

# Leveling the playing field: Empowering youth voices through a racial and equity lens

**Kutztown University School of Social Work**  
*6th Annual Clinical Colloquium*

ANNETTE JOHNSON  
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UNIVERSITY OF  
**ILLINOIS CHICAGO**

Jane Addams College  
of Social Work

# Who is in the Room??

Indicate in the chat feature:

1. Your target client population (youth or adult)?
2. What marginalized populations do you serve?
3. Do you practice in a school setting?

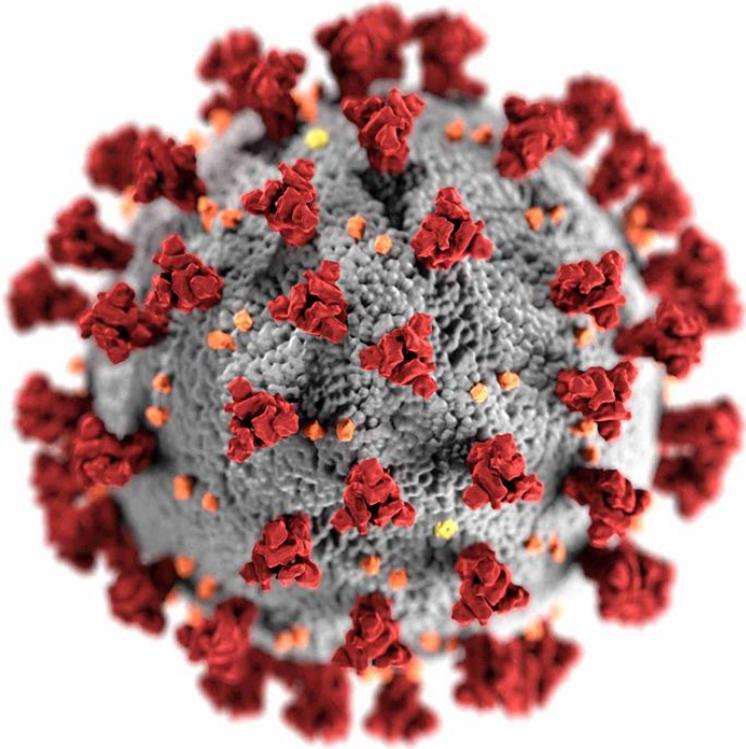
# Objectives

- Reflect on the impact of the double pandemic(COVID 19, racism and inequities on the mental health of youth
- Review the role of social workers and educators in leveling the playing field for students
- Introduce SEL, PYD and Strength-Based Practice as equity frameworks
- Share CSL as a intervention strategy to elevate youth voice.

An aerial photograph of a university campus, overlaid with a semi-transparent blue filter. The image shows a network of walkways, trees, and buildings. Several small circular logos with the letters 'UIC' are visible on the ground. The word 'Context' is written in a large, white, sans-serif font across the center of the image.

