

# Reflections

NEW TEACHER CENTER

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SANTA CRUZ • DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
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## Coaching for Equity

by Enid Lee, *Visiting Scholar to the NTC*

For the past year or so, at the invitation of Ellen Moir, I have been engaged in the challenge of supporting New Teacher Project in making equity explicit in their work. What does it mean to make equity explicit in coaching and in other aspects of the induction of new teachers? What are the implications when the word *equity* is placed alongside words like *culture*, *language*, and *race* in the context of coaching?

Equity is the approach that consists of finding and using measures that will address inequality and bring about fair treatment. In legal terms, equity is the principle of supplementing the law to ensure equality or justice. In educational terms, equity is the principle of altering current practices and perspectives to teach for social transformation and to promote equitable learning outcomes for students

of all social groups. Equity is the approach. Equality is the goal.

The face of equity can be confusing. It can mean treating people differently in order to treat them fairly. Different treatment is needed because students

from various social groups enter our schools on an uneven playing field. Some students enter our schools at a distinct disadvantage because of the way society views their race, language, culture, or class. For instance, if the language of instruction is different from the language of your home, you can be at a disadvantage if your teachers have no training in how a second language is acquired, or if there is no organizational encouragement to help you maintain pride in and grow in your first language and use that first language to help you learn the language of the classroom.

COACHING *continued on page 2*

## Preparing New Teachers to Meet the Challenge

by Ellen Moir, *NTC Executive Director*

There are many gaps in the quality of education for underrepresented students in America's schools. The underachievement by students of color is not much different today from when the Supreme Court desegregated schools in 1954. An investment in high quality professional development for the next generation of teachers offers the chance to build a better future for all students. We must be courageous and have the will to challenge the status quo and do what's right. All of our students deserve a well-prepared, high quality teacher.

Teaching is complex and to do it well requires enormous preparation and on-going learning. Teachers who consistently get results with all groups of students have strong content knowledge, an array of effective strategies, draw on prior knowledge of their students, see the range of student abilities and differentiate instruction, and constantly examine their own attitudes about race, class, and culture. This is no short order, and those of us who step forward to work with novices must take the challenge seriously.

New teachers are passionate about making a difference in the lives of their students. Teacher induction programs can capitalize upon this commitment by helping these novices become the most effective teachers who hold high standards and take responsibility for

MEET THE CHALLENGE *continued on page 9*



*NTC advisors discuss case studies.*

COACHING *continued from page 1*

Because of the history of racism in education and its impact on the curriculum, if you are a student of color, the experiences of your people are often missing, misrepresented or marginalized in the curriculum, and your prior knowledge may be not be considered or used as a source of learning. This same absence and loss applies to gender, social class, sexual orientation and ability.

To ensure that all students regardless of background have equal opportunities and outcomes in learning, steps have to be taken in pedagogy, content, climate,

is no need even to call parents about their child's progress.

The coach notices when the prior knowledge of African American students is never tapped as the teacher presents her lessons.

The coach notices when the questions requiring critical thinking go mainly to the small group of white students sitting closest to the teacher.

The coach notices when the teacher does not seem to be concerned that this small group of white students is being miseducated because of the very limited perspective they are shown

in what passes for "American history", but which, if truth were to be told, ought to be called the "history of White America".

Beyond noticing these inequalities, the coach names them in the coaching process and understands them as part of the systemic racism which is embedded in the education system.

Most importantly, the coach knows the reflective questions to raise with the teacher to

parent and community outreach that will create the chance for students on the margins to become central to the system and for those students to perform to their fullest potential.

To coach for equity we must intentionally support, guide, and challenge beginning teachers to teach in ways that address the inequities of the school system and turn school life into experiences of academic excellence and consciousness-building that equip students to work for a world of justice and joy.

It means that a coach of beginning teachers notices when English language learners and their parents are written off by the beginning teacher as "not interested in education" so that there

assist in exploring these inequalities. The coach selects the language to reduce any defensiveness the teacher might feel in this discussion. The coach works with the teacher to find strategies and resources to redress the curricular imbalance in both content and pedagogy. The coach assists in teasing out how low expectations may prevent her from recognizing the potential of the students of color. The coach models lessons that provide evidence of what African American, Latino, Asian American, Arab American, Native American students and students of working class backgrounds of all races are able to do when their prior knowledge is valued and used as an essential element of pedagogy.

Even at this early stage, the coach begins to support the beginning teacher to advocate for equitable treatment in all contexts for students of all backgrounds.

