to do so for an extended period of time. But I'm going to take from Tia's story and use that as an opportunity for self-healing, and also, once I get to a place of overcoming the instant shock of the consistency of this behavior, being one that I have to experience, then I have to ask myself, and I'm using Tia's story as an example here, what will I do with that and what's my responsibility? Because there are others this may happen to and because it happened to you, you've been the chosen one to take that and take from that instance and in some sort of manner similar to Tia, informing others through a three-page letter, taking that and empowering yourself to help to eradicate that for someone who is going to come behind you. And that's something that I feel really blessed to be a part of the employment that I have within the Bellevue School District and I also feel like it's a God-given quality that I have that I didn't ask for, but I got it and it's here and so now I'm going to do everything in my power to combat these experiences and to prevent others from having to have them.

Dr. Nicol Howard: I'd like to jump back in too because in listening to both of you, I'm thinking about-- I know we spoke to Gail Parker's book in the description of the webinar, and there's this story where she talks about, as a yoga instructor or yoga practitioner, so she went into a yoga class and there was like a certain position. I think it was called out and it was an insensitive

name used to describe the particular yoga pose and she felt some kind of way about it and so she took a moment to pause. She took a breath and as much as she wanted to say out loud why would you use that term to describe the yoga position. She waited until the moment was right and approached the instructor later and had a conversation one on one. But even a story before that she talks about how people who witnessed her confront the situation asked, "Did you need to call that person out and especially in front of all of us? Did you need to do that right now?" And it really has me thinking about my own experiences because I've been through that where I have had to confront something in the moment because it does very much feel that if you are willing to act this way and willing to inflict this trauma, why am I somehow not allowed to respond in the moment? And so, I think about our young people today who are much more vocal. Our young people today are unafraid to speak up when situations happen and, yet, what's the response by our administrators when students speak up against what they're dealing with on school campuses? If a teacher makes a comment that they feel uncomfortable with, and they address it somehow, somehow they're the ones that are disciplined for that response as opposed to really thinking about let's take one step back. They were willing to say that, willing to do that in front of others, so why not reckon with it? Why not unpack it? Why not let this be a teachable moment? We've heard that term used before. Gail Parker uses that term, too. But there are teachable moments for everyone, so.

Dr. Kathryn Kennedy: Did Shomari or Tia did you want to jump back in at all?

Shomari: I don't. Thank you.

Dr. Kathryn Kennedy: Okay. Speaking of stories, I'll just share a short story of a friend of mine who-- I was a freshman in college at the time, and I was part of her wedding party. There were 15 or 16 of us, and I was the only white person on the wedding party, and we went into a bridal shop and the people at the bridal shop kept on coming up to me and I said, "I'm not the bride. She's right there. Go talk to Tori," and they didn't go help anybody else, and they kept on coming up to me and I thought, "Oh my God, what is going on here?" It just was extremely eye-opening, and I had prior experiences with some of my friends in middle school and elementary school having the same kind of experiences as that and just really sorry to hear these stories. And I'm hoping that as you're telling them, as you mentioned Tia, that you are in the healing process and that you know you have advocates with you supporting you. I do want to mention, Nicol, when you mentioned strategies, if you can bring that up at another time, later on when you're when we're talking. And then the other thing I also want to make sure that we touch upon is something that you and Shomari both mentioned about representation during the Equity and Access digital-- or Digital Learning Collaborative podcast that we did together. So that's something I'd love for you guys to bring up later. So, let's move on to our next question. What are schools, districts, and communities doing to help their educators, students, and communities?

Shomari Jones: Such a tough question. I think I do everything, everything. I don't ask anybody for permission. I am okay with receiving upon the consequence that I'm going to have to face when I don't do things in the manner in which people would like for me to do them. But