# Context

# Societal Changes



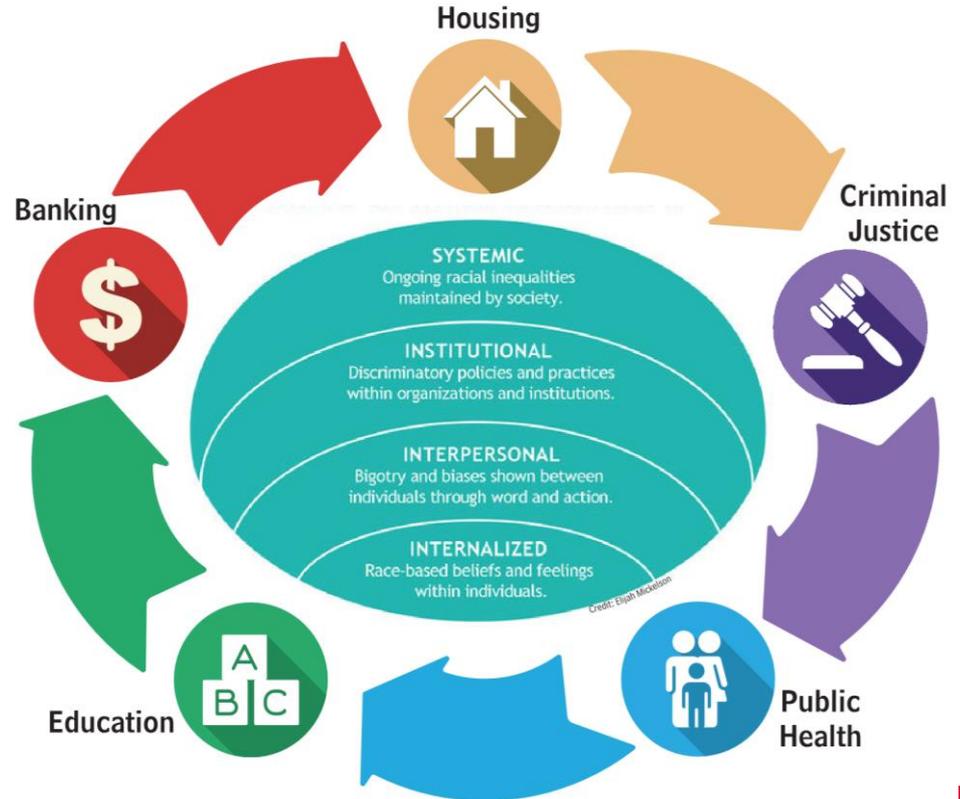
- Emotional and behavioral health challenges and associated disparities were growing concerns before the COVID-19 pandemic but are now a public health emergency.
- Highlight the inequities that result from structured racism



# Societal Impact: Institutional Racism

Ongoing and accelerated institutional racism.

- This has been exacerbated by the pandemic.
- It is tied to the stress brought on by COVID-19 and the ongoing struggle due to inequities resulting from racism.



# Childhood Mental Health

## Prior to the Pandemic

- Rates of mental health concerns and suicide rose steadily between 2010 and 2020.
- Suicide is the second leading cause of death for youth ages 10-24.

## Family Stability-Pandemic and beyond

- Loss of parents:
  - Over 140,000 children in the US lost a primary and/or secondary caregiver.
  - Youth of color are disproportionately impacted.
- Increased rates of depression, anxiety, trauma.

An aerial photograph of a university campus, showing a wide walkway with many people walking, surrounded by trees and buildings. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue filter. The text "Theoretical Frameworks" is centered over the image in a large, white, sans-serif font.

# Theoretical Frameworks

# Theoretical Frameworks

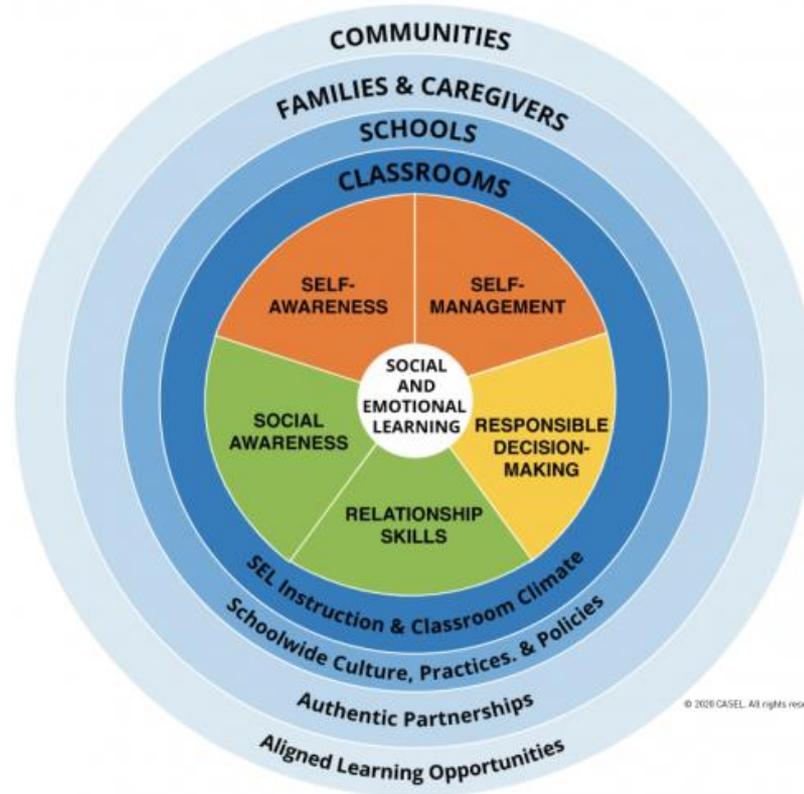
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Social Emotional  
Learning

