An initiative of Aspen Institute Education & Society Program, Council of Chief State School Officers and Education First

Empathy Interviews

October 2019

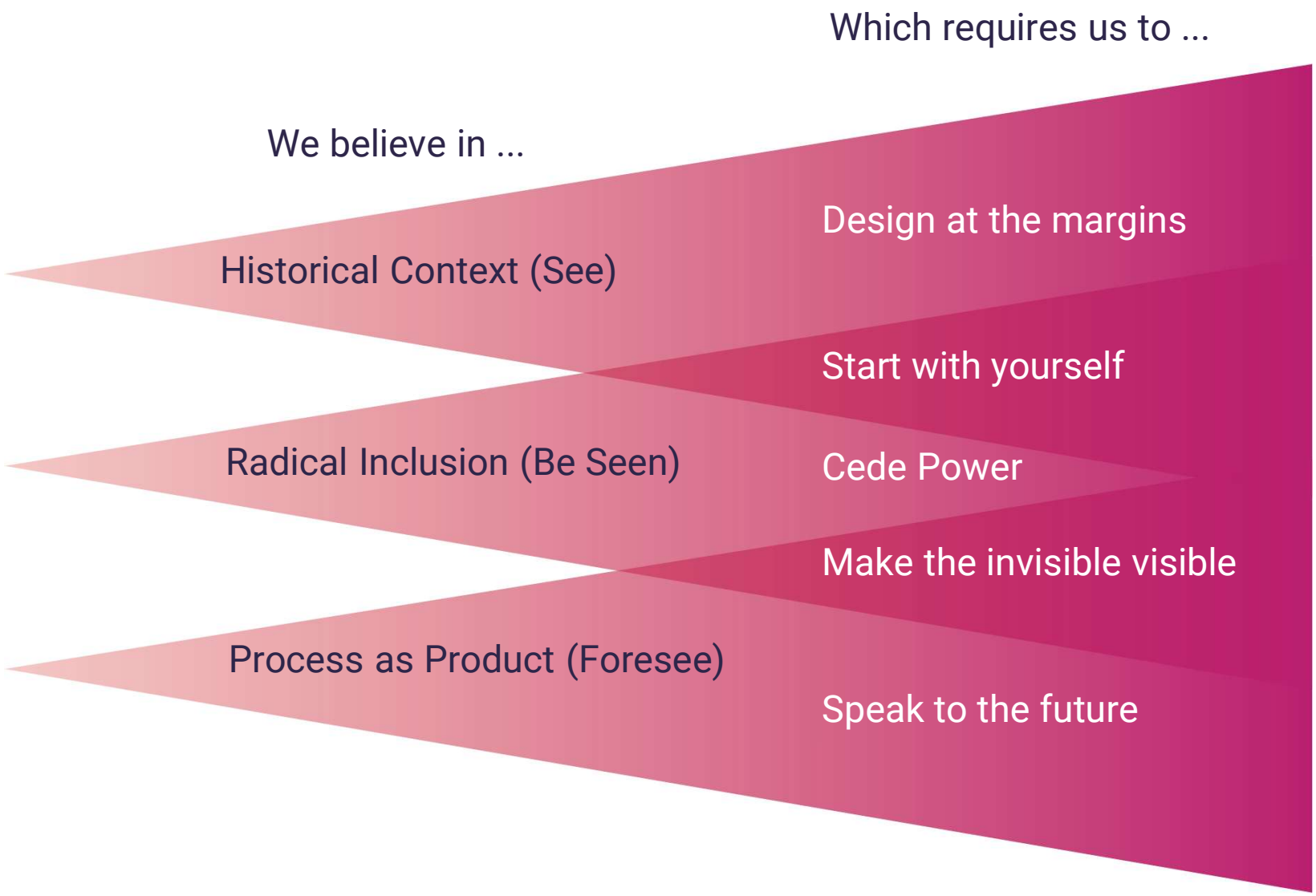
Coherence Lab Fellowship is an initiative co-led by the Aspen Institute, Council of Chief State School Officers and Education First and it focuses on bringing together state, district and school leaders to support coherent policy-to-practice experience for teachers and principals.