regardless, at the end of it, I don't feel as though I have, yet, gotten to the stasis of consistently experiencing great transformation in our system, so. And I've done it all. I've read all the books and here's things that you should be doing in order to be radical, proactive, and transformative in a space in which you are employed or not employed. You could be a family member, a parent, you could be a community member, or an advocate but a lot of the things revolve around PD. I told someone the other day, I calculated because I'm in the job that I am-- I work in a school district. We're a public organization and because there is a contingent of people in my communities that absolutely don't like me, based on the fact that I'm pushing for an equitable advancement of how we treat students and families and others, who have absolutely gone out of their way to sort of make my life a little bit miserable by way of showing up to school board meetings and an insurmountable amount of public records requests. So, I think I'm up to 40 something now, of public records requests, and they're all for specific things. But one of them, a community member, wanted to know how much money I spent over the past five or six years in professional development, and it's substantial. I mean, I've spent \$6 million in professional development around racial equity, specifically, in medium to small size school districts, where 20,000, almost 21,000 students, and around 2,500 staff. And so that means that we have had umpteen hours' worth of trainings on an annual basis, amounting to somewhere around 90 to 100 hours per person.

So, we don't have people who don't have consciousness. We have people who have lack of willingness to engage in ways that are outside of the norm of either how they were taught in their teacher prep or education programming, or in the way that their parents, or the worlds in which they were raised, agree to or aligned to what it is that we're trying to do. But whether it's PD, whether it's build personal relationships, whether it's seeking as best as possible to remove the bad seeds from our organization and replace them with people who have mindsets that are more open and amenable to the ways that we want to change, I have experienced some successes. I've experienced some challenging failure opportunities that I've had to reevaluate and try my best to institute again, and I really don't have a suggestion. It's very dependent upon your individual organization. For me, my organization was one where the superintendent was all on board. He, basically, was in his last stage of his tenure as an educator. He was on his way towards retirement. He wanted to build legacy opportunity so he can leave some things behind for the community, and the district, and those we serve. And we did a lot of effort and a lot of work, and I think we're better for, but we have a long way to go.

And so, my advisement here is find a place, the greatest of places to start. I've tried the revolutionary route. It didn't work, and the thing that it did the most was caused me internal fatigue and a consistent, unhealthy environment that I was placed into, and so I don't want to do that anymore. Now I have to be more strategic, which, unfortunately, translates into divisive, in order to sneak things in under the radar until it becomes common practice and then poof. All the way people. Now guess what, it's here, and it can't go away because it's unshakable because everyone's doing it.

So, I want everyone to start and try and practice. Not everyone's going to be as successful in the things I've been as successful in. Not everyone's going to have as much challenge in the areas

where I had challenge, but if we're not doing nothing, then the thing is never going to transform to be more in service of our students, and families, and staff.

Dr. Nicol Howard: Well, I'm at university level, but I can speak to the community. In the City of Redlands, they recently declared racism a public health crisis, and so that opened the door for conversations between schools and the police department, the local PD. And it's also opened up some conversations, I'd say, for our students at a university level with different businesses and with the police department as well. And it's been a healing process. And they've definitely talked about bringing in more restorative practices and learning opportunities for our community members, for them to understand the experiences of the students from the K16 spectrum, from that whole range of students there, because it doesn't just stop when they graduate high school. They continue on to deal with some of these things later. So, I'd say that's one step forward. It doesn't completely erase or eradicate racism, but it does open the door for more conversation around what the community can do. And I've definitely started to see some healing take place.

Dr. Tia Madkins: I can speak to some of the things that districts have been doing, much of them obviously pre-COVID. In Oakland Unified School District, we did a lot of work around full-service community schools. And so, the district became one of those districts. And that's basically where schools in areas that have historically been underserved, really work hard to partner with community organizations, with the district, with the state and local authorities to offer lots of services. For example, the school where I was an instructional coach, we had laundry facilities for families to use so kids could come and bring their laundry to school knowing that things in the area oftentimes weren't safe for them. Right? And so even going to the local laundromat might have been a source of trauma for them because things happen to them in those spaces. And so, parents and students could bring their laundry, their parents could get training to help support with becoming prepared to enter the workforce in different ways. So, there were free classes that were offered, there was restorative justice circles happening within the schools, but also the parents were being trained on that to think about how to respond differently to both student behaviors that they might have seen at home, but also just learning - unlearning some of the traumatic experiences that we had as children. As well, many of those schools were partnering with local non-profits, particularly for the visual arts, for students to have ways to heal from race-based trauma. So, our school, in particular, was STEAM-focused. And so, we partnered with some local artists who helped the kids not only process the traumas they were experiencing and educating them about what race-based stress is like and helping them to name a lot of the things that they were dealing with, both at home, in the school community and where they worked, et cetera, but also to process that. And so, they did a lot of that through art and they created artwork that became a part of the local community as well. So, they did that during their art class and then they would actually go out in the evenings and on the weekends and actually begin to paint. And so all of the murals throughout the neighborhood became a part of their learning, an extension of what they were learning in the classroom. And that was really powerful for those kids.