Positive Youth  
Development

Strength-Based  
Practice

# SEL: Embracing the entire school community



# Strength-Based

## Aspirations



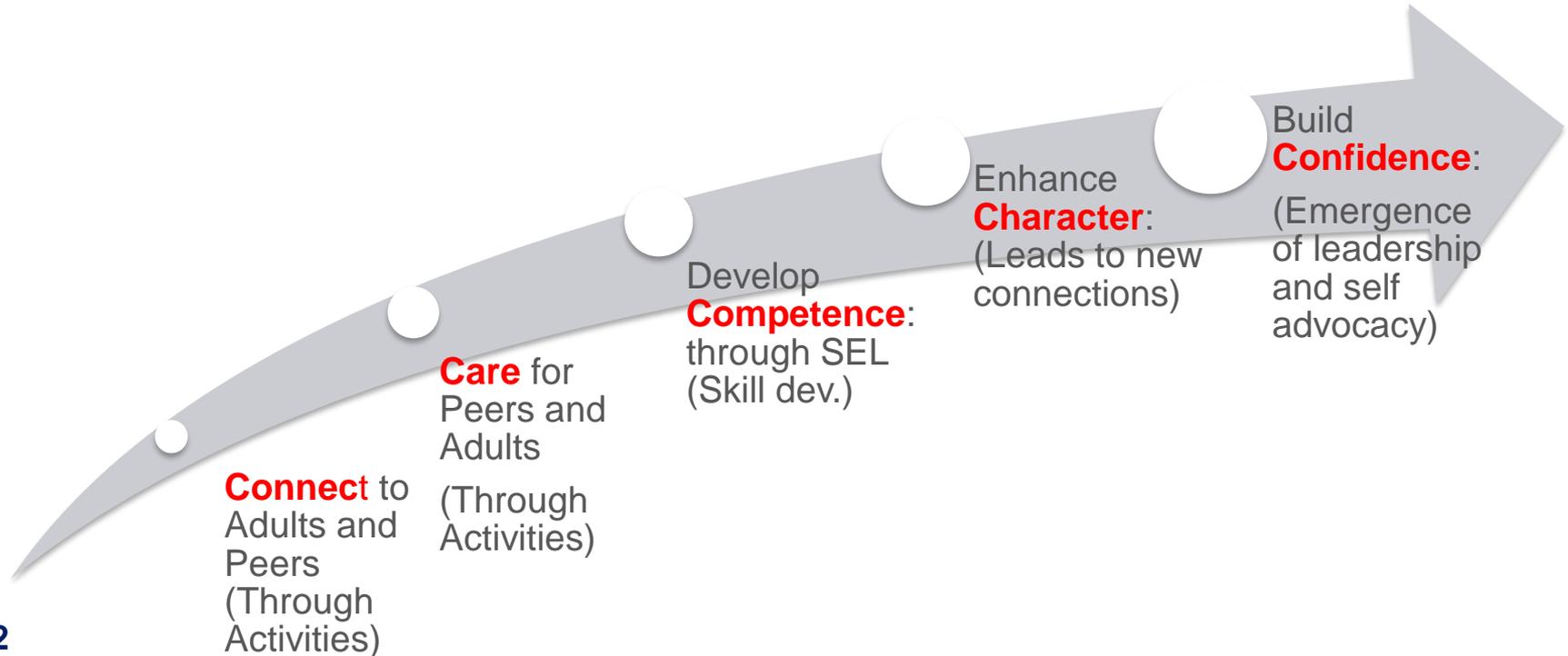
## Positive Outcomes

**Assumption:** All people and communities have strengths

- Struggling students with emotional, behavior or academic concerns
- Communities rife with social problems
- Demonstrates respect and a belief in the worth of all individuals, youths & communities

