Accountability, Equity, and Practitioner Learning and Change

In honor of William M. Plater

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Abstract

Accountability and evidence-based decision-making have become the mantra of government, policymakers, and even private foundations. Yet most attempts to foster cultures of evidence have not brought about change in practices, notably because they are treated as management tools rather than learning processes. "Equity for All" is an approach to accountability that is grounded on the principles of practice theory and sociocultural theories of learning. The authors provide empirical evidence to illustrate practitioner learning.

Beginning in the 1980s and coinciding with the decline in public funding for higher education, there was a rapid rise in all manner of evaluation and accountability systems. Accountability systems are designed to produce information on the performance of public higher education on the basis of access, cost, and outcomes. Many factors stimulate the development of accountability systems. These systems symbolize rationality, transparency, evidence-based decision-making, and the constant monitoring of quality and improvement efforts. The primary means of implementing accountability is through the collection of data that are typically reported in the aggregate on an annual basis. The underlying presumption is that if decision-makers within institutions and at the state level are better informed, they will be more likely to make decisions that will achieve the desired outcomes (Bensimon and Bauman 2004).

Another issue that emerged in the 1980s was diversity and increasing access to higher education for minority groups with a history of exclusion and marginalization. Although accountability and diversity in higher education have much in common—both are directly related to institutional performance and responsibility—they do not belong to the same community of practice. Moreover, diversity is not central to the accountability agenda, nor is accountability central to the diversity agenda. To illustrate this, Measuring Up (National Center for Public Policy in Higher Education 2002), the biennial national report card that grades states on several indicators, does not include a student enrollment indicator based on race and ethnicity. (For a more extensive discussion on the absence of equity from accountability systems, see Bensimon, Hao, and Bustillos 2006.) Similarly, diversity efforts rarely focus on an institution's track record for producing successful outcomes for the students who make it possible for an institution to qualify as "diverse" or "minority serving." Stated simply, in spite of increased substantive and symbolic attention being given to

accountability and diversity, and in spite of having a shared agenda for increasing institutional responsibility for student success, neither the accountability nor the diversity agenda has made growing inequality in higher education outcomes a priority.

In this article, we discuss an initiative that endeavors to make equity in educational outcomes for students with a history of exclusion, discrimination, and disenfranchisement (i.e., African Americans and Latinas/os) an integral aspect of such institutionalized processes as goal setting (e.g., strategic planning), self-assessment (e.g., accreditation studies, student retention initiatives), academic decision-making (e.g., faculty hiring, professional development), administrative decision-making (e.g., resource allocation), and student support services (e.g., career counseling). This initiative, known as Equity for All: Institutional Responsibility for Student Success, addresses the absence of equity in accountability systems in general and at the institutional level more specifically, in formal learning systems (e.g., research and planning offices) and in informal organizational practices (e.g., decision-making networks within departments) (Shrivastava 1983).

We wish to emphasize that unlike the great majority of accountability systems and institutional research activities, *Equity for All* has a theory-based structure to support practitioner inquiry, learning, and change. In the first part of the article, we provide a brief overview of theories that inform our concept of institutional change. In the second part, we describe how these theories were incorporated into the design and implementation of "Equity for All." In the third and final part, we illustrate the meaning and articulation of "equity-mindedness," a concept that describes the type of learning and change sought through *"Equity for All"* and which is defined later in the article.

The paper upon which this article is written is based on a year-long action-research project conducted with nine community colleges located in Southern, Northern, and Central California. The data used to illustrate "equity-mindedness" come from a database of audiotaped field notes from 91 campus team meetings that took place between May 2005 and the summer of 2006.

Practice and Sociocultural Theories of Learning and Change

Equity for All is an intervention designed to produce practitioner learning about racial inequities and foster equity-minded sense-making. Throughout the paper, we will use equity-minded, equity-mindful, and equity-mindedness interchangeably. These terms are used to describe individuals, practices, and structures. The goals are as follows: (1) to develop awareness of race-based inequalities in educational outcomes; (2) to learn to interpret race-based disparities in academic outcomes through the lens of equity; and (3) to view inequalities in outcomes as a problem of institutional accountability that calls for collective action.

A fundamental aspect of *"Equity for All"* is learning. In fact, a major goal is the

construction of new knowledge and new practices for individuals as well as institutions to foster equitable outcomes for students of color. The project is based on two theoretical perspectives: practice theory, as recently elaborated by Donald Polkinghorne (2004) in relation to the caring professions, and sociocultural theory, as elaborated by neo-Vygotskian scholars (Forman, Minick, and Stone 1993; Lave and Wenger 1991; Moll 1990; Rogoff 1991; Rogoff, Turkanis, and Bartlett 2001; Tharp and Gallimore 1988; Wenger 1991/1998; Wertsch 1998).

Practice Theory and Change at the Individual and Institutional Levels

According to Polkinghorne (2004), the everyday practices of professionals are guided by socially and culturally acquired knowledge that functions below the level of consciousness. The premise of *"Equity for All"* is that institutional practitioners have personal interpretations of inequality in educational outcomes among African American and Latina/o students, and as a consequence they respond to these students in ways that can ameliorate or perpetuate unequal results. Practitioners' personal theories about the causes of racial patterns of inequality partly reflect their feelings of self-efficacy as agents of change—i.e., do they consider what their role is or could be in the making or unmaking of unequal outcomes? From the perspective of practice theory, practitioners' beliefs, knowledge, and level of expertise can produce conditions that perpetuate or reverse inequalities in educational outcomes.