Shomari Jones: One more thing that I could offer as advisement, you as an individual in this body of work, equity is not popular. It's not popular amongst those who are part of dominant culture and who have historically been known or at least have felt as though they were in power. And so, for that purpose, me as an individual combating the system is very challenging on me, but also much more complicated to get to a resolution, or resolve, or success. And so, one of my strategies is to commission support from my community so that I show up in strength and numbers. And I have galvanized teams that I've helped to co-construct that have a common goal. So then when it's time for us to show up at the school board meeting to transform that policy or the practices that instructors bestow upon kids in a way that is unhealthy and unsafe for them, then we have a collective mass of people that are being heard all at once, the loudest voices oftentimes in these school board meetings and particularly the ones that tend to get the most action done. And so, I started a black parent group called PABS, Parent Alliance for Black Scholars. I think that even Kathryn spoke to a few of my most recent group that I am a member of. It's called Right to Breathe that initiated just passed George Floyd and his murder. And the members on that team were combating our municipalities around ensuring the safety and respect of black people in those communities. So, we're focusing on four cities, right? Someone's got to do it. It shouldn't be you alone. It's really unfortunate that we still have to in 2021. But some of us were built for this. We're soldiers put here to do this work. And so, I think we have to find pathways towards making sure that we're still loud about the challenges that we're experiencing.

Dr. Kathryn Kennedy: So, I have just a follow-up to a couple of your comments, Shomari. This may go back to what you were talking about regarding the request for documentation for your budgeting but--

Shomari Jones: Public records request?

Dr. Kathryn Kennedy: Yeah, yeah. But I remember when we did a case study on your school for the Digital Learning Collaborative Snapshot report and the program offering students graduation coaches. I remember you talking about that. And I remember also from your article in EdWeek where you came up against some of the community and the parents having issues about your spending money to serve those students. And I wonder if you can talk a little bit more to that part of your experiences at your school district.

Shomari Jones: Yeah, I mean it is a pure racism. I know it's racism that was rearing its head and our district in a way that no one expected. And so, we have a bit of a flipped district in our demographics, whereas our white folks are not the majority by way of number. They certainly still are in positions of normal, long-term sustainable power within our country. But we have a dominant culture in our Asian demographic with an emphasis on Chinese. And there is this privilege metric that they must follow the ones that were combating this effort because many showed up to every board meeting. Many were the requesters for the public records. Many absolutely hated that I took it upon myself in my role to support kids who some from this community did not feel were deserving of opportunity and bluntly and blatantly would tell you that to your face, "These kids don't work hard enough. Our kids do, so those resources that

you're spending should be allocated towards us." They didn't say that to me. They came to the board meeting. It's on public record. They wrote manifestos. They were on the news channel, on the radio. It was a really big thing to experience such outright blatant racism from someone that I would consider a fellow group of members of color. And so-- I mean, I'm sure everyone's circumstances are different, but sometimes we combat enemies that are not even the ones that we thought that we would be going up against. Sometimes we're going up against the people who look just like us in some of these situations. And so, it's just really vital that you are surrounding yourself with a contingent of people who they absolutely got your back, whether it's from way back or whether it's right there next to you, so that, when these incidences occur and not if, you are prepared with your cadre to go up against them and continue to fight for what's right.

Dr. Kathryn Kennedy: Thanks, Shomari. I appreciate you bringing that up.

Shomari Jones: Yes, ma'am. You mentioned Grad Success Coaches. In a role that I played here in Bellevue School District, I created a role called Graduation Success Coach to really identify kids who are not on track towards graduation explicitly. And these coaches would have a caseload, very much smaller than a counselor's caseload, maybe 50, and they built relationships with students and they built relationships with their family. They helped them to get all the things that they needed towards graduating on time.