***Just as CPR is breathing for someone until they can breathe for themselves, SBP is “...believing in someone until they can believe in themselves (Saleeby, 2008)***

# Positive Youth Development



# Stretch-Break (10 minutes)



An aerial photograph of a university campus, overlaid with a semi-transparent blue filter. The image shows a wide, multi-level walkway with many people walking. There are trees and buildings in the background. The text "Youth Voice" is centered in white, bold font.

# Youth Voice

# Elevating Youth Voice through CSL as an Intervention Strategy



# Equity Building

Empowerment is characterized by having equitable access to resources, knowledge, civil participation, and decision-making.

In promoting youth empowerment, the school social worker uses social and emotional learning while developing leadership skills and highlighting youth assets. This helps to level the playing field.

Empowerment practice is about sharing of power and knowledge to cultivate another's sense of agency. It acknowledges the value and worth of marginalized people/youth.



# Youth's Mental Health and Service

Surgeon General Youth Advisory Report, indicates that service:

- Builds a sense of purpose and develops a sense of self-worth.
- Is an antidote to isolation and reminds youth of the contributions that they can make to the world.
- Can help youth to learn and practice techniques to manage stress and other difficult emotions.

Protecting Youth Mental Health: The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory 2021

An aerial photograph of a university campus, showing a wide walkway with many people walking, surrounded by trees and buildings. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue filter.

# Critical Service Learning Intervention

# Critical Service Learning

(Johnson et al., 2018)

Service Learning	Critical Service Learning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Engage youth in intentional, structured community service</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Engage youth in critically analyzing the community</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Combine learning goals and community service</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Promotes critical thinking:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• social justice , oppression, equity</li></ul></li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Build engagement skills</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Stronger engagement and understanding of community needs</li></ul>

# Critical Service Learning

Integrates the student's academic, and social and emotional curriculum to enhance what is taught in the classroom

Supports the development of civic responsibility, care and concern for others.

Engage marginalized youth who may opportunities to participate.



# Critical Service Learning & Youth Voice



- Activates civic engagement
- Develops skills in critical analysis
- Engages youth to **examine** oppression and equity issues
- Promotes the desire to contribute to decision-making processes

# Critical Service Learning

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- Encourage youth to contribute to their community
- Promote a sense of empowerment
- Creates opportunities for “*at-promise*” youth who are often marginalized because of their behavior and are not given the opportunity to appropriately contribute to their environments.

# Critical Service Learning Group Intervention

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- Engage youth in system change in school and community.
- Provide a strategy vulnerable or marginalized populations to learn advocacy skills.
- Utilize strengths-based practice rather than a deficit model.

# Role of the Social Worker as a Facilitator

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Elements of facilitation:

- Create a safe and supportive environment
- Create and intentionally support and sustain positive culture, climate and structures that allow youth to articulate changes needed
- Continuously engage and integrate strengths, talents, actions, and achievements of young people

Willing to move from the traditional adult power position to a relationship that recognizes youth capacity to promote change.

# Cornerstone of CSL – Community Web Mapping

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- Framework highlights youth voice.
- Vehicle by which youth examine issues of:
  - power
  - Privilege
  - community need.
- Fosters leadership, advocacy, and empowerment to work toward social change.

# Community Web Mapping

(Johnson et al., 2018; Lantieri, 1999)



# Community Webmapping

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Depending on the central topic, a session may start with asking a number of questions:

What is a community?

