

# STRENGTH-BASED COLLECTIVE BRIEF



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## WHAT IS DEFICIT THINKING?

Deficit thinking is a way of looking at people and situations that focuses on their weaknesses, limitations, and problems rather than their strengths, abilities, and positive qualities (Driskell & Olmstead, 2013; Rutter, 2012). This approach is based on the belief that individuals and communities are lacking in some way and need to be "fixed" or "corrected" in order to be successful (Driskell & Olmstead, 2013).

Deficit thinking can have negative consequences, as it can lead to a negative outlook and a focus on problems rather than solutions (Driskell & Olmstead, 2013; Rutter, 2012). It can also lead to a lack of motivation and a sense of helplessness, as individuals may feel that their weaknesses and limitations cannot be overcome (Rutter, 2012).

Deficit thinking can disproportionately impact marginalized groups, as it often reinforces negative stereotypes and biases about these groups (Driskell & Olmstead, 2013; Rutter, 2012). For example, deficit thinking may lead to a belief that individuals from marginalized groups are inherently less capable or have fewer strengths and abilities, leading to discrimination and other forms of marginalization (Driskell & Olmstead, 2013).

Overall, deficit thinking is a limiting and unhelpful way of looking at people and situations, and can prevent individuals and communities from reaching their full potential (Driskell & Olmstead, 2013). In contrast, a strength-based approach, which focuses on building on existing strengths and abilities (Linley et al., 2010), can help individuals and communities thrive and achieve their goals.

To learn more about how deficit thinking manifests in the school setting, check out *Hacking Deficit Thinking: 8 reframes that will change the way you think about strength-based practices and equity in schools* by Byron McClure and Kelsie Reed.

## REFERENCES

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