Infusing an Equity Approach Into Career and Technical Education Research
Webinar Transcript

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Speakers and Facilitators:

- **Corinne Alfeld, PhD**, IES Education Research Analyst, Policy and Systems Division, National Center for Education Research (NCER), Institute of Education Sciences (IES), U.S. Department of Education

- **Emily Passias, PhD**, Equity in Career and Technical Education (CTE) Workgroup, CTE Research Network; Vice President of Policy, Linked Learning Alliance

- **Lois Joy, PhD**, Equity in CTE Workgroup, CTE Research Network; Director of Research, JFF

- **D. Crystal Byndloss, PhD**, Director, Outreach, Diversity, and Inclusion/Senior Associate, K–12 Education, MDRC

- **Dawn Rowe, PhD**, Equity in CTE Workgroup, CTE Research Network; James H. Quillen Chair of Excellence in Teaching and Learning Professor, East Tennessee State University

- **Julie Edmonds, PhD,** Equity in CTE Workgroup, CTE Research Network; Program Director of the SERVE Center, University of North Carolina at Greensboro

CTERN = CTE Research Network

Corinne: All right, welcome everyone. It's great to have so many people join us today. My name is **Corinne Alfeld**, and I'm a program officer at the Institute of Education Sciences at the U.S. Department of Education, which is the funder for the CTE Research Network. I'm standing in today for the Network director Kathy Hughes of the American Institutes for Research (AIR) to introduce today's webinar and presenters.

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I'm excited to be part of this webinar on how to infuse an equity approach into career and technical education research. The Equity Framework for CTE Research was developed by the Equity Workgroup of the CTE Research Network. All of these folks are part of the CTE Research Network In different projects and roles, who work together to create this important framework. I want to give a shout-out and thanks to the lead facilitators of the Equity Workgroup listed on the left side.

Our presenters today on the right are Emily Passias, Lois Joy, and Crystal Byndloss.

Emily Passias currently serves as the vice president for policy at the Linked Learning Alliance. Emily formerly served as the state CTE director for the state of Ohio, where she worked each day to ensure that state policies and data strategy were centered on equity and serving our students furthest from opportunity. She holds a PhD in sociology from the Ohio State University and is passionate about creating a robust evidence base to drive equitable CTE policy and practice.

Lois Joy is a research director at JFF. She leads projects investigating gender and racial differences in education in workplace outcomes and broadening participation of underrepresented groups in STEM [science, technology, engineering, and mathematics] fields through alternative credentials, work-based learning, and apprenticeships. She recently served as the principal investigator for a National Science Foundation project, analyzing the impacts of internships on technology, education, and employment. She received her PhD in economics from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst.

Crystal Byndloss holds dual roles at MDRC. She is the organization's first director of outreach, diversity, and inclusion, and a senior associate in the K–12 education policy area, where, for more than a decade, she has researched and directed initiatives to promote postsecondary access and success for students with low incomes. She earned her PhD in sociology from Harvard University.

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Before we get started, I'd like to share some information about the CTE Research Network. Its mission is to expand the evidence base for CTE by conducting studies that use causal research methods to determine whether CTE participation caused students to have different outcomes than if they had not participated. The CTE Research Network is led by a team consisting of AIR, Vanderbilt University, ACTE [Association for Career and Technical Education], and JFF. There are six teams participating in the CTE Network who are all conducting causal research funded by IES grants.

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To expand the body of CTE research, we need more CTE researchers. The Network has been building a community of researchers through training opportunities. We're also helping researchers improve their research skills and helping them with some of the sticky methodological issues involved in CTE research.

Our new set of tools, the CTE Research Fundamentals, supports researchers in designing and executing high-quality CTE research. The Equity Framework is an important piece to this. I believe the links to these are being put in the chat.

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Please visit the website to learn more about the Network's research training opportunities and resources.

Now, I will turn the presentation over to Emily Passias.

Emily:　　Thank you, Corrine. Next slide, please.

