

Making Equity Explicit: A Professional Development Model for New Teacher Mentors

Enid Lee

For 2 years I worked intensively with new teacher mentors in California induction programs to explore applying an antiracist, equity-centered lens to the practice of mentoring. Having engaged in antiracist professional development of educators for two decades across Canada and the United States, I felt this new context had promising features: ongoing collaborative work, reflection on needs of adult learners, institutional support, and demographic variety. In addition, some of the mentor programs were represented in the Leadership Network for Teacher Induction (LNTI), where I provided some professional development. This chapter reflects significant steps in my own journey with these mentors. I begin by reporting themes that emerged from 68 mentors' self-assessment of ways they address issues of language, culture, and race in mentoring. I highlight strengths and challenges identified in their practices. Second, I describe key elements of the professional development series I designed and implemented to address the salient issues. I point to promising practices that resulted from this work. Finally, I recommend ways to address dilemmas inherent in moving mentors and new teachers toward racial equality in teacher induction and student achievement.

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MENTORS REFLECT ON THEIR EQUITY STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES

To prepare, I asked these mentors to reflect on how they address language, race, and culture in mentoring. I coded their reflections as stepping-stones (strengths) and stumbling blocks (challenges). The themes highlight complexities of a knowledge base needed to mentor for equity and shaped the professional development I designed for them.

Stepping-Stones

Four themes of strength emerged. First, respondents reported mentoring novices on English language learner (ELL) needs. Specifically, they highlighted demonstrating lessons for new teachers that enhanced English language development (ELD) and promoted sheltered English strategies. Respondents also described how they marshaled resources by directing new teachers to antiracist, antihomophobic, and linguistically appropriate resources and professional development to deepen novices' knowledge of diverse learners.

Second, mentors explained how they assisted beginning teachers in building lessons by drawing on students' background to stimulate new knowledge and help them gain access to the curriculum. They encouraged novices to recognize differences among students and to provide opportunities for students to learn from each other by sharing their unique experiences. Further, they helped teachers create a welcoming climate for new students to the classroom, moving toward a goal of what one mentor described as "social inclusion."

Third, respondents reported self- and group assessments of awareness levels on issues of equity. For example, one mentor wrote, "[Equity] is a huge issue. . . . We have much to learn . . . and so far to go." According to another, "We're all on a continuum as far as our awareness and sensitivity to these issues." Finally, some mentors expressed general openness to enhancing their awareness. It should be noted though that there was a notable range of awareness levels in the group. The following statements reflect points along a continuum on which they saw themselves: from a complete sense of confidence to clear acknowledgment of difficulty. One mentor wrote in response to the prompt, "How do you address issues of language, culture, and race in your role as mentor?": "Very openly! It's of utmost importance." In contrast, another responded, "This is one of the more difficult questions I have been asked." Still another replied, "I am not uncomfortable with the topics, but because I'm white and middle-class, I know I have blind spots."

Stumbling Blocks

Mentors' responses also point to the subsequent design of professional development. Mentors were much more confident with their work with race. The invisibility of race and language as a major stumbling block. For example, one mentor, who was approaching teachers, she did not consider race first. She noted: "What I respond to first is the teacher. I look at them as 'fellow teachers' and not as members of a particular race. I think that marks demonstrated a collegial response to how educators' experiences are racialized in the United States grant or deny opportunities. I expressed a disconnect between instruction and the delivery of race, language, and culture. 'I have not seen [race or culture or language in my] teaching delivery of instruction.'"

Questions of race appeared to remain a challenge. Mentors were identified as "diverse" and several mentors responded to issues "if it affects students." One mentor explained, "I discuss it because both the schools where I work have this invisibility was the absence of recognition of race. Some mentors tended to see it as a feature of an unequal system that could be changed. Mentors identified the need to make sure that instruction should be inclusive," but sometimes mentors would have to support new teachers in specifically identifying what was excluded from their classroom inclusive.