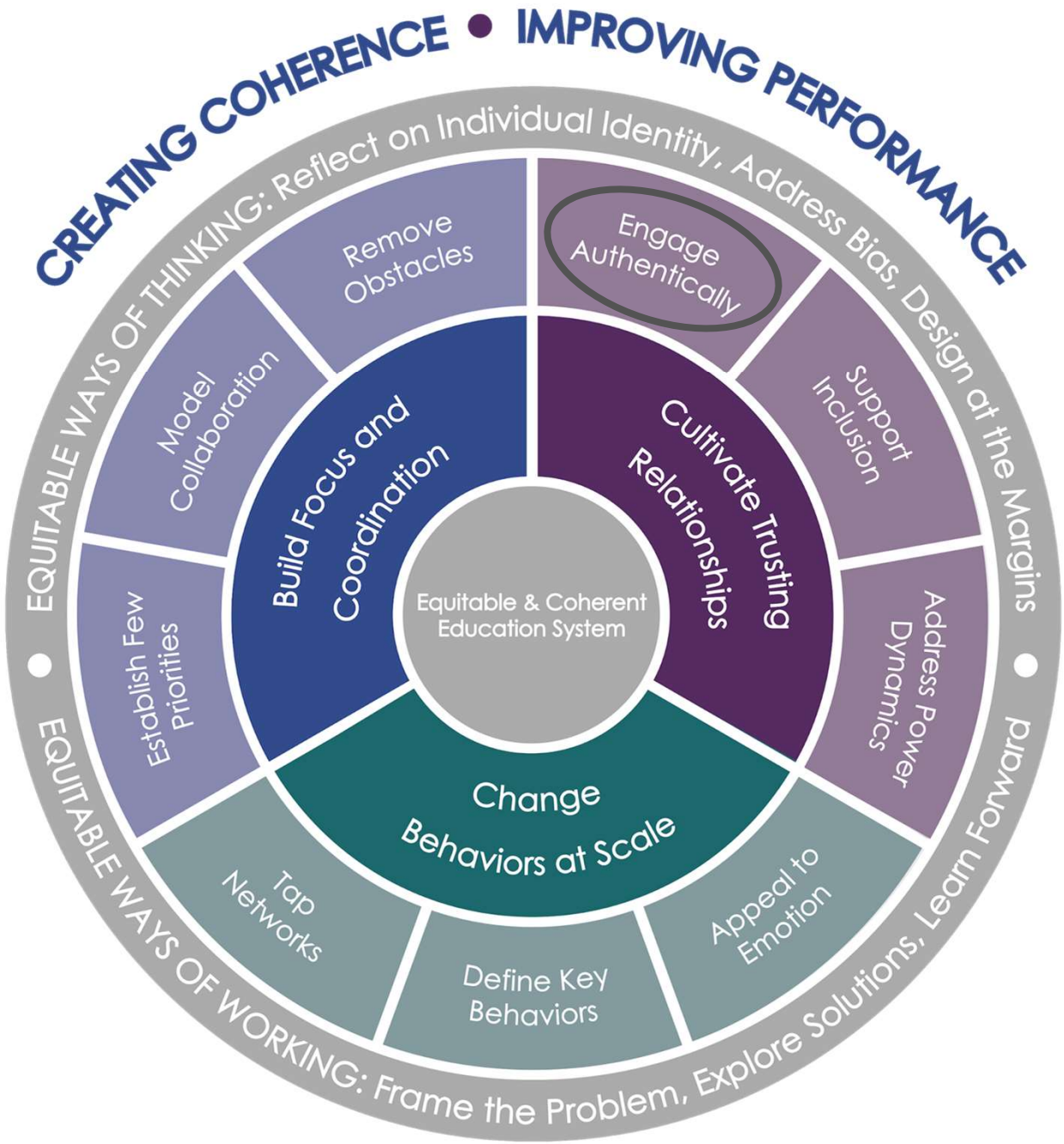
Empathy interviews are a component of **Equity Meets Design** who was a partner in developing the content for the Coherence Lab Fellowship.

equityXdesign

Combines the consciousness
of equity work with the power of design
thinking methodologies

The Remix.