I'm sure it isn't news to anyone in this virtual room here today that CTE has a troubled history when it comes to equity. CTE originally started as vocational education, with the intent of ensuring that students who were not going to college were well-trained in workforce skills. The dark side of the vocational education system was that it ended up tracking students, particularly our students furthest from opportunity, our Black and Brown students and our low-income students in particular, into vocational programs that lack connection to jobs with family-sustaining wages or connections to further postsecondary opportunities.

CTE has evolved, however, and today we see a new and reinvigorated emphasis on equity. Perkins V offers state and local practitioners both the funding and policy levers to design and implement more equitable CTE experiences for young people and encourages us all to build stronger connections between high school, postsecondary education, and the good jobs that allow individuals to lead self-determined lives.

Nevertheless, we still see inequities in accessing and succeeding in high-quality CTE programs. This history, which is also reviewed in more depth in the framework that we'll be discussing here today, really motivated the work of our Equity Working Group.

I recognize that we are having a little bit of chat difficulty here today.

So, we want to just start by asking you all what equity means to you, but recognize that our chat function is not working today. I would encourage you all to think a little bit, as we go through the presentation today, about what equity means to you personally in your work every day, and what it means specifically in the context of career and technical education. If we're able to get the chat function working here later in the discussion, please feel free to share your thoughts on that through the chat.

But for right now, I'm going to go ahead and keep talking a little bit about the process that we went through as a working group together, to come to some agreement around what equity meant for us as a collaborative.

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To kick off this work, our CTE Research Network Equity Workgroup spent some time ensuring that we had a common definition among ourselves of what equity means to us, to really ground our work. And we really felt like Wisconsin's framing resonated with each of us.

For us, equity means that every student has access to the educational resources and rigor that they need, at the right moment in their education, across race, gender, ethnicity, language, disability, sexual orientation, family background, and/or income.

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Before we dig in on the framework, I want to give you a little bit of background on the process by which our group went through to develop this framework, and a little bit of information about who the Equity Workgroup is itself. Our CTE Research Network Equity Working Group is a group of CTERN members who are interested in issues of equity. Our goal is to build awareness of and expertise in addressing equity issues in CTE research. One of the initial activities our group did together was a survey of the CTERN projects on issues related to equity.

Project leads described how equity was defined in their projects and if there were any equity-related questions that were under investigation through their research. We also looked at the demographics of research teams themselves and identified possible areas of growth in that area as well. One of the things that came out of our data collection was the conclusion that we, as a field, would really benefit from some resources to guide our thinking about how to incorporate equity into CTE research. We wanted more specific suggestions about what this would look like, and how we should think about infusing an equity lens into our day-to-day work. As a result, the group did some brainstorming and decided that it would be a useful activity to create a framework to provide that more specific guidance.

Over the past year, our group has worked together to create the framework, a draft of which you should have available to you, and that we'll be digging in on a little bit deeper today.

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As a work group, we started by developing some value statements to guide our work. We believe that every student should have the opportunity to engage in high-quality CTE experiences that align with and expand their interests and aspirations and prepare them for their futures, and we believe that access to and success within CTE programs should not be determined by demographics or geography. All students, regardless of race, ethnicity, family structure, income, disability status, language, sexual orientation, gender identity, or other factors should be able to be welcomed and supported in CTE experiences.

We also believe that a core goal for our CTE data and research work should be to identify and address structural and institutional barriers that inhibit equitable participation in outcomes for CTE participants, and that using multiple methods and approaches in our research will allow us to most fully understand issues of equity in CTE.

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Before we start digging in on the content of the framework, I want to talk just a little bit about what the framework is and what it's not. The framework is not intended to be a methodological primer. It's not going to provide analytics strategies, and it's not intended to replicate existing CTE or other research guidance. The framework is intended to encourage researchers to center their CTE research on issues of equity and to use an equity lens throughout the research process, from research question development at the front end all the way through dissemination of results at the end of the process.

Our working group believes that infusing equity throughout our research is critical to ensuring that research can make a difference in ensuring equitable access to and success within CTE programs.