The focus on specific social groups was not a stumbling block for mentors, since the undifferentiated approach to be the preferred way of thinking. The focus on race prevented this examination of group experiences. "I think the terms I use in discussion were 'meeting the needs of all students.' . . . and gender. Just *all* students." Yet, in contrast, that educators must specifically identify the needs of all students.

The third stumbling block was the coaching model, exacerbated by the culture of coaching. The coaching model quite correctly sup-

IN THEIR EQUITY CHALLENGES

to reflect on how they address language and culture (challenges). The themes highlighted to mentor for equity and shaped for them.

Stumbling Blocks

Mentors' responses also point to three challenges that helped focus my subsequent design of professional development for these mentors. First, mentors were much more confident with questions of language and culture than with race. The invisibility of race and its role in education was identified as a major stumbling block. For example, one mentor explained that in approaching teachers, she did not consider issues of language, race, and culture first. She noted: "What I respond to is why they have requested assistance. I look at them as 'fellow teachers.' I look at them as educators and not as members of a particular race. I abhor tribalism." This mentor's remarks demonstrated a collegial response but did not include consideration of how educators' experiences are racialized, or how laws and customs in the United States grant or deny opportunity based on race. Another mentor expressed a disconnect between instruction, student performance, and issues of race, language, and culture. "I haven't met with a new teacher with [his or her] race or culture or language in mind. I have met with the goal of improving delivery of instruction."

Questions of race appeared to remain invisible unless the student populations were identified as "diverse" and thus the issues deemed "relevant." Several mentors responded to issues "if they come up" or if they were "obvious." One mentor explained, "I discuss these matters with my new teachers because both the schools where I work are richly diverse schools." Central to this invisibility was the absence of recognition that racism is systemic and institutional. Some mentors tended to see racism as an episode rather than as a feature of an unequal system that does not serve everyone equally well. Mentors identified the need to make sure that "the new teachers' classrooms should be inclusive," but sometimes missed how in their role as mentors they would have to support new teachers in disrupting inequitable practices, and in specifically identifying what was excluded in order to make the new teachers' classroom inclusive.

The focus on specific social group membership was the second stumbling block for mentors, since the undifferentiated term "all students" seemed to be the preferred way of thinking. The desire "not to attach labels," in part, prevented this examination of group experience. As one respondent explained, "I think the terms I use in discussion with teachers include the language of 'meeting the needs of all students.' . . . I am not thinking of issues of race and gender. Just *all* students." Yet, in order to get at the "all," I have found that educators must specifically identify the groups that make up the "all."

The third stumbling block was that this set of challenges was further exacerbated by the culture of coaching that emphasized relationship building. The coaching model quite correctly supports building trusting relationships

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between mentor and new teacher. However, because race and racism are often difficult questions to raise, they might be set aside, at least for a while, in order to avoid damaging the relationship. A mentor described a challenging mentoring moment with a new teacher who had her students read aloud an excerpt from a text that contained derogatory terms for Latinos and African Americans. The mentor noted that she was appalled that the teacher used this in the classroom: "She feels it's fine and has just given me the full excerpt to read. I have yet to read it, but our conversation was disturbing to me. She felt it was fine because Latinos were calling each other names." The mentor faced challenges in balancing the delicate nature of maintaining trust with the beginning teacher, firmly confronting racist language and its impact on students, and exploring the pedagogical responsibility of teachers when using material of this nature.

Mentors were also confronted with the daunting duties of novices, often causing mentors to leave addressing issues of race until "classroom management was in place." Some mentors struggled to help new teachers make connections between classroom management and racial equality. Challenges emerging from mentors' responses were not unique. They echo findings of others who have surveyed other largely white teaching populations that have been socialized away from thinking about structural racism. As Sleeter notes in teaching whites about racism, "While denying structural racism, whites usually spend their lives in white-dominated spheres, constructing an understanding of race and social equality from that vantage point" (1998, p. 37). I would add that the very nature of schooling results in this denial of structural racism among some educators of color also, despite their own lived experience of racism.

A PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE ON ANTIRACIST MENTORING

Based on themes from mentors' writings and on work I had developed over two decades, I designed and facilitated a professional development series entitled *Making Equity Explicit*. Its goal was to further develop skills, knowledge, and attitudes of new teacher mentors to recognize and address inequities in classrooms, schools, and teacher practice, with a particular focus on race, language, and culture. I entitled this professional development initiative *Making Equity Explicit* because of the vague way in which equity tends to be spoken about in many educational circles. One central feature of my work as a professional developer is sharing with participants the vision of equity in teaching and learning I have developed, specifically that equity-centered practice

Making Equity Explicit: A Profess

- Embraces positive development as an essential aspect of teaching
- Validates knowledge that all students are capable of learning
- Redistributes a wide range of resources that traditionally not had access to
- Nurtures positive attitudes and behaviors that promote equality
- Ensures equitable education for all students and groups
- References communities that have successfully implemented and decisionmaking
- Celebrates cultures of marginalization

Building on this vision and on the research I designed and facilitated an eight-

Goals

Learning goals throughout the series were assessment and were embedded with the work. Mentors were held accountable. For example, mentors were allowed to build on work that they had done to extend their repertoire to address the needs of their students. They were to (1) develop a coaching plan for equity; (2) explore ways their experiences shaped their perceptions and practice; and (3) practice coaching in their role as mentors. By the end of the initiative, learning goals were directed toward the Teaching Profession (CSTP): (1) understand the CSTP dealing with understanding a coaching plan for learning; (2) practice coaching strategies on student life experiences and practice that are meaningful and relevant; (3) identify cultural norms and (4) share strategies about how to work with parents.

Processes

Highlighting the historical context of the challenge of the invisible man
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- Embraces positive development of the student's identity as an essential aspect of teaching and learning
- Validates knowledge that is frequently omitted from the curriculum
- Redistributes a wide range of skills among those who have tradi- tionally not had access to them
- Nurtures positive attitudes toward struggles for social justice and equality
- Ensures equitable educational outcomes for students from all social groups
- References communities that have been excluded from discussion and decisionmaking
- Celebrates cultures of marginalized people

Building on this vision and on the mentors' specific strengths and challenges, I designed and facilitated an eight-session series over 2 years.

Goals

Learning goals throughout these sessions spoke directly to mentors' self-assessment and were embedded within professional standards for which they were held accountable. For example, in the first session, learning goals allowed mentors to build on work they had done on culture with ELLs and extend their repertoire to address the question of race in coaching conversations. They were to (1) develop a common language about race, culture, and equity; (2) explore ways their experiences of race and racism influence their perceptions and practice; and (3) practice raising issues of race and culture in their role as mentors. By the 2nd year of the professional development initiative, learning goals were directly linked to the California Standards for the Teaching Profession (CSTP): (1) examine the equity implications for the CSTP dealing with understanding and organizing subject matter for student learning; (2) practice coaching strategies to assist beginning teachers to build on student life experiences and prior knowledge to make the content meaningful and relevant; (3) identify cultural and racial biases in the curriculum; and (4) share strategies about home visits and building relationships with parents.

Processes

Highlighting the historical and institutional perspective. In approaching the challenge of the invisibility of race and its institutional nature, we looked at the history of legislation and official decisionmaking in public education and how legislation has privileged and continues to privilege groups

based on race, class, culture and language, and so forth. We also looked at the legacy of legislation in our classrooms today and the need to address it in our work as educators. One particular example proved to be a graphic eye-opener to many participants. The *Historical Timeline of Public Education in the U.S.* (Applied Research Center, 2001), one of the tools used for this historical journey, states that in 1864,

Congress makes it illegal for Native Americans to be taught in their native languages. Native children as young as four years old are taken from their parents and sent to Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) off-reservation boarding schools, whose goal, as one BIA official put it, is to "kill the Indian to save the man." (p. 3)

Through this example, we explored the role of schooling in terms of "assimilation" or "cultural genocide," depending on one's perspective. It also led to some tense discussions and debates about the school's and teacher's response to today's ELLs and their communities' languages.