Dr. Kathryn Kennedy: Yeah. That's definitely why we featured it because we felt like that's the most important thing at this point is just to support structures for students, for sure. Back to your point about restorative practices to heal race-based trauma, I wanted to highlight one of the partners that we have through Wellness for Educators. It's called BeWell in Schools. They're based out of Nashville, Tennessee, and they offer guidance on providing wellness rooms as well as professional learning for teachers to help students cope with trauma and stress. So, if they find that there's behavioral issues in the classroom, instead of penalizing the student, they get referred to the wellness room and learn strategies, like breathing strategies or movement strategies, to really help them work through and really get at what is the issue that they're dealing with. Because, obviously, if they're acting out, there's got to be something going on in their lives, in their classrooms. There's conflict between students. Let's try to figure it out without having them get in trouble all the time and really displace what is actually going on.

Dr. Nicol Howard: I wonder if we can have those wellness centers opened up for our teachers, too. I mean, Shomari spoke to teacher education. And I think having an opportunity for teachers to go in and decompress for a moment and think and reflect upon their practice-- I think it's a great space for all, not just the students, even a wellness center for parents.

Dr. Kathryn Kennedy: Agreed 100%. I know that they started-- before COVID, there was a wellness lounge. There was a whole group doing wellness lounges in schools. And I think that's an amazing idea, and the same for the families and caregivers, especially now that they've become co-educators really in COVID-19 structures, so.

Shomari Jones: It's beautiful. And you don't we need to lounge, right? You don't have to go to a place. Everyone is so incredibly accustomed to virtual communication now, in Zoom and Teams and others. When I first got here, I was lonely. When I first got to Bellevue School District, coming from the Urban League-- let's be clear, the whole staff was black, right? And then I went to BSD and I was the only black person at the district office, and I was like, "This is crap." But I know that there are a few other black people out there, especially those who are in roles of leadership, and so I launched for my own self a wellness experience. Whereas we, as a black group of leaders within BSD, would come together monthly in a social forum. We didn't need to do anything that had anything to do with work. We didn't need to decompress that racism event that happened over there. We needed to be in one another's company regularly so that we could feed off of one another's energy and be able to go back in a sane way to the space that is causing us so much trauma. And I started one after that for most of the groups with the expectation that those groups would sustain themselves and that I wouldn't have to be responsible for checking in. You got what you need, etc. And some survive and some fizzled. And the formatting of them are all different. Some of them are working on strict policy related stuff, some are talking about their experiences in their employment, and mine is like, "Let's go do something. Let's kick it. Come through." In a backyard, like, "Everyone bring a drink." We're just going to enjoy one another's space, and it's been healing. But the challenge is it's healing for the short amount of time. So, the question would be, how do you always have a space for healing? How do you turn down after you've turned up for so long during the workday in a manner that will rejuvenate you for the day that's to come or the days that are to come, right? And so, there's a lot of need for finding strategies to self-sustain and take care of yourself, which is why I'm so down for this Wellness for Educators thing.

Dr. Nicol Howard: I think, even, the point in what I'm hearing too is the racial socialization and how important that is for preparing our students to confront and cope with racism. And we do affinity groups, but sometimes, we have to hear that it's not necessary to have an affinity group. And what we're actually saying today is it is necessary. These are valuable spaces for our young people to develop their identity, become comfortable in who they are so that they are effectively confronting and combating and coping with the racial trauma that they deal with. And anyway, I know you're going to ask about strategy, so I'll wait until you get there. But I just had to say that I think the racial socialization is important.

Dr. Kathryn Kennedy: Yeah, I think we've been talking about the programs and strategies and techniques, so I'll go ahead and ask the question but continue with what you were going with, line-wise, in terms of the conversation. What programs and strategies and techniques have you used or have you seen others using that you'd like to share with our community? And please feel free, participants, to chime in in the chat area too.

Dr. Nicol Howard: Well, I just wanted to pick back up on the affinity groups piece because I know Shomari mentioned creating those spaces at the district level. And what I realized is that, during this time, it was something that we also needed on our campus. And so, I started the black students, faculty, staff, and administrators association for our campus leaders in order for us to come together and think about how we would build our support for our students but also

support for one another. So, I just really want to highlight how important those spaces are not just for our children but for adults too. And then I wanted to be honest about the piece that we talked about when there might be moments where you're thinking about how do I address a situation. And so, although it's not the strategy that we want to see all the time, it's the reality that there is sometimes this passive coping strategy where someone may just say, "I'm going to accept it right now and deal with it and walk away." But I think that I'd like to push back a bit and say that maybe that's not the strategy. Maybe it's one part of the strategy as you step back and process it, and you figure out what's next. How do I channel this energy, or how do I address it? And Dr. Madkins, Tia, spoke to that earlier when she shared her experience, and she leaned into writing. She wrote a letter. So, yes, we have moments where we will reflect and think about what's going on. But I think there needs to be a what's-next.