In order to coach for equity, I have found the following approaches helpful:

► **Make Racial Inequality Tangible and Close to Home**

To speak about equality without reference to inequality is to engage in nonsensical and confusing talk. I have witnessed what appears to be unwillingness to work on equity issues. On deeper probing, I recognize that it is the inadequate and incomplete evidence of the systemic racial inequality in schools and not always unwillingness that slows down the conversation. I find I must constantly reacquaint myself through large-scale studies, anecdotes and observations of racial and other kinds of inequality in schools. For example, when I review the kinds of color-coded statistics of human experience and opportunity found in the report *Racial Profiling And Punishment In U.S Public Schools: How Zero Tolerance Policies and High Stakes Testing Subvert Academic Excellence and Racial Equity* (Research Report October 2001 Applied Research Center) racial inequality in schools comes to life. In this report Linda Darling Hammond's article, *Apartheid in American Education: How Opportunity Is Rationed to Children of Color in the United States*, notes that, "The distribution of well-prepared teachers is extraordinarily unequal. In California, for example, the proportion of faculty teaching without appropriate credentials is nearly seven times higher in minority schools than in low-minority schools. Nationally in schools with the highest minority enrollments students have been found to have less than a 50 percent chance of getting a mathematics or science teacher with a license and a degree in the field that they teach". (p. 41)

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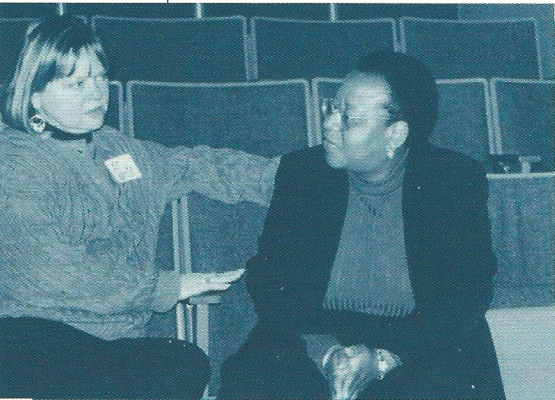


*Enid Lee facilitates advisor forum discussion.*

COACHING *continued from page 1*

► **Name Racism and Connect It with Other Forms of Oppression.**

I am constantly reminded of the importance of naming racism, of actually using the word, of providing examples and explanations of why a policy or a word is racist. Racism is a difficult word to get one's lips around, especially in the polite and supportive climate of a



*Outreach Coordinator Jan White and Enid Lee discuss mentoring issues.*

coaching situation. But it is important to encourage clarity on the term. It's important to clarify that intent is not the main consideration but rather the outcome. If we teach in ways that deny respect, opportunities to learn, challenging curriculum, and reflection of self in the curriculum to students of color, we perpetuate systemic racism even though this is not our intention. If what persists in our classrooms is a system of advantage based on skin color, then we have to deliberately undo that system by intentional teaching acts, groupings of students, connecting with families that include all, and nurturing the growth of those students who are being limited by our practices.

And in coaching, we perpetuate racism if we fail to pose questions which help beginning teachers see the racism described above. Most often it is the quiet collusion of silence or the placing of challenges faced by beginning teachers over the impact of racism on

the lives of students that can cause us to overlook issues of racism in coaching.

By connecting questions of race to those of gender, class, or sexual orientation, we can appreciate the complexity of our students' lives. We can also deepen our understanding of racism when we tap into our own experiences of sexism, classism or heterosexism. Comparisons with other forms of oppression can help us ease into the conversation on racism.

► **Highlight the Historical Perspective**

I have found it difficult to talk about or even understand equity and inequity without an historical perspective. History helps me understand the systemic roots of the unequal situations in our classrooms. The kind of history I have in mind includes the history of legislation and institutional decisions that influence curriculum choices that deny teachers creativity or funding, or testing that fails to help us learn what all students know, or hiring patterns that exclude potential teachers of particular linguistic, racial and social class backgrounds, or outreach arrangements that never allow us to reach parents of some communities. Immigrant and working class are two that come to mind. The hope of history tells me that these situations are not permanent. Once we can find the roots of the problems, we will know where to place our energy and earnestness.

The historical perspective allows us to recognize the hand of history writing the same message and laws repeatedly. It helps us get to the roots of things, and more importantly, it frees us to write a new history by creating a new present.