Connected to this discussion were some effective approaches for supporting ELLs and other students of color to acquire knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in the larger society, while maintaining pride in their cultural heritage and using their learning for self-determination of the cultural, racial, and linguistic communities from which they came. These conversations were sometimes characterized by defensiveness and other strong emotions, which became part of the subject matter from which we gained insight into historical and institutional roots of racism. Specifically, we focused on the fact that a new teacher who was not valuing a student's home language or culture was not simply acting out of a matter of personal prejudice. Rather, such an attitude had a historical and institutional basis. The process of change therefore had to include both individual attitude and the written and unwritten institutional policy that supported individual behavior.

Identifying social group membership. We engaged in activities to introduce and make operational the importance of identifying social group membership. We examined the role played by class, gender, and racial and cultural membership in our experiences as educators and as members of society. One such activity, entitled *Personal Cultural Racial History*, invited participants to recall through drawings an early memory of race (Okazawa-Rey, 1998, p. 65). In debriefing this activity, participants were struck by commonalities and differences their colleagues had experienced along racial lines. We came to realize that our story was not just our individual story but also about how questions of power, privilege, advantage, or disadvantage associated with our societal location impacted our opportunities and perspectives. Coupled with this insight was the challenge to work from both

social group membership and organizational equity in our respective sites. successes and challenges as they h

Undertaking and expanding spect of the professional development repertoire in raising issues of race. the use of a tool, *The Four A's*. Th and attitude change. I developed th changing attitude without appropri of attitude change. Raising awaren ness, and analyzing outcomes of th changing attitude. One of the are group membership or social locat ions of a white teacher mentor wh India and wondering whether her munication with parents"? We dis dressed in this case.

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ward equity in our respective sites. At each session, mentors reported on their
successes and challenges as they had attempted to support new teachers.

Undertaking and expanding one's role as a change agent. This aspect of the professional development initiative was to expand the mentors' repertoire in raising issues of race. One approach to this process was through the use of a tool, *The Four A's*. The A's refer to *awareness, action, analysis, and attitude change*. I developed this tool to address a tendency to focus on changing attitude without appropriate attention to some of the antecedents of attitude change. Raising awareness, identifying ways to act on that awareness, and analyzing outcomes of the action seem to be important factors in changing attitude. One of the areas of awareness is with respect to social group membership or social location. For example, what are the implications of a white teacher mentor who is working with a new teacher born in India and wondering whether her culture "was getting in the way of communication with parents"? We discussed various awareness issues to be addressed in this case.

Applying the equity principle in teaching, mentoring, and leadership. The "equity principle" came to be understood as the practice of undertaking measures necessary to undo or redress inequities in teaching, mentoring, and other aspects of schooling in order to ensure that everyone experiences equality. The equity/equality formula is as follows: Equity is the process. Equality is the goal. To achieve this goal, a range of resources including reflective activities, tools, professional readings, and audiovisual materials were used throughout the series. A typical opening activity was as follows: "Think of an example when you would say you were intentionally teaching or mentoring for equity. Identify the inequality you were attempting to address. Share your experience with others at your table." Such an activity produced concrete examples from lives of new teachers and mentors and also allowed us to deepen our knowledge of ways in which inequality plays out in schools (e.g., patterns of suspension along race lines).

A reflection tool entitled *Checking My Systems for Equity* was a central resource in our work (Lee, 2001). Mentors included this reflective tool in both coaching and observation aspects of their work. New teachers used it for self-reflection. It consists of eight segments devoted to the planning, instructing, and reflecting aspects of teaching and learning. For each segment, the new teacher and/or mentor write reflectively on a domain of concern. This is not a summative assessment tool or a checklist to be ticked off. Rather, mentors can invite new teachers to reflect on various aspects of their students' social identity and the prior knowledge they would bring into the

room when planning lessons for those students. For example, a teacher during the preparation stage would ask: "Which students in terms of gender, culture, race, language, immigration status, and class can relate to these learning goals, activities, and this material?" Closely connected to awareness of students' background is the nature of the learning tasks and their goals in terms of students' learning. Thus the next set of reflective questions asks: "How can I include a range of tasks to engage the realities of experiences in the room?" or "How can I link this lesson to the multiple ways in which students' knowledge will be assessed?"