Dr. Kathryn Kennedy: Yeah. I agree, a point of taking action in it, I think. And back to the story that I shared about my friend Tori. We wrote letters. All of us wrote letters to the Better Business Bureau. And the shop ended up closing down based people just deciding not to shop there anymore.

Shomari Jones: I had a couple of things. The first thing is really focused on my black people. And I scrolled through the attendees, and there's a lot of you'll in here. So, I'm talking to you. In doing some research in my district, I discovered-- this isn't concrete research. This isn't data-driven research. But I've discovered that of the groups who historically have not had a position of advantage in systems across our country-- I would say in my organization, the black folks have a tendency to be the most disjointed by way of having a unified plan towards combating systematized racism. "I experience it. This person experiences it. That person experiencing it." But seldom are we coming together as a collective to create a single unified manifesto around what we're going to do, how we're going to do it, who we need to commission support for. Let's build a plan around this thing. Because historically, in my department, and especially with having a cadre of younger staff-- and I'll say something slightly controversial. But I had a cadre of younger staff who I would deem as millennial who were all about the business. They were like, "We're getting this done, and we're going to fix all the stuff like tomorrow." And they're going to come by us, and they're going to punch white people in the mouth, and they're going to change the way that kids are forced to learn. They're going to transform the curriculum into something that's more affirming and more connected to culture and history for the people who are going to be learning it, etc. So, when they didn't see that, it was moving along at a pace that was respectful to the way they wanted to see things happen. They sort of flailed a bit, right?

Whereas if we come together collectively, identify a problem, absolutely put some meat behind that problem, what we're going to do, how we're going to do it, who's responsible, I think we'll have a better way towards getting towards-- and I hate incrementalism. I've been taught for the longest time in my life that incrementalism is the devil, right? And it's just really unfortunate that I have landed in a system where I have very limited choice outside of incrementalism. If I want to sustain and be a factor that continues to promote transformation and disrupt all these ideologies that have been cemented in our system historically, right? And so, I've got to find the most effective ways to bring people together, the most effective ways to speak a language

which I do not speak, which is privilege, and the most effective way to rule things out in a way that folks can accept, adopt and then create for themselves, right? And so, it's not an easy task, but I think it's an essential task for us to do instead of talk about it. Right now, we're talking about it. The question is, what are you going to do about it? Right? And I'll leave that to you. You're the recipient.

Dr. Kathryn Kennedy: Shomari, to the collective piece, why do you think that there might be less of an approach by a collective? And I guess back to your point, Nicol, about the affinity groups and the importance of affinity groups because potentially that collective could move forward with some of these things. But Shomari, what are your thoughts on that?

Shomari Jones: It's interesting, this might take a turn because then we get into the brass tacks of the manner in which society was developed and created. I think that in my professional experience, it has become a tremendous rat race. A lot of people are moving to be-- and excuse me if this is offending you, but to move as close to whiteness as possible, that's monetarily, that's positionally, that it-- and whiteness is depicted oftentimes as the goal that we strive for. Folks migrate and immigrate to our region to be as close to power advantage and opportunity as possible. And so, when we look into the infrastructure of how a system like this is created, in order to advance you had better fit to a particular box. If you don't fit in that box, then you don't advance. Right. It's just the narrative of the story. And so, the collectivism, "Of I'm a part of this team that's seeking to disrupt", is a stain on your record towards the advancement that you're striving to achieve, right? And so, we have sometimes people who disassociate themselves from the movement because there's an instilled fear. We can go all the way back to enslavement. There's a fear instilled in the negro that rises up, right? And so, God forbid I rise up and then all these white people around me are like what that-- this isn't customary and they will likely choose to smack me back down into my place, right?

