



COACHING FOR EQUITY

DISRUPT AND TRANSFORM PRACTICES THAT REVEAL IMPLICIT AND EXPLICIT BIASES

BY TONIKIAA ORANGE, JO ANN ISKEN, AMBER GREEN,
NANCY PARACHINI, AND ANNAMARIE FRANCOIS

Marissa, an African American female teacher, has been teaching chemistry for two years in an ethnically diverse, urban public school that serves 96% Latinx students and 4% African American students.

Marissa is having difficulty

managing the class. When the whole class is assigned a task, some students are vocally disruptive, and she is unsure how to engage them. In particular, Marissa is concerned about three African American male students who tend to group together, seem to be disengaged, and often shout and cause disruptions in class.

Marissa does not want to dismantle what she is doing since the other students seem to be engaged and learning.

When Marissa's instructional coach, who has 15 years of teaching experience, observes the classroom, she skillfully provides strategies for overall classroom management and

HOW THE RECIPROCAL LEARNING PARTNERSHIPS FOR EQUITY FRAMEWORK CONNECTS TO THE STANDARDS FOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Learning Communities	Outcomes	Learning Designs
<p>The Reciprocal Learning Partnerships for Equity framework reframes the coaching model from coach/mentee to a learning partnership and situates discussions of equity in a community where collective responsibility emerges in the co-construction of equity action. Participatory inquiry initiates a cycle of continuous inquiry, action, implementation, and reflection.</p>	<p>The Reciprocal Learning Partnerships for Equity framework has an explicit focus on equity that links teacher practice to student learning with an implicit understanding of an expectation for the success of all students.</p>	<p>The Reciprocal Learning Partnerships for Equity framework reflects a learning model that requires active engagement and deep understanding of teaching practice leading to construction of a new personal understanding of student motivation.</p>

instructional delivery. But she offers little about how to support the three African American boys who are disengaged in the work. Marissa is left to struggle with one of her most pressing challenges on her own.

MISSED OPPORTUNITIES

In our work observing coaches and teachers, we have seen this type of scenario again and again. Despite many productive conversations, noticeably absent is any real conversation about how the lived experiences and identities of teachers and students influence decisions about pedagogical moves and student engagement.

Without the intentional examination of how cultural identities and personal bias impact beliefs about teaching and learning, coaches and teachers miss important opportunities for reflection and improvement.

In the scenario above, this led to Marissa and her coach missing the underlying root cause of the disengagement and disruptive behavior of the African American students. Attention to equity would lead to a significantly different analysis and potentially different solutions.

From the outset of our observations, the replication of uninterrogated and sometimes deficit-focused practices was a serious concern. As we saw teachers engage in multiple coaching cycles, we continued to see expression of both explicit and implicit

biases, and in our work supporting the development of teachers in becoming coaches, we saw these practices perpetuated in their coaching. We began to question the effectiveness of conventional coaching models in moving the needle toward identifying and tackling issues of equity.

Having observed 128 coach-mentee partnerships and more than 1,100 coach-mentee interactions over a four-year period in the UCLA IMPACT Urban Teacher Residency program, we identified an urgent need for both the coach and mentee to come to a coaching conversation ready to counter bias, refute deficit thinking, and combat racial stereotypes.

We developed a coaching framework with an explicit focus on equity to provide a high-powered lens to zoom in on a practice and deconstruct it for the purpose of disrupting and transforming inequitable practices.

THE NEED FOR EQUITY

Historically, students of color and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds in urban communities have been judged to be deficient, lacking social capital, or simply not as intelligent as their more advantaged peers (Howard, 2003; Oakes, 1985; Oakes, Ormeseth, Bell, & Camp, 1990).

Differences in academic outcomes across race and class have typically been described as an achievement gap, but what we are really dealing with is an

equity gap, which results, in large part, from both implicit and explicit biases that educators carry into the classroom and perpetuate in their practice. Structures, cultures, and pedagogy in schools are often culturally oppressive and exacerbate inequalities.

Yet these kinds of critical conversations and self-reflection are seldom found in conventional coaching models. As critiques of coaching models have pointed out, it is not enough to share best practices for teaching linguistically, culturally, and ethnically diverse students.

There is a need to develop the attitudes, knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to think deeply about and work effectively with diverse student populations. Indeed, this has been and remains a major policy issue in teacher preparation (Darling-Hammond & Berry, 2006; Horsford, Grosland, & Gunn, 2011; Milner, 2003).