With that, I will go ahead and turn the conversation over to my colleague and CTERN Equity Working Group facilitator, Lois Joy. Take it away, thanks.

Lois: Thanks Emily, and welcome everyone. It's great to see you all here today. We really appreciate you taking the time. It's just really a pleasure to be able to share this with all of you.

So, what does our framework cover? Because of the complexity and the structural inequities in CTE, we really felt that an equity framework needed to be embedded in all the different aspects of research, from the very beginning—the development of project management teams—through to data collection, analysis, and dissemination.

You'll see in the framework that for each of these elements of research, we describe the stage of the research and how an equity lens can be implemented, questions to consider in implementing this lens, and the potential barriers.

We're not going to be able to do everything in every project, but to just be aware of any barriers and how they are going to affect our analysis, and then we provide some examples of current or future research that has this equity lens.

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So, the one thing you may find really interesting, that was really interesting to us, is once we went through all of those different stages of the research process, these six themes really rose to the surface as key elements of an equity approach to CTE research. There are these cross-cutting themes. So, starting here in in the yellow, ensuring transparency.

Being very, very clear about the definitions of equity being used, about what the focus of the research is, who's participating in that, and what are the outcomes we're looking at—just being clear and transparent about the whole process of research and inquiry. The second theme was involving the community. You'll see this again through the whole process—that the communities in which we work have a rich source of information to be sharing with us, to be collaborators with us, and to participate with researchers in the development of questions, in the gathering of appropriate data, in the analysis and interpretation of data, in sharing results, and in developing

strategies and policies for next steps. That being part of the community is going to help us to do research that is able to understand structural barriers and inequity.

Having diverse teams that we're working with when it comes to, again, developing questions. What are people with different backgrounds, from having CTE experience, or community college experience, or different genders, races and ethnicities, and ages.

It may be also appropriate, [to consider] different geographic areas, to just think about how that diversity on the team either as subject matter experts, collaborators, and bringing people in at different stages to help us really see beyond our own blind spots and beyond what our experiences are, and even knowledge of the literature, to just expand that out.

We also saw the importance of taking a systems approach. So, Emily had talked about some of the historical issues of inequity with vocational education, and to understand that, to understand how that may resonate today, and to be thinking about not so much what the learners or students need to do to adjust, but how can we create the systems of education, of work-based learning, of bridges to employment. These systems and pedagogy that are going to be supportive to all learners in a way that refers back to our definition of providing the right sources at the right time for all learners to be able to advance in their education and in their economics. And that's going to be something for us to really think a lot about, as we talk about in the framework, when it comes to data collection and analysis, to really make sure we're clearly understanding how we're going to be able to see when there's a structural barrier that individuals or groups of individuals are facing.

And then as much as possible, considering how our perspectives again may have certain blind spots in terms of we can't know everything, and we're very much influenced by our experiences, our education, our background, our communities. Just to be aware of what bias we may be embedding into our research designs, to make that as, again, transparent as possible to make the assumptions we're making, to really unearth them, so that we're not just reproducing inequity, but we're actually developing tools and lenses to see more clearly.

And the way to do that is to be aware of our biases, to draw on that diversity in the teams, the community. You can see how all of these are connected to help us really become more clear, rich, and effective in the research we're doing, and then demonstrating respect in the communities we're working with by bringing an asset versus a deficit approach. Again, looking at the systematic supports that may or may not be there and that need to be strengthened, rather than weighing change on the burden of an individual. So, these emerged out of the framework as guiding themes and principles.

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So, what I want to do now is just take a moment to give you a little bit of a flavor of how these themes are embedded into the different research stages, and hopefully you can go back and dig into this more in the framework.