And I've seen it. You all have seen it. Whether you choose to recognize it or not, it's clear and it's present in a lot of circumstances. And those examples are ones to help to ensure that we stay in our place. Enslavement and the whipping of a person's property so that they don't run away is an example to the other folks, "Don't you leave because this is going to happen to you too", right? And so, it's played out for hundreds and hundreds of years, and this is where we are. So now we have to find strategies to free our mind from the turmoil, and the trauma that was deliberately that of our ancestors and place ourselves in a space where we have less fear. I am one of those individuals who is a part of this faction that is concerned about what will happen to me if I rise up too hard, right? And I want to get to a place where I can eradicate those fears and just go all the way in in service of my people, knowing that I'm going to lose a few of the battles but striving towards winning the war.

Dr. Nicol Howard: I remember in high school, there used to be the spot where we would gather at break.

Shomari Jones: [laughter] The tree.

Dr. Nicol Howard: The tree.

Shomari Jones: [laughter] Yeah, [crosstalk].

Dr. Nicol Howard: Every time you were by the tree, you were allowed to be there for only so long. Sometimes you were left alone for the entire break, but sometimes somebody would come over and say, "Break it up." And I'd often wonder, "What are we breaking up?" Right? And so, I put that question back out to my teacher candidates. I ask them, I give them the scenario and I ask, "How do you respond?" And we unpack that because there's something to think about, "What do you feel inside? What are you feeling that makes you think that needs to be broken up?"

Shomari Jones: That is unsafe. Yeah.

Dr. Nicol Howard; "Why does that appear unsafe?" And when you have no answer then I go back to, well, why break it up? So, it's a question that we're trying to answer. But I also ask that of those who perceive those situations as threatening. And stick in it and unpack it with them for my teacher candidates.

Dr. Kathryn Kennedy: Yeah, [crosstalk]—

Shomari Jones: So important.

Dr. Nicol Howard: Strategies.

Dr. Kathryn Kennedy Yeah, and I'm [crosstalk].

Shomari Jones: It's so important.

Dr. Kathryn Kennedy: Well, I'm just reflecting back on remembering recess and just seeing that happen and not really being aware of what was actually happening, just a reflection on that.

Shomari Jones: I also think that it's important to understand that our teachers are taught to be teachers. And they're taught how to teach. And when they show up in the classroom, they're practicing all the things that they have been taught, which then for me means that without teachers who teach teachers, like Nicol and Tia, to teach them in manners that forces them to be self-reflective. Forces them to answer the critical question. Forces them to be in partnership with people who have perspectives different than theirs. Without that, then we regenerate the same teacher that I had 40 years ago, right, which is not the teacher that I needed then and absolutely not the teacher that our kids need now, right? And so, we also got to find strategies to push into that post-secondary arena to begin to shape what we want the experience to be for those who we hire into our systems.

Dr. Kathryn Kennedy: So, I want to end with the next few minutes before we do our grounding and empowerment practice to kind of conclude our session. What programs and resources are available that can help the field of education and people of color in general?

Dr. Nicol Howard: Just really quickly, if you don't mind before I jump into specific programs. There are a couple of scholars on the call who have these strategies that I'm familiar with that I find as valuable. And we were reminded today. Dr. Strong talked to us about the restorative practice in yoga. Dr. McCray, who just left, she also speaks to that often and the importance of it for us, but also for our students. Dr. Allen, who's on the call, really encourages us to set intentions and to be purposeful. And so, I think that these are some things that can help us as educators, but also, we can instill these in our students. I think that's also powerful. So those are just some other strategies. They're not program-specific, but there's Wellness for Educators when it comes to restorative practices in yoga. So, there are programs that would give us an opportunity to find a way to do that work. GirlTrek, yeah, thank you for dropping that. When we talk about exercise, I'm thinking of an acronym. Dr. Matkins, Tia, and Shomari you know it. DEER I just learned this recently. And I was told to drink water, eat, exercise and rest. And sort of using that strategy for myself, that's helped me try to keep balance during this time because I can't get out and move as much during the pandemic, right? And then I'll drop some other links in, but I'm going to stop talking to give my colleagues some time to jump in.

Shomari Jones: I'm just writing down DEER.

Dr. Kathryn Kennedy: Did I get the word to align to it right? I don't know if I did or not. Be Active drink water eat. Be Active rest. Is that right?

