

# EQUITABLE ECOSYSTEMS STORY SERIES DISCUSSION PROMPTS

See page 3 for a version of the Discussion Prompts with Key Ideas

## Developmental Practices & Setting Quality

All Stories	Individual		Setting		System	
	Reclaiming Belonging in a Climate of Harassment	They Only Like Me When I Play Ball	Building a (Culture) War-Free Zone	Loud, Outspoken, and Connected	Messages to Child Welfare	I'd Be a Sure Bet If I Weren't Locked Out of Opportunity
<p>What do you think were the most important developmental practices used by staff or the organization in the story you read?</p> <p>How would you rate the quality of the primary setting featured in the story you read (on a scale of 1 – 5 with 5 being the highest quality)? What elements in the story support your assessment?</p> <p>What strategies are you using in your settings to support belonging and development for all young people?</p>	<p>What were your initial reactions to reading about the impact of a climate of harassment and student belonging in school? What thoughts does it lead you to about missed developmental opportunities?</p> <p>This piece took on the difficult topic of harassment. In nearly all developmental settings, there are dynamics that could cause developmental harm that exist alongside of intentional developmental practices. Where are there opportunities to uncover the ways in which students experience negative development experiences in your setting and engage adults in supportive, productive dialogue about it?</p>	<p>If you could interview Sam and her mom, what else would you want to know about her old school? The other settings they connect to? The “tradeoffs” discussions they had?</p> <p>How do you connect with students as they enter or transition into your setting? How do you support them in assessing available supports and building connections to other settings in which they engage?</p>	<p>How did YouthBuild staff use developmental practices to address a larger “culture war” conflict? To address behavior that contributes to “othering<sup>1</sup>?”</p> <p>What do you think about the concept of “students giving adults permission to teach them?” Is this necessary for successful engagement? How would this apply or not apply in your setting?</p>	<p>How did policy and practice intertwine to support a fresh start for Leo? In what ways was student engagement critical to the implementation of these practices?</p> <p>For the young people in your setting who have experienced the most challenges, what staff or organizational practices provide the best opportunities for a “fresh start” or a “refocus?”</p> <p>Reflect on how various microsettings (e.g., classroom, afterschool club, cafeteria) in your setting may be experienced. Which spaces seem to provide the best opportunities for connection, and for whom?</p>	<p>What are the “little” developmental experiences that end up being “big” for young people in your setting?</p> <p>Jodi and Natasha suggest that systems must act more like “relationships.” What is your reaction to this concept? Is that a realistic goal?</p> <p>What were the key contributors to the differences in experiences for Jodi and Natasha in the child welfare system vs. the education system? What more would you want to know about how Jodi and Natasha engaged with various settings within each system?</p>	<p>Is belonging “impossible” in systems like the justice system as the featured young adults suggest? What are realistic developmental goals in the juvenile system?</p> <p>How might Jaleel and Darrell have been engaged in settings that provided supports and connections automatically rather than by chance?</p> <p>What in your setting or system do young people connect to by chance?</p>

<sup>1</sup> We derive an understanding of belonging and othering from the work of John A. Powell, founder of the Othering & Belonging Institute at University of California Berkeley. Othering is a generalized set of common processes that deny someone full humanity based on perception and treatment as less than and/or a threat to the favored group.