We would love for any feedback you have, of course now, or after you've had a chance to read through. So, this theme of community involvement, I want to take up that here. So, the first example here is in project management. So, what does it mean to embed this theme, "Involving the Community," in the project management? Well, it goes back to that idea of understanding, that first we need this diversity in our teams to give us these different perspectives, and across many different elements, including race and gender, socioeconomic status, participation in CTE, and rural versus nonrural. And this will help us just to see things more broadly, those experiences, but also we can really be more active in developing cultural competency in our teams—developing the ability to understand and engage with people from communities and backgrounds that are different from us—and we can develop this skill. It's not just something static that you kind of get and then you have it. But this is that ongoing learning that we can do through workshops, bringing subject matter experts in to inform us in our research, to help us understand where our biases or prejudices might be. So, that's one step we can take in project management and, again, drawing on the community within which we're working, and the people there are going to know that context so much better than we might.

In the research design, it can really help so much to involve the communities of people we're working with. As a researcher, you're just not going to have the experience of someone day to day on the ground, administering a CTE program or education program you might be focusing on. It's just such a rich source of information about what it is they're trying to do and how they are thinking about it, how different people in the community are being brought together, and what are the challenges? That is just going to help make the research so much more relevant.

Then, when you're going on to data collection, then really being able to develop those surveys or those questionnaires that are really going to be on target in the situation that you're studying. And also help to understand, with measurement and data collection—it could be secondary data sources you're working with—that you just will understand where they came from, what they were measuring, what's maybe being missing, what's not being included.

I think another point, too, I want to mention is of course, when we're doing this data collection, working with the community will help us understand if we're sampling correctly. That's such a big element: Are we removing as much of that kind of selectivity bias in our data collection?

Do we have effective strategies for recruiting the right people to be talking to? So, all those things are going to help the data collection be stronger and more rich for the analysis. And then finally for reporting and dissemination, to really think more broadly about all the different audiences that we can speak to with the research. But most importantly, to be working in communities to get feedback. Is this analysis resonating? What are we missing? Is there something just off-key or off-note? Just another really good way to see if there was something missing in the way that the team put the data together and analyzed it. So, those are some of the many ways we talk about involving the community.

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We wanted to just take a few moments for you to share in the chat some experiences you may have had in involving representatives from the community and other stakeholders in the different stages of the research process. And as you're thinking about that, how you've done that, and what kinds of collaborations you've been part of. In CTE research, we're often going into these schools, and we're really asking them to open things up so we can explore questions. And the more collaborative that is, the more possible that's going to be, the more schools are going to want to be able to work with researchers.

When we ask them, "What is it you would like to get out of this inquiry that we're providing?," they may not have the resources to do that. So, setting up those collaborations and working on that on an ongoing basis, that's something we've talked a lot about in the development of this framework. And especially in a lot of communities where they may be under-resourced already, so we don't want to be putting an extra burden without providing really high value to the inquiry we're doing.

So, let's move on to the next slide. You can keep putting things in the chat.

This is fabulous; we will have this for our resources to use. Even if we don't talk about it here, it's great to have them.

So, this next theme of acknowledging and attending to bias, we saw as again emerging through all the different aspects of research and being really important to pay attention to, so that we can really move beyond our narrow view of things. Again, to see things from different perspectives—especially when it comes to structural bias—these kinds of things can be very challenging to document and see. So, having a big lens on it is really important.

And this bias, just to be clear, it's not just like the statistical bias that we're trained to be careful about in our statistical analysis, which we're doing. It more has to do with assumptions we may be making about different groups of people. Because we just lack information, we lack a bigger view. So, one example may be in an analysis of data to call a choice—an outcome a student is making—to call that a choice, when it actually may not be a choice. There may not have been a choice involved. And so that would be applying a bias to an analysis.

So for project management, we can train ourselves to be more aware of the biases we might have by, again, by looking for people from diverse backgrounds, by being very collaborative with the communities [in which] we're working, to do some of that competency training, to see where we may be losing the perspective.

With data collection, there are a variety of ways that we can measure student experiences, and we should tap into all of those ways to make sure we're getting the full experience of how a student is moving through some of these programs, or what the experience is from teachers or administrators or the community, and to be aware of who's participating in our research and who isn't. Who we are able to sample and we are getting information from, and who isn't responding and we're not getting information from, and is there anything we can do about that in our

analysis? So, that nonresponse comes up. Like, are we only talking to learners who are already participating in a program? And just to understand, we may be missing the perspective of the learners who haven't yet entered, and just to be aware of that.