RETHINKING COACHING

Many conventional coaching models include an expert “other” teacher who is guiding, modeling, or transmitting expertise to novice teachers. But as much expertise as a coach may have, he or she may be unconsciously guiding mentees through suggestions or reflective questions that marginalize students of color and low-income students.

We asked ourselves: Could listening to the narratives of the less-experienced

teacher, who comes to the partnership with new and relevant knowledge of pedagogy and theories of action around equity, serve as a catalyst for thinking about challenging and transforming established practice? Could the resulting interchange centering on equity contribute to the learning of both participants in the conversation?

We began to reimagine coaching conversations to consider how an individual's identity and positionality come into a conversation between two or more people who have different levels of rank and experience. What would happen if the newer teacher was a young, female person of color and her coach was an older white woman? What if the young teacher's coach was a highly successful and experienced African American male administrator?

We aimed to establish conditions for teachers and mentees from different backgrounds to each have a recognized

voice in the coaching conversation. Our goal was to build a coaching framework in which both partners viewed the conversation as an opportunity for co-constructing an action to challenge an inequitable practice and invent a new solution. This required a shift to a more egalitarian and equity-grounded partnership focused on relationships and reciprocity.

EQUITY-CENTERED FRAMEWORK

As a result of these questions and reflections, we have developed a new equity-centered framework for coaching, Reciprocal Learning Partnerships for Equity. This is not a series of prescribed steps, but an open-ended framework to encourage conversation and reflection.

The framework creates a space to consider how an individual's identity and positionality may unconsciously lead to unexamined bias in selecting

teaching practices and, therefore, influence a coaching conversation.

Using this framework, teachers identify, name, and take action toward eliminating inequitable practices in classrooms. The process of participatory inquiry, which lies at the center of the framework, engages educators in continual critical reflection, questioning their beliefs, and ideals, while acknowledging each other's agency and co-creating new knowledge and transformative actions.

Engaging in participatory inquiry requires coach and mentee to establish and maintain four conditions for introspective inquiry into their own practices: developing relational trust, engaging in reciprocity, examining identity and positionality, and developing an equity stance. Here are descriptions of those conditions and questions that can help frame conversations about them.



Relational trust is rooted in personal exchanges, personal regard, responsibility, and personal integrity. It allows people to be open and vulnerable so that change can occur. *Questions: What does learning together mean for us? How are we continually working on building our relational trust?*

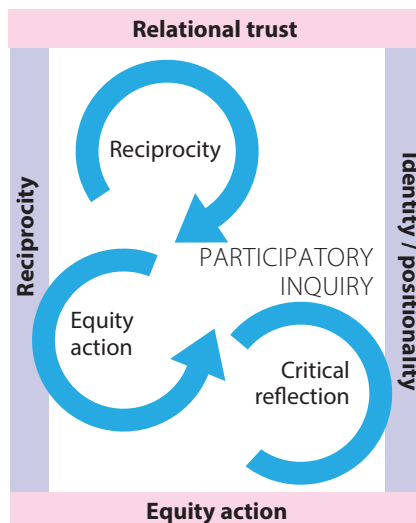
Identity is how we acknowledge ourselves. It is formed by relationships, experiences, cultural upbringing, etc. One’s positionality is shaped by social relationships and the way we see and understand ourselves in various contexts. It dictates how we interact with one another and navigate different communities. *Question: Given who we are, how do we understand the equity issues?*

Reciprocity is the act of sharing and receiving information, resources, and skills between two people with the expectation of fair exchange. Education partners participate equally in co-constructing new understandings and have equal responsibility for shared outcomes. Conversations focus on “we,” not “I.” *Questions: What knowledge and skills do we both bring to the relationship? What will we each contribute to the work?*

Equity stance means intentionally noticing and disrupting the conscious and unconscious structures that perpetuate inequities in classrooms and schools. *Question: How are we challenging assumptions and deficit notions that are embedded and reproduced in our decisions about classroom practices?*

The Reciprocal Learning Partnerships for Equity framework is a powerful way to engage in coaching conversations because it intentionally uncovers and addresses issues of bias, identity, and race that have powerful implications for teaching and learning.