## Systems & Systems Change

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<p>What does the story you read indicate about how our formal systems (education, juvenile justice, child welfare) are designed, or not designed, to foster a sense of belonging?</p> <p>How might systems change efforts support both increased setting quality and greater connections between the system and the larger ecosystem?</p>	<p>In the story, Emmy writes, "Most students aren't taught to identify and act upon their own agency, but youth aren't the only population letting what is habitual become acceptable." What systemic barriers seemed to prevent further joint action between young people and adults to address school climate issues?</p> <p>What systemic challenges prevent young people and adults from working together for change in your setting?</p>	<p>In what ways was Sam's experience a result of lack of knowledge in the system about all of the elements to youth success or of the extent to which these elements were not in place for students of color?</p> <p>How do you engage family and community leaders as experts in your systems change efforts?</p>	<p>In what ways is the YouthBuild team's approach to this challenge based on the fact that they sit intersection of the education and youth development system? How might this experience inform the larger system?</p> <p>How might organizations and settings influence the approach of larger systems?</p>	<p>In what ways did the intentional developmental practices of Our Town &amp; Peace Teams shift how an entire district, system, or network listens to and approaches its work with young people?</p> <p>What practices in your setting are worth lifting up across your broader system or institution? What cross-setting connections are needed to begin that transformation?</p>	<p>What would a more "relationship" focused system look like?</p> <p>Jodi notes that "we shout 'self-care' at kids who need community care." What "community care" strategies would you identify as important for supporting youth in systems?</p>	<p>Every system has strengths and challenges. Considering the full developmental needs of children and youth, where is the justice system getting it right?</p> <p>What improvements to supports for youth are already underway in your setting? Where can supports be strengthened through collaborative partnership with other systems?</p>

## Ecosystems & Ecosystems Proximity

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<p>What do adults need to understand about young peoples' current ecosystems in order to better support their development? How do you work to understand the full ecosystem of the young people in your setting?</p> <p>What infrastructure is needed to ensure supportive, developmental relationships and cross-setting connections are built into youth experience rather than happenstance?</p>	<p>What supports did students experience in the school system and what supports did they seek out outside of the system? What was the result of drawing on both inside and outside resources?</p>	<p>If you could interview the adults who took action together (over time) to help Sam and other students of color navigate the school, what would you ask them?</p> <p>What are examples in your setting of how caring adults can be connected cross-settings? Empowered to change their systems?</p>	<p>Are there any "culture war" or thorny issues rooted in the larger ecosystem that affect your setting (e.g., racial tensions, masking, sexual harassment, etc.)? How does this impact your work to create belonging and agency in your setting?</p>	<p>What experiences from other parts of the ecosystem did Leo carry into school?</p> <p>How do young people's experiences in other settings in their ecosystem influence what happens in your setting? What experiences gained from other parts of your students' <u>ecosystem</u> contribute to stigmas or barriers for them? To strengths?</p> <p>How do you work to connect across the ecosystem to respond?</p>	<p>In what ways might Jodi and Natasha's systems engagement have looked different if the adults in each system were aware of their full ecosystems?</p> <p>What systems do the young people in your setting need to <u>navigate</u>? What support is there in your setting to prepare them to navigate these other settings?</p> <p>Where else are young people getting supports, and if identified, can these be better leveraged?</p>	<p>In what ways is the juvenile justice system's place in the ecosystem connected to the "lock out" Jaleel experienced?</p> <p>What systems do the young people in your setting need to <u>navigate</u>? What support is there in your setting to prepare them to navigate these other settings?</p> <p>Where else are young people getting these supports, and if identified, can these be better leveraged?</p>