► **Uncover the Cultural Basis of All Curricula**

A prevailing myth in educational circles is that curriculum can be neutral. All curricula have bias. The question is, what is the bias? Whether we are teaching mathematics or music, culture is reflected in the subject matter. By culture I mean the experiences and

values of a social group. When we recognize the cultural basis and bias of all curricula, we can work with beginning teachers to present curriculum that is culturally responsive to all students.

► **Acknowledge the Significance of Our Social Group Membership**

One of the biggest obstacles to recognizing racial inequality in coaching is that it is easy to take our social group membership, its privileges and power for granted. Looking at the way in which our class, our race, our gender can influence our perspectives and experiences helps us understand how our beginning teachers and students who do not share our group membership may have totally different experiences of teaching and learning. Moreover, all group membership does not have equal privilege in our society. Part of teaching and coaching for equity is to create classrooms and schools where you have an equal chance for success regardless of your group membership.

► **Hold the Tension Between Hope and Urgency**

As we work on equity issues we can sometimes swing toward paralyzing despair or premature celebration. The situations we are attempting to change are deep and systemic and so it is easy for despair to set in. On the other hand, superficial changes sometimes can lead us to forget how much there is to do. A healthy balance between hope and urgency can get us to the next teaching or coaching situation with confidence. Urgency—because there is an incredible weight of racial inequality in schools that deserves our attention. Hope—because of untiring efforts, we see evidence that racism is being kept in check in some educational contexts.

Every coaching situation is a new opportunity to write a line in the history of education, a history that is centered on racial equality as an everyday experience for every student. ■

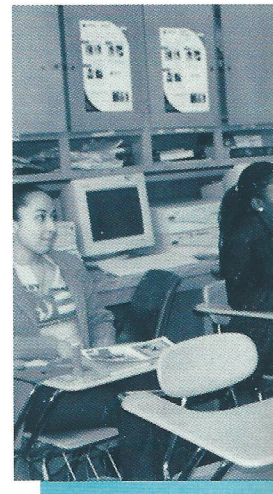
# Checking Equity Systems



Debbie Ulrich, new teacher at Dewitt Anderson Alternative School.

## What does this teacher actually do in order to check her equity systems?

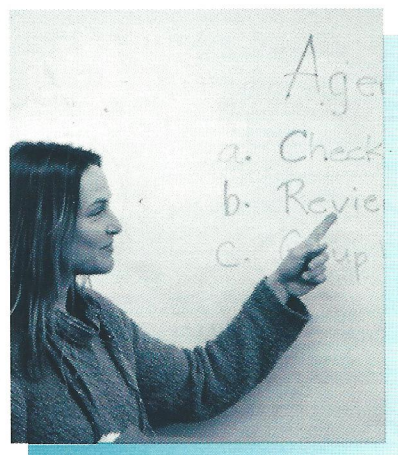
She frequently checks the assumptions she is making about students and their families on the basis of their culture, language, race, and class, and how these assumptions are shaped by her own language, race and class among other aspects of her identity, during the stages of preparing, instructing and reflecting on her teaching. These assumptions can be apparent in the following areas:



### As she teaches, she asks herself:

#### Student Talk

- Which students are talking while I am teaching?
- Is there a pattern among those who are talking and among those who appear to be listening, such as proximity to me, connection or relationship to the topic (girls? boys? language? levels of student performance?) When are there times when these students are engaged?
- What are the agreements we have in place for listening to and learning from everyone in the room who is part of our learning community?
- How can I use these questions to understand what is taking place and to redirect the students' attention to the subject at hand.



### During the preparation stage, she asks herself:

#### Activities for Instruction

- Which students, in terms of gender, culture, immigration status, socio-economic status, can relate to these activities?
- How can I connect these activities to the experiences and prior knowledge of all of the students?

#### The Nature of the Learning Tasks

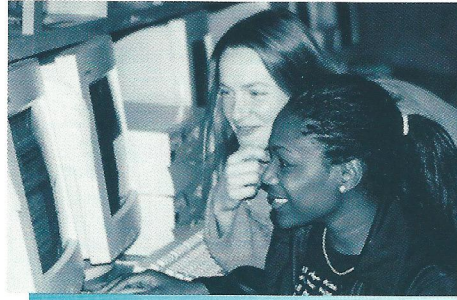
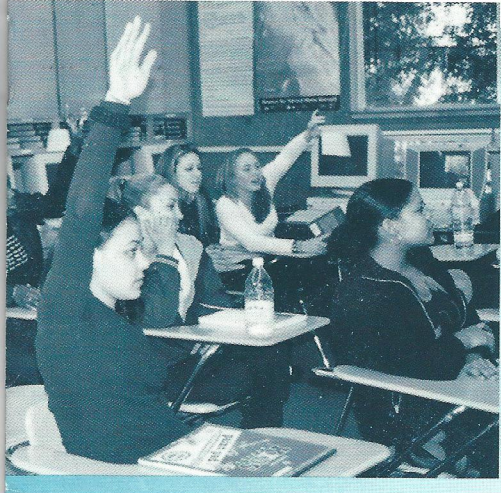
- What do I want students to learn from these tasks?
- Have I included a range of tasks to engage the realities of experiences in the room?
- Is the purpose of the task clear and challenging to all students?
- If students are not on task, what are they doing instead?
- Is there a pattern in terms of gender, culture, language background, race, seating arrangements, or status in the classroom among those who are on-task and those who are not?