In the data analysis, in the qualitative example, we could be aware of, like, are we using certain codes for certain groups more than other groups? Or do the codes that we develop seem more applicable to some groups and not to others?

Are the codes themselves not helping us to see relevance and experience?, for example. And we also have a whole section on the quantitative analysis, where bias can start to be embedded in, and we can't always fix it, but the more we're aware of it—it's better to be at least aware of it and transparent about it than not to because then we're just perpetuating inequalities because we don't see them. And then finally, for cost and resource allocation for CTE, the different access students may have and the different resources available to different programs—all that may have an impact on the provisioning of these programs and their outcomes.

I think the bias comes in just making sure we've gathered enough information to know, are we getting a complete picture? And if not, where are we missing information, so that we're not missing ways in which there are structural barriers that may be preventing some groups from advancing than others?

So, I think we're going to go to the next slide. Okay, good.

So, here's an example of a question you and your teams could ask, as you're collecting and analyzing data, which I talked a little bit about. Have you considered the reasons why participants may opt out of data collection? And is there some source of bias around that, that could be corrected in terms of how you're reaching out to collect that data? It could be how e-mail messages were sent, or even whether gift cards were enough, or whether we've used the right channels to communicate to all the different groups that we were really interested in gathering information from. So, that becomes important, even if you're using administrative data, that becomes very important to make sure we understand how that was sampled, who was included in those samples, and who may have been left out. And then to look at the kinds of questions that were asked to see if there is information that wasn't collected here that really may skew the analysis we're doing to answer our questions.

So, a lot of this is really standing back and saying, do we get a big enough picture? Do we include diverse perspectives? Do we understand this community? And can we be transparent about what we're trying to do and where our biases may be? So that's, in a nutshell, what we've developed in this framework. We've gone through, again, all these different steps of research and discussed these themes, and then provided some tools and examples of how you may begin to approach your research using these tools. So, thanks very much.

I think my colleague—I think Crystal is going to go next. So, thank you very much.

Crystal: Great. Next slide, please. Thank you.

I'm going to say a few words reflecting on the framework, and wanted to share that. When I thought about the reflections on the framework, I realized I needed to reflect a bit on some of the activities that took place before we got to a framework.

And so I just wanted to share that in 2021, I was a member of the CTE Network, the Workgroup on Equity, which we've mentioned here, and we authored a blog, which can be found on the CTE Research Network website. And so in that blog, we had suggested a few ways in which researchers could be more intentional in thinking about equity when conducting CTE studies. So, we encouraged researchers to establish diverse teams, to adopt an equity-minded research and evaluation approach, and to explore intersectionality within, as opposed to just across, subpopulations.

We also asked researchers to acknowledge that inequities don't exist within a vacuum and to address in their studies [those] systems policies and procedures, or what those systems policies and procedures are, that promote inequities. We also recommended that researchers engage the communities that participate in the studies and to ask ourselves, consistently ask ourselves, what more is needed.

So, these are themes that Lois had mentioned in her presentation about what you find in the framework, and I wanted to flag this work that happened beforehand because I just thought it was important to share that 3 years ago when we wrote that initial blog, for me those statements felt very bold. And they were bold, not because we were sharing ideas that we thought were unreasonable, but because we hadn't seen a lot of discussion about equity in the CTE literature. And to me, it felt as though we were moving into new terrain. I wasn't exactly sure how this would be received within the community.

So, the blog also included a few next steps for the Network, including creating some documents and sharing resources with Network members, so that, as a Network, we could be thinking critically about how best to bring an equity lens to bear on the studies that we were engaged in. But honestly, at the time, I thought our blog felt very aspirational, and we had set this really lofty goal. But then you jump to fall of 2022, and the workgroup has created a set of publicly available documents focused on how to bring equity to bear on the CTE research process. I do want to flag for those in the audience who may not be CTE researchers that while the resources speak specifically to a CTE audience, given the universal nature of the principles cited in the resources, you'll find that they're very useful to researchers who are studying non-CTE topics as well.