# EQUITABLE ECOSYSTEMS STORY SERIES DISCUSSION PROMPTS

## WITH APPLICABLE KEY IDEAS

### Developmental Practices & Setting Quality

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<p>What do you think were the most important developmental practices used by staff or the organization in the story you read?</p> <p>How would you rate the quality of the primary setting featured in the story you read (on a scale of 1 – 5 with 5 being the highest quality)? What elements in the story support your assessment?</p> <p>What strategies are you using in your settings to support belonging and development for all young people?</p>	<p>What were your initial reactions to reading about the impact of a climate of harassment and student belonging in school? What thoughts does it lead you to about missed developmental opportunities?</p> <p>This piece took on the difficult topic of harassment. In nearly all developmental settings, there are dynamics that could cause developmental harm that exist alongside of intentional developmental practices. Where are there opportunities to uncover the ways in which students experience negative development experiences in your setting and engage adults in supportive, productive dialogue about it?</p>	<p>If you could interview Sam and her mom, what else would you want to know about her old school? The other settings they connect to? The “tradeoffs” discussions they had?</p> <p><i>Sam’s experience of bias at school affected her school performance, relationships with teachers and peers, and social-emotional wellbeing. The <a href="#">research evidence</a> supports what black youth know from lived experience – racism negatively impacts many aspects of healthy development, including mental health, self-esteem, and academic outcomes.</i></p> <p><i>We don’t know enough about Sam’s first school and the positive and negative aspects of that environment. We know that some perceived aspect of “school quality” motivated the change. We can use the <a href="#">Guiding Principles for Whole Child Design</a> to tease out some of the thinking about the “trade-offs” anticipated and experienced that were linked to Sam and her mom’s decision.</i></p> <p>How do you connect with students as they enter or transition into your setting? How do you support them in assessing supports and building connection to other settings in which they engage?</p>	<p>How did YouthBuild staff use developmental practices to address a larger “culture war” conflict? To address behavior that contributes to “othering<sup>2</sup>?”</p> <p><i>In the story, adult staff were able to lean into pre-existing relationships with young people built on trust and a consistent approach to positive experiences that address a full range of developmental needs. This foundation allowed YouthBuild staff to approach conflict from a developmental perspective and challenge assumptions that were both deeply personal and culturally harmful.</i></p> <p><i>To build a sense of belonging for all youth, the school built a culture grounded in intentional investments to develop strong peer commitments, practicing, and modeling respectful dialogue, and the cultivation of positive individual habits as embodied in their daily creed. All of these contributed to building a sense of belonging.</i></p> <p>What do you think about the concept of “students giving adults permission to teach them?” Is this necessary for successful engagement? How would this apply or not apply in your setting?</p>	<p>How did policy and practice intertwine to support a fresh start for Leo? In what ways was student engagement critical to the implementation of these practices?</p> <p><i>Leo’s fresh start was the result of policy decisions at the building level to bring a restorative justice model to the school. The developmental practices of the Peace Team provided Leo an opportunity to have different relationship-building experiences with peers and adults. The Peace Team environment modeled adult-youth relationships that were more informal than Leo had experienced before. These provided space for Leo to build positive relationships outside of the classroom and for students to have a voice in shaping the climate and practices within their school.</i></p> <p><i>Informal relationships, authentic youth-led leadership, and opportunities to build positive alternative narratives were present in the Peace Team microsetting, providing a bridge to change the narrative from Leo’s formal school experiences prior to joining the Peace Team.</i></p> <p>For the young people in your setting who have experienced the most challenges, what staff or organizational practices provide the best opportunities for a “fresh start” or a “refocus?”</p> <p>Reflect on how various microsettings (e.g., classroom, afterschool club, cafeteria) in your setting may be experienced. Which spaces seem to provide the best opportunities for connection, and for whom?</p>	<p>What are the “little” developmental experiences that end up being “big” for young people in your setting?</p> <p><i>A more human-centered system would have more capacity to support the day-to-day experiences in which young people experience connection. The rules and constraints of the system can make it hard for foster youth and their families to be empowered to make spontaneous and natural connections – “little things” that provide young people with normal teenage experiences.</i></p> <p>Jodi and Natasha suggest that systems must act more like “relationships.” What is your reaction to this concept? Is that a realistic goal?</p> <p>What were the key contributors to the differences in experiences for Jodi and Natasha in the child welfare system vs. the education system? What more would you want to know about how Jodi and Natasha engaged with various settings within each system?</p> <p><i>Relationships were present in both systems. One system seemed to have the conditions needed for those relationships to be flexible and responsive, and focused on a fuller set of needs than just the ones that the system is primarily responsible for. In Natasha’s words, the educational system was more flexible to act “like a series of relationships” and less like a bureaucratic system attending to the needs that necessitated system involvement.</i></p>	<p>Is belonging “impossible” in systems like the justice system as the featured young adults suggest? What are realistic developmental goals in the juvenile system?</p> <p><i>Jaleel and Derrell point to at least one developmental goal that all youth should attain irrespective of setting – the opportunity to build positive, supportive relationships with adults.</i></p> <p>A system in which the adults are supported to provide key developmental experiences is essential to achieving this goal.</p> <p>How might Jaleel and Darrell have been engaged in settings that provided supports and connections automatically rather than by chance?</p> <p><i>The story suggests that in terms of navigating the system, few adults within the system were positioned to provide consistent support. However, Jaleel talked about finding a mentor who was both knowledgeable about the system and supportive. The narrative also mentions that individual adults in the system can form positive developmental relationships, but this is not consistent across systems.</i></p> <p>What in your setting or system do young people connect to by chance?</p>