In the instructing phase of the work, new teachers would be encouraged to reflect on aspects of their work dealing with teacher talk, attention, tone, and direction and, in turn, student talk and participation. Some of the reflective questions in this section include: "What language am I using to check for understanding among various groups of learners?" and "How much am I talking in comparison to the amount of time students are talking?" In the final section, items are related to the learning that can occur after a lesson has been taught and the teacher uses questions to see how she or he can refine her or his practice. These questions expand from reflections related to insights gained from examining student work, to insights gained from talking with students, parents, and other colleagues.

Another resource we tapped was sample lessons that promoted antiracist content and pedagogy. Lessons included a wide range of subjects, from mathematics to art. While students learned how to find the median or to work with percentages as required by district math standards, they were also able to see how mathematics was a tool for exploring economic inequities. They would examine the median weekly earnings of full-time workers in various professions by gender, race, and ethnic origin (see samples in Lee, Menkart, & Okazawa-Rey, 1998). We also viewed videos to analyze antiracist teaching. For example, *Reflections* (Outlook, 1996) features teachers demonstrating how to support students to identify racial bias in texts.

Role-play exercises based on experiences of mentors and new teachers, and aligned with professional standards, provided further learning opportunities. One role-play prompt that focused on creating and maintaining effective environments for student learning read: "I am a new teacher with a lot to think about, classroom management etc. . . . I think I'm going to put off multicultural education until my second year." Mentors participating in this role-play enacted a coaching conversation that would support the new teacher in making the connection between classroom management, multicultural environments, and the significance of such a climate for students from a range of cultural backgrounds. In another role-play focused on understanding and organizing subject matter for student learning, mentors played out responses to the following new teacher questions: "How can I bring differ-

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For example, new teachers would be encouraged to reflect on their learning with teacher talk, attention, tone, and student participation. Some of the reflective questions are: "What language am I using to check the understanding of learners?" and "How much time do I spend on students who are not talking?" In the next set of questions, the focus is on the learning that can occur after a lesson. The next set of questions asks: "How do you expand from reflections related to your current work, to insights gained from talk with colleagues?"

For example, sample lessons that promoted antiracist education included a wide range of subjects, from mathematics to how to find the median or to work with math standards, they were also able to explore economic inequities. They included readings of full-time workers in various parts of the world (see samples in Lee, Menkart, and Menkart, 1996) features teachers demonstrating antiracist teaching practices. The video (Lee, 1996) features teachers demonstrating antiracist teaching practices.

The experiences of mentors and new teachers, and the questions they asked, provided further learning opportunities. One participant focused on creating and maintaining an antiracist classroom. She read: "I am a new teacher with a lot of questions. . . . I think I'm going to put this on my second year." Mentors participating in the program had a conversation that would support the new teacher. The conversation was between classroom management, multiculturalism, and the importance of such a climate for students from diverse backgrounds. Another role-play focused on understanding student learning, mentors played out the following questions: "How can I bring differ-

ent cultural perspectives in a class like Math? Besides, I've only one black student in my class."

POCKETS OF PROMISE

While it is difficult to claim direct causal effects of this professional development initiative, I highlight below four changes or "pockets of promise" that mentors reported were the result of their participation in this work.

First, participants reported growth in their consciousness of self and social group membership. One respondent wrote, "I have learned about myself as a person, a teacher, a mentor and in general, how that comes across to others. I have heightened awareness of how that affects my work." Another noted the insight gained at "so many levels—personal, social, historical, and intellectual, and how to bring these new understandings into the day-day-day work of education from the teacher to the institution."

Second, participants described the development of their capacities and strategies for equity-focused mentoring. For example, one respondent reflected, "I've had a huge increase in awareness of what to observe in classrooms in terms of curriculum/subject matter as well as teacher/student and student/student interactions." Another identified, "I've learned to look at curriculum in light of what voices are missing and whose perspectives are missing."

Third, mentors began to recognize their role as agents of change. One stated, "I have learned not to be afraid to bring up important issues around racism." Another mentor explained the importance of taking action: "Intentions have less impact than actions. It isn't enough to say that you don't notice differences among your students. More important is to consider what may be a lack-of-equity issue for them that you didn't see coming."