We believe in ...
Historical Context (See)
Radical Inclusion (Be Seen)
Process as Product (Foresee)
Which requires us to ...
Design at the margins
Start with yourself
Cede Power
Make the invisible visible
Speak to the future



Coherence Lab FELLOWSHIP

What is meta-empathy?

At the center of empathy is listening to understand.

At the center of empathy is listening to understand. while understanding how you’re listening.

Why do Meta-Empathy through Interviews

Moving from Transactional To Relational

What's the goal?

You are listening to…	You are not…
Understand a person's experience, choices and behaviors	Leading with your opinion
Understand a person's point of view and relationship to the problem	Identifying a solution
"Get to know" the problem better	

Coherence Lab FELLOWSHIP

How to do Interviews

A few guidelines…

- Ask specific and open-ended questions
- Ask why…and keep asking why
- Ask one question at a time
- Do not ask binary questions
- Do not suggest answers
- Even when you think you know the answer, ask people why they do or say things.
- Don't be afraid of silence
- Pay attention to nonverbal cues. Be aware of body language and emotions
- Capture notes, audio or written

A few guidelines…

- Start the interview by thanking them, reiterating purpose, positioning yourself as a learner and establishing rapport
- Another reminder that silence is not a bad thing; people may need time to process
- This should feel like a conversation; listen and follow up questions out of curiosity
- The goal is to get information that will help you understand and refine your POP from the perspective of those who are most deeply experiencing the problem

Who to engage in Interviews

Who should you engage?

- **Think of a range of users** with proximity to the problem
- Go **beyond** the "usual suspects"
- Look to the **margins**

Boundaries

What are the boundaries of the problem space you're working to solve? WHAT IS TRUE OF ANYONE WITH WHOM YOU ARE WORKING?

Geography
Demographic (eg. Age/Grade)
Needs
Technical Problems

Margins

Who is on the margins in the problem space you're working to solve? WHAT IS TRUE OF THOSE WHO MOST NEED A NEW DESIGN?

Oppressive Circumstances
Past Stories
Relationships with Institutions
Moral Dilemmas

How to prepare for Interviews

Tools - Preparing

Self-interview

Ask yourself (and then answer) the same questions you intend to ask others.

Imaginary Pre-Interview

Pretend that you are conducting the interview you are intending to have. Think very specifically about the very person you will speak to. How do you imagine they might answer your questions?

Power Visualizations

What power differentials might be at play? How might that influence the conversation? How can you neutralize the differences?

Self Interview

How:

Ask yourself (and then answer) the same questions you intend to ask others.

Reflection:

What might that be telling you about yourself? What should you be aware of or do differently as you engage in this process?

Imaginary Interviews

How:

Pretend that you are conducting the interview you are intending to have. Think very specifically about the very person you will speak to. How do you imagine they might answer your questions?

Reflection:

What assumptions, biases or stereotypes might be at play? What do you think you already know about the person you are going to interview? What might you be projecting onto them that is really about your experience?

Power Visualization

Across what dimensions might there be power differentials?

- Identity
- Expertise
- Roles
- Culture
- ???

How will you neutralize them?

How to write questions for interview

A few guidelines…

- Ask specific and open-ended questions
  - "Tell me about the last time you . . ."
- Ask why…and keep asking why (or tell me more about that, etc)
- Do not ask binary questions (ie Yes/No)