So, I just want to flag that while the graphics that we flagged in the presentation earlier were really helpful in distilling the main points that are raised in the document, I just want to enthusiastically encourage you to read the framework itself, which provides useful insights on individual study stages and how you might approach this when doing CTE-focused work.

I think overall the resources are really thoughtful and contain concrete ideas to help you take intentional steps when you're conducting equity-focused studies.

And I saw in the Q&A at some point, someone asked how are these resources specific to CTE? And I think when you go through the framework, you'll see that they're actually examples pulled from CTE. So, it really helps you to contextualize how to think about this in the CTE realm.

So, I'd like to just spend my remaining time sharing my experience applying aspects of this approach to a CTE project. So, for several years now, MDRC has been considering: How can we do better at bringing an equity-focused lens to all of our studies? And so, we do work that involves CTE, but then we do a lot of work outside of CTE.

So, how do we think about this across our studies? In 2020, I was part of an MDRC project team that was about to launch an IES-funded CTE evaluation. As part of our internal project network meeting, our team was asked to share with internal reviewers how we were thinking about bringing equity to bear on this particular study. So, the project leaders met to review the questions we'd been given and to consider our responses. Then, the responses were shared with the full team for its review and comments. I just want to say that I think it's worth mentioning that typically senior leaders on project teams complete the new project, review materials and kickoff materials themselves, and submit them for internal review, and don't always reach out to the full team to get their feedback. But in this case, because there was an equity focus to the questions, it really created an opportunity for us to engage the full team in the discussion, which was a real shift in our approach.

So, some of the questions we were asked were fairly easy to answer. So, when we discuss project management, which was at Stage 1 in the framework, we were able to answer questions about how we created a racially and culturally diverse project team and staff development opportunities that were planned to ensure that the entire team was exposed to cultural competence training and would be exposed to equity-focused research resources, some of which have been created in-house at MDRC. We were also able to articulate planned staff development opportunities for staff who would be taking on new tasks and new roles in the project.

When we discussed the research design, which is Stage 2 in the framework, we were able to describe a process for ensuring that the team would take a culturally responsive approach when conducting the informed consent process, and we were also [able] to describe our intent to work with a survey firm to field a student survey. And in our interactions with the firm, we wanted to ensure that our survey questions would be culturally responsive and sensitive to students' lived experiences.

Now, at other times, the team was challenged by how to accurately answer questions about project stages that were well into the future. So, for example, when discussing reporting and dissemination, which is Stage 6 in the framework, it was difficult to accurately state the team's process for involving stakeholders in the dissemination phase, when the project had yet to start

and when we didn't know the extent of the stakeholder community for the study. Still, we took the time to brainstorm potential ideas that could be revisited at a later stage in the project.

So, this exercise of walking through the stages of the project with an equity-focused lens at the project start asked us to shift the way in which we were conceptualizing, designing, and conducting our research. The exercise helped the team to identify specific stages where the team had almost instinctively been using an equity-focused approach, specific stages where the team had not taken an equity focused approach—but could with more intention—and specific stages that the team would need to revisit as the research progressed.

Now, at the start of my remarks, I mentioned that the framework addresses—or maybe I didn't mention this because I think I cut it out when Lois mentioned it in her remarks—potential barriers. And I think because this approach is asking researchers to revisit traditional ways of conducting research, you might find that some of the ideas are easier to implement than others. So, for example, you may find it's going to take more time and more budget to do this work well, which is going to require that you make some tradeoffs in terms of your project plan. I think that's a very real barrier, or something that you need to consider when you're doing this work, but it's something that you can achieve.

Applying an equity-focused lens takes time and intention, and we're really encouraging you to look at this framework as a tool to help you consider how you can begin to make some shifts in your practice in a way that helps you to center equity in your studies. So, to assist you to do this work, of course, you have the framework that we've mentioned. And then on the slide here, we have four resources from other colleagues and other organizations that can also help you to think about how you want to approach this work going forward. I believe that these links will be shared with you in the chat as well as after the presentation.