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<p>What does the story you read indicate about how our formal systems (education, juvenile justice, child welfare) are designed, or not designed, to foster a sense of belonging?</p> <p>How might systems change efforts support both increased setting quality and greater connections between the system and the larger ecosystem?</p>	<p>In the story, Emmy writes, "Most students aren't taught to identify and act upon their own agency, but youth aren't the only population letting what is habitual become acceptable." What systemic barriers seemed to prevent further joint action between young people and adults to address school climate issues?</p> <p><i>Since the story presents the student perspective, we do not fully know what the limitations and barriers were, but we know how students experienced it. We can also extend our thinking to imagine the policy, administrative, and organizational barriers that are most typically present and the challenges they present to joint efforts between youth and adults to affect change. Identifying system-level barriers to change is an important step in preparing the adults to work most authentically and effectively with young people. Adults need to assess their own willingness and power to affect change, and level-set expectations, options, and strategies alongside young people.</i></p> <p>What systemic challenges prevent young people and adults from working together for change in your setting?</p>	<p>In what ways was Sam's experience a result of lack of knowledge in the system about all of the elements to youth success or of the extent to which these elements were not in place for students of color?</p> <p><i>"Good schools" are often judged as such on just one or two dimensions (most often related to academics), but an understanding of whole child design and youth development requires a far broader lens for understanding all of the elements needed for youth success.</i></p> <p><i>The school failed to consider that "rich learning experiences" alone are not enough to offset intense feelings of "being othered" and failed to anticipate a need for consistently positive learning settings on Sam's confidence, behavior, and motivation.</i></p> <p><i>Details from the story demonstrate the need for institutionalized commitments not just to rigorous instruction, but to creating "personalized, empowering, culturally-affirming, transformative" learning environments for all young people, especially those likely to feel marginalized for any reason.</i></p> <p>How do you engage family and community leaders as experts in your systems change efforts?</p>	<p>In what ways is the YouthBuild team's approach to this challenge based on the fact that they sit intersection of the education and youth development system? How might this experience inform the larger system?</p> <p><i>YouthBuild's position as an organization that sits at the intersection of education and youth development gives it a unique advantage in engaging young people in ways that make strong connections between academic achievement, interpersonal and social emotional skills, and leadership development.</i></p> <p><i>Specifically, the YouthBuild model emphasizes relationships and provides space for community-building and social-emotional skill development throughout a young person's day. Because of this, young people have many opportunities to practice working through issues that affect the entire community and are scaffolded in using these skills to resolve interpersonal and community-level conflict.</i></p> <p>How might organizations and settings influence the approach of larger systems?</p>	<p>In what ways did the intentional developmental practices of OurTown &amp; Peace Teams shift how an entire district, system, or network listens to and approaches its work with young people?</p> <p><i>The Peace Team provided a model for replicating such practices in other schools and across the district. With young people as lead facilitators, the Peace Team approach modeled student engagement and provided the proof points needed for the district to adopt a broader engagement strategy.</i></p> <p>What practices in your setting are worth lifting up across your broader system or institution? What cross-setting connections are needed to begin that transformation?</p>	<p>What would a more "relationship" focused system look like?</p> <p><i>Jodi and Natasha presented a contrast between systems that helps illustrate what a more "relationship" focused system looks like: flexible and responsive; focused on positive identity development rather than deficits; and positioned to help young people make connections back to their communities.</i></p> <p>Jodi notes that "we shout 'self-care' at kids who need community care." What "community care" strategies would you identify as important for supporting youth in systems?</p>	<p>Every system has strengths and challenges. Considering the full developmental needs of children and youth, where is the justice system getting it right?</p> <p>What improvements to supports for youth are already underway in your setting? Where can supports be strengthened through collaborative partnership with other systems?</p>