#### Student Participation

- Which individual students are not participating?
- Which groups of students are not participating?
- What is the nature of the participation I am expecting?
- What strategies have I put in place to encourage whole class discussion?
- Is there opportunity for students who speak English as a second language to practice their answer in pairs?
- Is the climate one in which "mistakes" and partially correct answers acceptable and opportunities for learning?
- Am I allowing appropriate wait time for different students depending on their need and strength?
- How much time am I talking in relationship to them?
- What opportunities and support have I created for students to lead the discussion and ask some of the questions?

## *I check my equity systems every time I enter my classroom*

—Teacher reflecting on her practice in an equity workshop



### **As she responds to her students, she asks herself:**

#### *Teacher Attention*

- Where do I seem to direct my questions?
- Do I seem to get the answers from the same students most of the time?
- What is my proximity to those students who seem to be engaged and those who do not?
- Do I move around the room and make contact with different groups of students in terms of their seating arrangements, their familiarity with the language of instruction, racial backgrounds?
- Do I address my questions or attention to the students who are not raising their hands?
- Do I ask questions that allow students to think creatively and not have one correct answer?

#### *Teacher Tone*

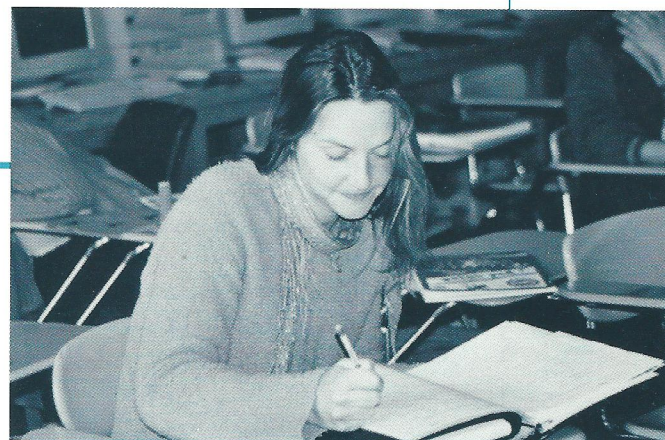
- What words and tone of voice do I use to express my expectations of my students?
- Do I begin by threatening, highlighting the negative consequences that will occur if they don't comply with my expectations?
- Do I stress the positive outcomes that will be experienced by participating?
- Do I express high expectations of all students in terms of my knowledge of them as individuals who are capable of demonstrating their best effort?
- Do I redirect students to the tasks at hand by finding out what has taken them away from it?
- Do I redirect their attention by reminding them of an instance when they did good work and made a sincere effort?

### **Once she has taught the lesson, she reflects:**

When I reflect on what I have learned from answering these questions with my class, how can I fine tune my equity systems tomorrow? ■

#### *Teacher Directions*

- Which individual students and which groups are following my directions?
- Which are not?
- Is there a pattern?
- What strategies have I used to ensure that my directions are heard and understood?
- Did I attract the attention of the whole class before I began giving the directions?
- Do I give directions in both spoken and written form?
- Do I give a chance for questions and clarifications after the directions are given?
- Do I provide the opportunity for a student to review the directions with the class to see if they are understood and reflect my intentions?
- Do we have agreements in the class which encourage students to help each other in the spirit of a learning community?
- What are the students doing when they are not following directions?
- How can I use this information to change the situation?