So that is it from my remarks. I'm going to pass the baton on to my colleague, **Dawn Rowe**, who is going to lead us through a Q&A.

Dawn: Thank you. Thank you very much, Crystal. I really appreciate it.

We've had several questions come through in the Q&A and chat, and I wanted to pass a few along.

Some we will answer after the webinar is over. But there was a really important question that came through related to what the limitations of the framework are.

What do you view as limitations to the framework? And Crystal, you mentioned this a little bit, but let's start with Julie. And then I think each of you might want to comment on that.

Julie: Hey, all. Sure, this is **Julie Edmonds**. I was one of the cofacilitators for this.

I think what happens when you write something is that you write it and then you start using it, and you see all the things that are missing from it the first time. And so one of the things that I think we did is that we actually identified a lot of these themes when we were sort of creating

ancillary products that went along with it. And I think if I were to redo the framework and add to it, I think I would definitely want to make some of those themes much more explicit and winding throughout because I think it's a good conceptual framework—that arc that you all saw at the beginning. I think that's a really good conceptual framework.

And the other thing is that I would like to say is that we are definitely looking for folks who are interested in applying this framework and giving us input on how it's working and how it's not working. So if, if there are folks here who want to do that, please reach out to any of us here and give us insights about the things that are working and not working for you.

Dawn: And then I open it up to other members of our team in terms of limitations that you see in the framework.

Lois: It's a great question. I think, I don't know if it's so much a limitation, but sort of like a stage. It really feels like this is a first stage, a first way of kind of starting out and looking and sort of pulling together all that's necessary, that's needed, that we start to look at. And then I think you could go deep into each of the sections about how to actually begin to operationalize things. I think what Crystal had mentioned too—sometimes there are these choices that have to be made given your resources.

So, how do you begin to navigate some of that? You can't often. When it comes to equity, what parts of equity are you going to be focusing on? Your data might not allow you to look at all the disaggregated intersectionality that you want. I think that it kind of gets us started, and I think the next step would be to understand, what is this like when we begin to operationalize it? What are the barriers we start to confront? How do we begin to overcome them?

I think something like this is naturally a work in progress, maybe to see it like that. We've kind of got it started. How do we keep it going, keep it growing, and keep learning from it?

Crystal: I believe the document says that it's a work in progress too. Building off Lois's point, I think the other piece—I don't quite remember if it's in there, but that's worth saying—is that we're not saying that you have to do everything from A to Z, but we're trying to give some throughout the stages of a project: Where might you raise some questions around equity? Where might you be able to dig a little deeper? And, so for some projects, it may be very clear how you do this and, depending on where you are in the stage of the project—if you're at the very start of a project—it might be very clear to say, "Okay, I think I know how I can lay this out." If you're midstream or at the end, it may be really hard to start thinking about these issues. But hopefully in reading the documents, if it's not something that can be applied to the project you're on in this moment, it might be helpful as you think about another project.

If you can get additional funding to do some other types of analysis, maybe you would want to do something that's related to equity as well. I do think, as Lois said, it's a stepping stone. It can help you to think about, what are some of the things you might be missing? Or [things] that you hadn't really thought about due to whatever set of blind spots you may have had coming into the work.

Emily: Just to jump in quickly and add one more thought there. I don't know that I would frame this as a limitation, but to Crystal's point about stepping stones or next steps, I saw someone comment or ask a question through the chat about sharing this framework with other organizations or folks who evaluate proposals for CTE research, whether those be your IRBs [Institutional Review Boards], or funders, or other folks.

I think a natural sort of next step for this is thinking about how to evaluate and provide feedback throughout the research process that centers equity along the way. And then another place that I think we could go with this work moving forward is providing some advice to folks, particularly on stakeholder engagement. I think if you're engaging stakeholders throughout the research process, what does it look like, feel like, smell like, and sound like to get feedback from folks that says, "hey, this actually isn't representative of our experience, or this doesn't feel that it is representing what's happening in our community"? What is an equity-centered way to address those sorts of concerns while sort of maintaining some research integrity? So, those are two things that come to mind for me as next steps as well.