Shomari Jones: Exercise.

Dr. Nicol Howard: Yeah, exercise for Be Active exercise. Yeah.

Shomari Jones: What programs and resources are available that can help the field of education and people of color? A practice of mine-- I kind of alluded to it a moment ago. But a practice of mine that really helps me in my work, especially with as many people as I deal with who have a perspective that is different than mine, is to ensure that I stay grounded in my purpose and my mission and my vision by way of creating one. A lot of people don't do that for themselves. We do it for our programs. It's sort of our north star. We do it by way of creating some guidance for others. But what are we doing for ourselves that help us to always have a center to come back to so that we don't accept assignments that are outside of that center so that we seek out opportunities to be a part of things that are going to help you move a little bit more closely to your goal? And I also have this-- I have this compass that I ripped not so-- my millions of dollars worth of professional development for our staff training came through by way of Pacific Educational Group, so PEG. And I pay Glenn Singleton and a lot of his people to fly out often to facilitate conversations and trainings. And so, one thing that I stole from that body of work that I really enjoy is this idea of mindful inquiry. Whereas we're going to encounter and interface with a tremendous amount of people who don't think like we do, who are not appropriate in

the way that they address circumstances that might impact me or might impact students or others. And a lot of them are very unconscious about what is it that is of a fence or what is it that they're presenting that is of challenge. And so, I help folks to realize those issues, not by way of me being confrontational and knocking somebody in the mouth, but by way of me asking a series of deliberate questions from a manner of me finding my center. That's the first challenging part in and of itself is finding my center when someone has done something to cause me to feel uncentered. But once I've gotten there, and I've reconciled that, "You don't know what you just said. You're ignorant to the fact that you just did something that is offensive to others," and by my gift that God has given me and by my job title, I feel that my responsibility to educate you and my responsibility to take you on a journey within yourself to discover why you said that thing and what you actually meant and to make some atonement for whatever it is that has transpired in that space. So mindful inquiry is really big for me. It helps me to seek clarification way before I just write you off as someone that cannot help me in this movement.

Dr. Kathryn Kennedy: Well, I want to close the practice-- or close the session today with a grounding and empowerment practice. I first want to thank Nicol, Tia, and Shomari before we jump into that practice. Thank you so much for sharing your experiences and being vulnerable and really just having all of these resources to provide, and all of these strategies. We are grateful for your time and expertise. So, we'll go ahead and jump into this grounding and empowerment practice. Like we did before, if you want to turn off your cameras, you're welcome to do that if it's more comfortable for your practice. You can do this standing up or sitting down. Whatever is most comfortable for you. Once you are where you are comfortable, I invite you to close your eyes, if that feels okay for you, or have a soft gaze, and take a couple of deep breaths in and out. And bring to memory a moment where you felt fully alive. A moment in which you felt whole. A moment where you felt fully in your humanity. Continue your deep breathing as you bring that memory into your mind. Once you have that memory in mind, I want you to observe that memory. What does that memory look like? Where are you? Who are you with? What do you see? What do you hear? And how does this memory make you feel? And as you're observing this memory, continue this deep breathing practice. Let the movement of the breath build the fire at the center of your core. This core is located right at your abdomen. This is the seat of your identity. It is the place at which your passion for your purpose in life is situated. Where your seat of power originates. Let the movement of the breath feed your fire. We need that fire to dismantle oppressive structures, to move us collectively and individually forward. Let that fire fuel you to connect with your full integrity in community, in humanity, in compassion. Put this memory in a place in your mind that is easily accessible, and come back to it whenever you're needing to reconnect with your power, to feel fully alive, to feel whole, to feel your humanity. Continue to breathe and place one hand over your heart and the other hand over that hand. Bow your head toward your heart center in deep gratitude inward for bringing you here to listen to Tia, Nicol, and Shomari. And to all of you who shared your experiences, may we all continue to do our part to dismantle the oppressive structures, an act that can ultimately result in liberation of all human beings. We thank you so much for your time today. As I mentioned, we invite you to stay connected with us through our many programs at well4edu.org. You can sign up for our newsletter at the bottom of our website.

And we will be sending out the recording and the transcript to those of you who have signed up. And feel free to share it with others. Thank you so much again, and enjoy the rest of your day.