Finally, some mentors pinpointed greater ability to make equity explicit in their coaching. One respondent wrote, "As mentors, we are better able to recognize opportunities for making new teachers aware of equity issues they can influence." Another wrote, "In my work with novices, I will be focusing our conversations on equity issues as a matter of course, having equity be an underlying structure for planning."

REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Not all of the mentors experienced the professional development in such positive ways. The response of one participant highlights the dilemma I face as a professional development consultant of antiracist education. This mentor

reported conducting personal research that yielded a different perspective. This individual found my view of culture misguided and my views of race shortsighted, noting that my approach to equity was polarizing and separatist without improving the socioeconomic conditions for minorities. After two decades of providing professional development in antiracist education, I have learned the number one rule of not regarding evaluations as personal attacks. I employed this rule in response to the above evaluation and drew from it the following lessons. First, the series was not presented in such a doctrinaire manner as to leave this participant feeling that there was only one right answer to the questions posed. Second, it inspired this participant to conduct her/his own research. Third, the already polarized nature of this country along the lines of race was not made convincingly enough for this participant. Finally, work on race, education, and mentoring can still be viewed as highly untheorized and thus may be reduced to "a matter of opinion" in ways that would not be true for other areas of study.

Besides such challenges as that mentor's comments, others assume they have completed their work on equity once the series is ended. While having only scratched the surface of equity issues, it is still easy to leave participants with a sense that they are "done" focusing on the area of equity. A further dilemma is embedded in the fact that having done the series, the organization has very high expectations of the competencies that have been developed. It is expected that participants will take up equity issues at every turn. We know that professional development, alone without more dramatic systemic change, will not alter an organization.

Despite emotional bumps on the way, I still feel excitement from the opportunity to look back on the experience of *Making Equity Explicit*. Many features of mentors' organizational context, mentors' own willingness to grow, and the opportunity to debrief and plan with co-facilitators contributed significantly to the pockets of promise that emerged. That excitement is tempered, however, when I consider the ideological tidal wave of specious meritocracy and denial of racial inequality that must be confronted in all educational work if equity is to be achieved. *Making Equity Explicit* is one attempt to move in the direction of educational equality. I offer these recommendations for induction leaders and mentors in continuing this work:

1. Hire more mentors and teachers of color in order to provide a wider range of perspectives and human experiences within the organization.
2. Work to create an organizational climate in which perspectives reflecting the life experiences from people of color can become an integral part of the organization.

3. Continue professional development for the organization to make the organization to make policy, and professional development.
4. Create the expectation that such discussions/activities will be a part of the relationship.
5. Build expectations of the organization's work.

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it yielded a different perspective. misguided and my views of race equity was polarizing and separatist conditions for minorities. After two years in antiracist education, I have given evaluations as personal attacks. I gave an evaluation and drew from it what was presented in such a doctrinaire way that there was only one right answer. I inspired this participant to conduct an individualized nature of this country along with enough for this participant. Fostering can still be viewed as highly subjective matter of opinion" in ways that

of his comments, others assume they are the series is ended. While having it is still easy to leave participants hanging on the area of equity. A further thing done the series, the organizational competencies that have been developed take up equity issues at every turn. alone without more dramatic system.

ly, I still feel excitement from the presence of *Making Equity Explicit*. In a social context, mentors' own willingness to brief and plan with co-facilitators and a sense of promise that emerged. That is, consider the ideological tidal wave of social inequality that must be confronted to be achieved. *Making Equity Explicit* is a direction of educational equality. I hope that leaders and mentors in continu-

of color in order to provide a safe human experiences within the

and climate in which perspectives from people of color can become an

3. Continue professional development that enables all members of the organization to make equity explicit in all aspects of planning, policy, and professional development.
4. Create the expectation between new teachers and mentors that issues of equity and race will be discussed and acted upon, and that such discussions/actions are essential parts of the coaching relationship.
5. Build expectations of the evidence of equity in all aspects of the organization's work.

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