The framework builds collective efficacy and enables coach and mentee to center themselves as co-learners in reciprocal dialogues. The participatory inquiry process provides a framework for the coaching conversation. The coach and mentee:



1. **Engage in reciprocal dialogue**, a two-way exchange of ideas and knowledge in which each person challenges and explores his or her worldview with shared norms and open, authentic communication.
2. **Practice critical reflection**, an examination and awareness of our perspectives and biases, along with the subsequent challenging of our assumptions through repeated cycling between action, dialogue, and reflection.
3. **Create an equity action**, the process by which inquiry moves to action and contributes to improved outcomes for diverse students. Action is directly linked to empowering and changing the lived experiences of diverse students and those most marginalized in classrooms and schools.

APPLY AN EQUITY LENS

Approaching a conversation through the lens of Reciprocal Learning Partnerships for Equity would require Marissa and her coach to be mindful and intentional about their identity and positionality entering the conversation as well as be specific on how they are building relational trust.

They would explicitly identify an

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equity issue and co-construct an equity action where both have responsibility to move on that action with the intent to disrupt or dismantle practices that lead to inequitable outcomes for students. The following are examples of questions that could guide their conversation:

- **Equity issue:** What equity issues showed up in my classroom? Which one should we tackle in this conversation?
- **Relational trust:** How are we building our relational trust, and how is our identity and positionality showing up and being addressed to begin a reciprocal conversation to disrupt the equity issue(s) identified?
- **Reciprocity:** What knowledge or understanding do we each bring to the table to address this equity issue?
- **Co-construction of equity action:** Given our conversation, what equity action will we co-construct to support teaching and learning in the classroom?
- **Evidence:** What will be our evidence of success or progress in changing this condition for students?

A Reciprocal Learning Partnerships for Equity conversation may begin with examining the fact that the students were engaged, but not in the way the teacher expected or intended.

A deeper discussion through the participatory inquiry process might reveal that the African American students were the only ones struggling or had a disproportionate number of discipline referrals. Critical reflection would lead to an examination of beliefs and teaching practices and how they

impact student behavior, such as how current grading practices — which benefit some students and marginalize others — manifest in student engagement.

The co-constructed equity action could be to design alternative grading practices to re-engage students by decreasing student failure. Marissa and her coach could also talk about the ways in which the African American students are engaging and how to build participation structures into the lesson that will engage them in other ways. Overall, the equity conversation is about this question: Why are the African American boys being seen as discipline problems?

EVALUATING EFFECTIVENESS

We have used the framework in partnerships between novice and veteran teachers, as well as with school-level teams, teacher leaders, and school leaders and teachers working together. We have observed increased ability for coach and mentee (the learning partners) to reveal and discuss inequitable practices.

Other qualitative indicators of the framework's effectiveness include increasing teacher agency and efficacy, increasing engagement of *all students*, and developing the ability of coach and mentee to co-construct new ways to address equity in every coaching conversation.

Long-term, the goal is for teachers to internalize the inquiry process to

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explore unconscious equity issues underlying practice, ultimately leading to a decrease in disproportional consequences for students that result from inequitable practices in classrooms.

We hope to see more outcomes like those in Marissa's classrooms: As a result of her work with her partner teacher, Marissa developed new participation protocols that show promise in bridging her African American students to the content and their peers using more relevant and culturally responsive ways.

Systems whose stated mission is a focus on equitable outcomes for all students must implement a coaching model that is intentional about achieving those outcomes.

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Tonikiaa Orange (orange@gseis.ucla.edu) is director of the Culture and Equity Project, Jo Ann Isken (isken@gseis.ucla.edu) is director of the UCLA IMPACT Urban Teacher Residency program, and Amber Green (ambergreen@gseis.ucla.edu) is UCLA IMPACT program coordinator at the Center for Powerful Public Schools. Nancy Parachini (nparachi@ucla.edu) is director of the Principal Leadership Institute at UCLA. Annamarie Francois (francois@gseis.ucla.edu) is executive director of UCLA Center X at the UCLA Graduate School of Education and Information Studies. ■

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Laura Stickle (laura_stickle@gse.harvard.edu) is project coordinator and Rebecca Bailey (rebecca_bailey@gse.harvard.edu) is assistant director at the EASEL Lab at the Harvard

Graduate School of Education. Gretchen Brion-Meisels (gretchen_brion-meisels@gse.harvard.edu) is lecturer on education and Stephanie M. Jones (stephanie_m_jones@gse.harvard.edu) is Gerald S. Lesser Professor in Early Childhood Development and director of the EASEL Lab at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. ■