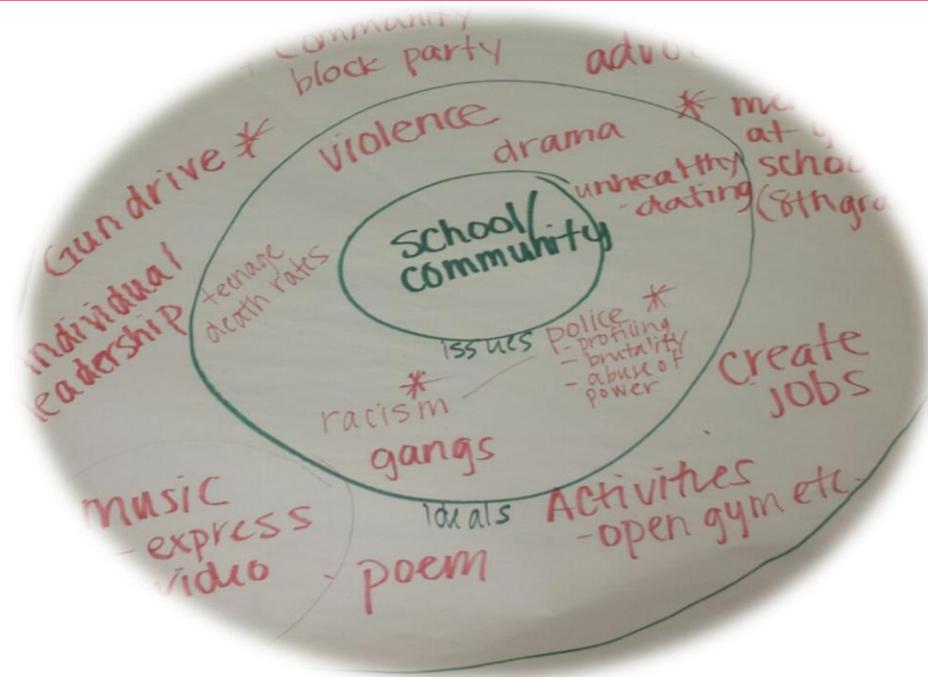
Describe a perfect community?

What makes it imperfect?

What are ways that we can make a better community?

# Example of Community Webmappint

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# Project Planning and Implementation

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From this exercise participants are encouraged to:

Analyze Structure

Develop and action plan

Design and implement a project to support the plan



# References

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American Academy of Pediatrics, (2021) Interim Guidance on Supporting the Emotional and Behavioral Health Needs of Children, Adolescents and Families during COVID 19 Pandemic.

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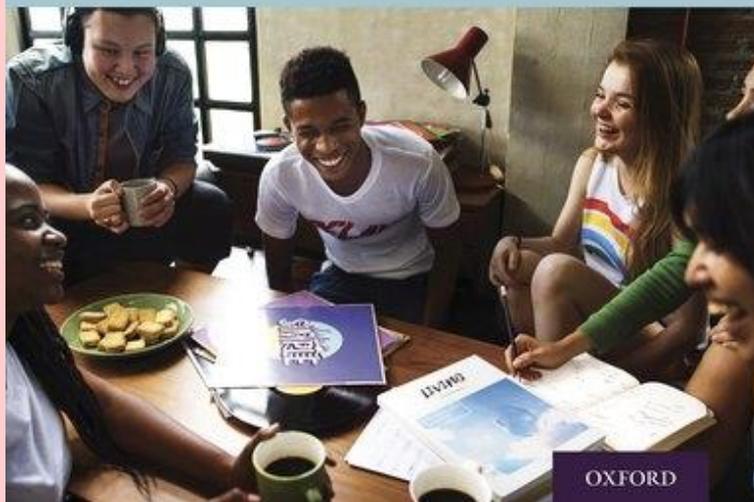
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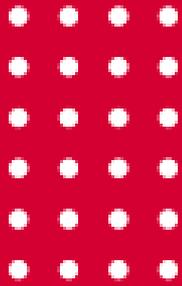
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- The U.S. Surgeon General’s Advisory (2021) Protecting Youth Mental Health, [surgeon-general-youth-mental-health-advisory.pdf](#)

# CRITICAL SERVICE LEARNING TOOLKIT

Social Work Strategies for Promoting Healthy Youth Development

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