Dawn: Thank you.

So many of you had projects going on before this work, before the work around developing the equity framework came about. So, in and thinking and reflecting back on your process and the different projects where you were project investigators, owner PIs [principal investigators], what ways did this work or your contributions to developing this framework change your practice or change the way that you viewed your current projects or your plans for future projects?

Anybody can start that one.

Julie: I can jump in. We talked a little bit about this in the blog that was included in the chat there.

I think one of the things that I became much more sensitized to is the need to really pay attention to some of those root causes and the structural factors. So, it's not just about looking at gaps, right? It's not just about understanding differences and outcomes. I mean, that's kind of a necessary first step, but then it's really about understanding why those outcomes are happening.

And I think it's the way that we frame our questions—so our questions are less about sort of what happened to students or what are our students' outcomes, and they're more about the systems that are creating those outcomes.

I think that has made, sort of made, a powerful change in my work and also, I think, a change that's actually going to have real implications moving forward because that's the information that policymakers can use. If you're focused on the problems in the system, then you're potentially identifying points of leverage to change outcomes for students.

I think that's sort of the biggest "aha" that I've had from working on this.

Dawn: Others?

Crystal: I would say, I think going into any research project now, the equity questions are top of mind. In part because at MDRC we're building this into our project kickoffs, risk reviews, and other things, but also more staff are talking about these issues. So, it's something that a lot of people are interested in. We know that some funders are really interested in these questions as well, so we want to get better in learning how to do the work so that we can answer these types of questions. I feel like it's much more top of mind than it may have been in the past, regardless of what the topic is that we're trying to study.

Dawn: Thank you.

I wonder if we could talk a little bit about, and we spoke a little bit about this, but how this is specific to career and technical education rather than just an educational research framework in general. So, what's special about it? What makes it unique to career and technical education? And I know these are lots of conversations we had as we developed the framework. So, I wondered if one of you might want to speak to that, please?

Maybe Lois could start us off? Or Julie?

Lois: Well, first and foremost with career and technical education is to understand that historical context. So, to understand, what are the opportunities that career and technical education provides? Who has access to those opportunities? How are they distributed in different communities and school systems? How is access determined? So, the specific context really has a lot to do with what students have access to, understanding that in the research project. What resources are available to support these programs, and what goes along with them? If there are things like work-based learning or apprenticeships.

So, then the focus is really understanding the context and the different opportunities available, and then challenges of collecting data around that. The data may not be available in typical systems, in educational systems, to really understand where there is data and where there isn't.

A lot of this is applicable to other—I think that's what's interesting—research settings in education and workforce. I think it's just being aware of the very specific context and the community in which this is being provided, and being really aware of where the access points are and the resources around this education. Those are some of the things.

Dawn: Anybody else want to add to that?

I want to thank everybody for all their questions. I will kind of end with—because there was a question related to how we will disseminate the research framework and what our intentions are— and this group does have, or is in the process of developing, a dissemination plan that is really inclusive of multiple different types of organizations and other folks who are doing research in career and technical education.

In addition to the broader audience of folks that are just doing work around diversity, equity, and inclusion, there are, as the presenters mentioned today, implications for practice among a large population in our process. But we welcome ideas and other thoughts.

I'm going to turn it back over to Corrine to end this out for the day.

Corinne: Thank you, Dawn, and thank you, everyone. I really appreciate everyone's attention today to this webinar. It's a really important topic. Thank you to all our panelists.

As it says in the chat, first of all, there are a lot of links in the chat, but second, you don't have to write them all down now. We will be sending around a webinar recording and a transcript of the chat with all the links and the answers to all the questions. So, look for that in your e-mail box.

On the screen now—well, it was on the screen—is the CTE Research Network website and e-mail address if you want to contact them. That's also in the chat.

Thank you again, everyone, and have a great afternoon.