## Ecosystems & Ecosystems Proximity

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<p>What do adults need to understand about young peoples' current ecosystems in order to better support their development? How do you work to understand the full ecosystem of the young people in your setting?</p> <p>What infrastructure is needed to ensure supportive, developmental relationships and cross-setting connections are built into youth experience rather than happenstance?</p>	<p>What supports did students experience in the school system and what supports did they seek out outside of the system? What was the result of drawing on both inside and outside resources?</p> <p><i>When students experienced their school system as non-responsive to the larger climate issues, the students sought out adult mentors in other places and found venues for taking action to get data on the depth of the harassment problem. The additional adult supports were instrumental to students having avenues to be heard and strategies for doing so.</i></p>	<p>If you could interview the adults who took action together (over time) to help Sam and other students of color navigate the school, what would you ask them?</p> <p><i>The intervention of a few key adults was critical for Sam, but few of these adult supports were intentionally established roles within the system.</i></p> <p><i>Sam is currently a second-year college student-athlete majoring in social work, but her future would have been different without the intervention of a few adults who helped Sam navigate and pushed school officials to "see" the systemic barriers to success. One important question is, can any of these "happenstance" supports that Sam received become more institutionalized in the future?</i></p> <p>What are examples in your setting of how caring adults can be connected cross-settings? Empowered to change their systems?</p>	<p>Are there any "culture war" or thorny issues rooted in the larger ecosystem that affect your setting (e.g., racial tensions, masking, sexual harassment, etc.)? How does this impact your work to create belonging and agency in your setting?</p>	<p>What experiences from other parts of the ecosystem did Leo carry into school?</p> <p><i>Leo's experiences within the juvenile justice system were dehumanizing and disempowering ones. Leo talked about the stigma associated with being a justice-involved youth. This influenced both others' perception of him and his own self-concept in school as well as his struggle to develop positive attachments to school.</i></p> <p><i>The school's family resource coordinator played a critical role in recognizing the influence of a stigmatized status from one part of the ecosystem on Leo's identity and behaviors in school, providing Leo with an alternative way to attach to school and build new personal narratives.</i></p> <p>How do young people's experiences in other settings in their ecosystem influence what happens in your setting? What experiences gained from other parts of your students' <u>ecosystem</u> contribute to stigmas or barriers for them? To strengths?</p> <p>How do you work to connect across the ecosystem to respond?</p>	<p>In what ways might Jodi and Natasha's systems engagement have looked different if the adults in each system were aware of their full ecosystems?</p> <p><i>In Jodi's words, a different kind of systems engagement might have looked more like "community" – focused on the full range of needs and helping young people make connections where they can be more fully seen and get their full range of needs met. Additionally, the system would have been positioned to provide young people like Jodi and Natasha with the experiences to navigate other systems effectively and with minimal disruption.</i></p> <p>What systems do the young people in your setting need to <u>navigate</u>? What support is there in your setting to prepare them to navigate these other settings?</p> <p>Where else are young people getting supports, and if identified, can these be better leveraged?</p>	<p>In what ways is the juvenile justice system's place in the ecosystem connected to the "lock out" Jaleel experienced?</p> <p><i>Young people commonly talk about the stigma associated with justice system involvement and the role stigma plays in making it harder to make and maintain supportive connections in the broader community.</i></p> <p><i>While increasingly, juvenile justice systems are employing interventions that seek to keep young people in their communities and connect them with community-based supports, many aspects of the system are structured in ways that remove young people from their communities, particularly Black, Latinx, and Indigenous young people.</i></p> <p><i>Without consistent, intentional counters to the institutional barriers that can "lock out" system-engaged youth, the barriers to making these connections can be insurmountable.</i></p> <p>What systems do the young people in your setting need to <u>navigate</u>? What support is there in your setting to prepare them to navigate these other settings?</p> <p>Where else are young people getting these supports, and if identified, can these be better leveraged?</p>



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