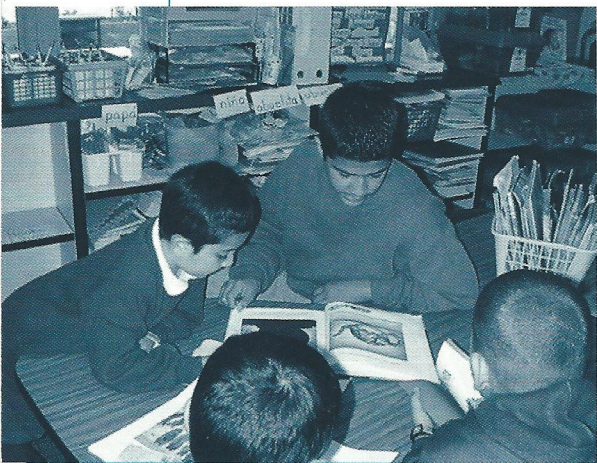


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# Case Study

Antonio is a first year kindergarten teacher. As his mentor, you are observing his class while students are coloring drawings of themselves and their families. A group of Latina students is sitting together and working on the pictures. One of the girls reaches out for the light brown crayon. The student next to her puts out her hand to stop her and says, *No, no that's too light for you. Take this one,* and hands her a darker brown crayon. The first student looks embarrassed. Several of the other girls giggle, and one says, *chocolate* under her breath. Antonio witnesses the situation but says nothing about the crayon incident. He simply asks the girls to finish up their drawings as the class will soon be over.

In debriefing the lesson with Antonio, you note that he does not make reference to the incident with the girls and the crayons. You share your observation with him and invite him to share his thoughts on what took place.



Antonio replies, *I heard the conversation, and it's not the first time I have heard them joking about skin color and shade, but I never know what to say. I know they pick up those attitudes from home. It's hard enough just keeping control of the class and getting them to sit down when I ask them to. Do you think I should be teaching a lesson about prejudice? They seem so young for that kind of stuff.*

*Besides, I'm not even sure what I would say if I tried to talk about this with the class.*

With coaching for equity in mind, how would you support Antonio in working with his class? One thing to think about is what could be some sources of Antonio's hesitation? How would you support Antonio in further developing his competence in the California Standard for the Teaching Profession (CSTP): Understanding and Organizing Subject Matter for Student Learning?

## Coaching for Equity: Some Considerations

At first glance, this case may have little to do with knowledge of subject matter. However, on closer examination, this situation concerns among other issues the knowledge gap which many teachers face in addressing questions about race, especially when raised by young children. Here are some learning objectives which a mentor could support Antonio and his students to achieve:

- Children develop a positive sense of their physical appearance, particularly the color of their skin and the texture of their hair.
- Children become comfortable with and show a healthy respect for differences in physical appearance, especially skin color, shape of eyes, nose, and texture of hair.
- Children learn about what we all share in common as human beings.
- Children acquire accurate information about physical characteristics such as color of skin, texture of hair and shape of eyes.
- Children learn that there is a negative bias in society against darker skin.
- Children learn to resist stereotypic and discriminatory comments and thinking.

The first three objectives many advisors might find comfortable and "developmentally appropriate" when coaching new teachers. The second three, however, might be regarded as too adult and too politic.

At the heart of coaching for equity is the ability to raise these issues with teachers and guide them to sources of

knowledge which help them challenge ideas that they or their students might hold: ideas such as people are superior or inferior, more or less deserving of good schools, or have the right to positive school experiences based on the color or shade of their skin. Issues of racial identity are directly linked to teaching and learning and student achievement. To omit these discussions in coaching is to coach for the status quo, which is basically racial inequality.

The reflecting conference following the observation is an opportunity for the mentor to extend the conversation. Asking questions that enable the beginning teacher to synthesize learnings, draw conclusions, and formulate next steps can provide an opportunity for growth. The mentor might ask, *What are some beliefs held by your students? What information do you need to feel more comfortable in having a conversation about racial differences and inequities? How can I help you plan this conversation? Let's agree on some next steps.*

What are some next steps? How might you support your students in moving forward in their learning? How might you follow this lesson?

Some information you might find useful in working with Antonio about providing accurate information about physical appearance:

"(There are) advantages (that) certain physical attributes give people under certain environmental conditions. Darker skin gives more protection from the hot sun than does lighter skin.

The 'epicanthic' fold (the downward fold that sometimes covers the inner angle of the eye) which determines the eye shape of people with Asian origins, provides protection against the glare of the snow.

"White' skin and blue eyes originated in Northern Europe where the sun is less strong."

*Anti-Bias Curriculum: Tools For Empowering Young Children*, Louise Derman-Sparks and the A.B.C Task Force, (National Association for The Education of Young Children), (p.38).

— Enid Lee, *New Teacher Center*, 2001 ■