What First-Generation Equity Professionals Need to Learn

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James Gray
First-Generation Equity Practitioner
Community College of Aurora
Professor John

- Degree from top research university
- College educated parents
- Teaches at university vying for top tier selectivity
- University also has a high proportion of first-gen, low income Mexican American students
“How do you help them?”

“That is a real interesting question.”

“The way that we’ve been trying to do it, is simply by telling them that what they’re doing is not right and telling them, you know this is the way you should be doing it.”
Professor John
First-Generation ‘Equity’ Practitioner
Sources of Professor John’s Knowledge

- Theories of Student Success
- Institutional Culture
- Professional Identity and Sense of Self
- Department Culture
- Implicit Theories of Change
- Conceptions of Race
About the Center for Urban Education

20 Years of Research and Action on and for Racial Equity
Equity in 2000.
Equity in 2019.
Invoking Equity, Omitting Race, Inability to see ‘Racialization’

1. “ALL” students is the preferred term.

2. Treating interventions and innovations as equal opportunity

3. Reporting accomplishments without reporting racial implications

4. Avoiding whiteness
'We are committing educational malpractice.'

- Thomas Jefferson put up 150 slaves as collateral to build Monticello.
- In 1781, George Washington signed the order that fugitive slaves had to be returned to their owners.
- Abraham Lincoln wanted to send blacks back to Africa.
- Slavery lasted 450 years during which time 36,000 slave ships crossed the Atlantic Ocean.
- 12.5 million Africans were forced into the transatlantic slave trade.
- The White House was built by slaves.
- Our great universities were built by slaves.
- The U.S. economic prowess was made possible by the great profits derived from unpaid, indentured labor.
THE PROBLEM

• Higher education practitioners are not expected to be racially literate.

• Higher education practitioners have learned to view academic failure as evidence of student deficiencies.

• Higher education institutions are not naturally self-reflective therefore do not ask: Why are our ways of teaching not working for minoritized students?

• AND, academic organizations, have learned to sweep their failures, sins, crimes...under the rug, rather than facing up to them.
Corrective Justice
For the educational debt owed to the descendants of enslaved people and other minoritized populations willfully excluded from higher education.

Anti-Racist Project
To confront overt and covert racism embedded in institutional practices, structures, and policies.

Make Whiteness Visible
To magnify whiteness as a characteristic of processes, as a defacto standard of quality, and as a source of power to define reality.
EQUITY has an accountability dimension and a critical dimension.
Eg. Proportional representation of historically marginalized groups in educational outcomes (e.g., access, retention, degree completion) and participation in enriching experiences.
EQUITY as ACCOUNTABILITY: Outcomes in College Level Math

- Started in Math 101: 56% White Students, 32% Latinx Students
- Earned an A in Math 101: 56% White Students, 32% Latinx Students
EXAMPLE COURSE SUCCESS RATES

Aggregated Data

Total

60%
Failure to recognize that institutional racism is an entrenched characteristic of colleges and universities that has to be dismantled with strategies that are color conscious, informed by critical theories of race, including whiteness.
EXAMPLE COURSE SUCCESS RATES

Disaggregated by Race/Ethnicity

What ‘hunches’ do you hear people put forward to explain why racial/ethnic inequities exist?

- Asian: 74%
- Black: 40%
- Native American / Alaska Native: 54%
- Latinx: 39%
- Pacific Islander: 51%
- Two or More Races: 60%
- White: 64%
WHICH OF THESE RING TRUE?

When you and your colleagues see data like this, how do you make sense of it:

• We say that students are underprepared
• We say that they lack the “right stuff”
• We say that racism makes it difficult for minoritized students to do well
• We say that white students feel at home
• We say this is what happens when admissions standards are lax
• We talk about inequality without saying “black” “Latinx” “white”
• We say, “they don’t fit in because of their culture.”
Recognition that institutional racism (and sexism) is an entrenched characteristic of colleges and universities that has to be dismantled with strategies that are color conscious, informed by critical race theory and systemic.
EQUITY ≠ EQUALITY
DIVERSITY
Equity-Minded Competence
The competencies that demonstrate equity-mindedness

**Building a hiring committee with equity-minded competence**

- Race-conscious and aware of racial identity.
- Uses disaggregated data to identify racialized patterns of outcomes.
- Reflects on racial consequences of taken-for-granted practices.
- Exercises agency and actively self-monitors practice to produce racial equity.
- Views institutional processes (like hiring) and spaces (like classrooms) as racialized.

**And hiring an applicant with equity-minded competence**
Cognitive Frame:

A mental map of attitudes and beliefs a person maintains to make sense of the world

Determines:

• What questions are asked
• What information is collected
• What is noticed
• How problems are defined
• What course of action should be taken
CUE’s Approach toward the development of an equity-minded cognitive frame
WHAT IS INQUIRY?

Why does this situation exist?

Why are things done in this particular way?

Institutional policies and practices

Mapping the Hiring Process
Conceptual Underpinnings of Learning to be Equity-Minded

* Adapted from Engeström’s (1987, 2001) Structure of Human Activity Settings
EQUITY-MINDED TEACHING INSTITUTE

Center for Urban Education

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CENTER for URBAN EDUCATION
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CUE Tools

Policy Tools

Observation Tools

Data Tools

Language Tools

Document Review Tools

Leadership Tools
Colorado Math Equity Project:

• Denver, Aims, Front Range, Pueblo, Red Rocks, Pikes Peak
• 30 Math Faculty, predominantly white
• Action Research organized as “Change Labs”:
  • Course-Level Data
  • Syllabi Review
  • Observations
  • Grade Book Coding
STEP SIX: Look for any patterns:

Look across the rows:
- Who’s struggling? Who’s succeeding? Are there patterns by race/ethnicity?
- Are there patterns in absences, by race/ethnicity?

Look down the columns:
- Are there particular assignments that produce greater or lesser success?
- Are there patterns for when students are absent?
“Rarely do we find men who willingly engage in hard, solid thinking. There is an almost universal quest for easy answers and half-baked solutions. Nothing pains some people more than having to think.”

Rarely do we find institutional stakeholders who willingly engage in hard, solid thinking about their practices and how they contribute to racist outcomes. There is an almost universal quest for structural solutions that leave whiteness untouched.