In *"Equity for All,"* practitioners' beliefs, knowledge, and practices vis-à-vis minority students are revealed in their sense-making conversations about outcomes data disaggregated by race and ethnicity. As part of our research agenda, we analyze naturally occurring talk (Perakyla 2005) among individuals as they attempt to make sense of routine numerical data on student outcomes. Our analysis is critical in that we are concerned with the ways in which sense-making at the individual and collective levels produces, reinforces, and sustains unequal outcomes among minority students. Accordingly, we analyze sense-making talk to understand practitioners' beliefs, attitudes, practices, and feelings in relation to minority students' educational outcomes.

In higher education, there is a strong tendency to naturalize inequalities in racial achievement patterns and attribute them to circumstances that are beyond the direct control of institutional actors. For example, high schools are often blamed for not having prepared students for college work. Even though it may be appropriate to indict high schools for minority students' lack of success, the unfortunate fact is that nothing can be done to change the past. Regardless of where the responsibility lies, the problem must be addressed in the present. Being cognizant of the tendency among institutional actors to link students' academic failure to external factors or to characteristics of the students themselves, *"Equity for All"* encourages and supports collective sense-making that is purposefully aimed at de-naturalizing unequal outcomes and inquiring into the ways in which they are produced institutionally (Pollock 2001).

Sociocultural Theories of Learning at the Individual and Institutional Levels

To facilitate learning and change among practitioners and institutions, we drew on the sociocultural idea that 1) learning is social; 2) learning is facilitated by assisted performance that is responsive; 3) learning is mediated by cultural tools and artifacts; and 4) learning takes place in communities of practice and is indexed by changes in participation within these communities. Learning is an activity that is typically associated with students. In this article, we focus on the learning of professional practitioners, including faculty members, administrators, counselors, and other academic and student support staff. We emphasize that this paper is about practitioner learning because the study of learning among institutional actors or at the institutional level is quite underdeveloped in the scholarship on higher education (Kezar 2005; Bauman 2005; Bensimon 2005).

While most approaches to learning regard it as an individual accomplishment (or failure) that takes place "between the ears," a basic assumption of sociocultural perspectives is that learning is fundamentally a social process. From this theoretical perspective, learning is predicated on a collaborative relationship that allows the learner and "more competent others" to negotiate understanding, usually through discussion, sharing ideas, questioning, and other mediational means. Vygotsky (1978, 1987) contended that learning occurs as individuals engage in culturally meaningful, productive activity with the assistance of these "more competent others," who may be a teacher, peer, sibling, parent, or colleague.

Sociocultural theories place great emphasis on the importance of mediation in learning processes, especially in regard to higher order thinking. A strong focus of this perspective is how cultural practices and cultural resources mediate the development of thinking and learning. A major concern is to understand how culture, like other tools and artifacts, mediates thinking. Practitioners have been socialized into particular cultural practices, including language and other artifacts that become tools for thinking and interacting with others (Bensimon 2007). We know the world through symbolic mediation, such as when we categorize people into ethnic, gender, or socioeconomic categories. However, in other instances our understanding is not automatic, but is based on constructed and shared meanings built up over time and in specific cultural contexts. An example of this is how we analyze data on student outcomes. As indicated previously, practitioners in higher education have attributed meanings to race-based inequalities that make them appear natural. Accordingly, in *"Equity for All"* the intervention consists of understanding and promoting equity-minded learning by introducing tools, artifacts, and cultural practices that reveal established meanings and facilitate the making of new ones.

Consistent with the socio-cultural view that learning is fundamentally social, knowledge is seen as being created through active participation in various social contexts and strongly influenced by what is valued in those contexts. In sociocultural

terms, these are known as learning communities or communities of practice, which Wenger defines as "...a locus of engagement in action, interpersonal relations, shared knowledge, and negotiation enterprises..." (1998, 85). Simply put, a community of practice is a social group developed over time through ongoing purposeful endeavor (Wenger 1998). These communities of practice help shape what Gallimore and Goldenberg (2001) describe as cultural models, or shared mental schema or normative understandings of how the world works, or ought to work, including what is valued and ideal, what settings should be enacted or avoided, who should participate, the rules of interaction, and the purpose of interactions.

Applying Theory to Practice: The *"Equity for All"* Model

The problem addressed in *"Equity for All"* is the limited capacity of institutions of higher education to produce equitable educational outcomes for African American and Latina/o students. Practice theorists suggest that over time and through a variety of experiences, practitioners develop implicit theories about the individuals they serve, about their own practices, and so on. In higher education, faculty members make judgments about why students succeed, why they fail, and what, if anything, they can do to reverse failure. *"Equity for All"* is based on the idea that the difficulties institutions have in producing equitable educational outcomes are due in part to practitioners lacking the specialized knowledge and expertise they need to recognize the racialized nature of the collegiate experience for African American and Latina/o students and adjust their practices accordingly (Bensimon 2007). To state it more directly, we believe that institutional effectiveness in producing successful outcomes for minority students depends to a great extent on the capacity of practitioners to be equity-minded.

Equity-mindedness

"Equity-mindedness" is a multi-dimensional theoretical construct derived from concepts of fairness, social justice, and human agency articulated in several disciplines, including philosophy, critical race theory, feminist theory, psychology, organizational behavior, economics, and education. In the context of this project, achieving equity means achieving equal educational outcomes for college students from racial and ethnic groups that have a history of enslavement, colonization, or oppression in or by the United States, relative to groups that have not experienced such conditions.

The qualities that we consider to be indicative of an equity-minded practitioner include the following:

1. Being color-conscious (as opposed to color-blind) in an affirmative sense. To be color-conscious means noticing and questioning patterns of educational outcomes that reveal unexplainable differences for minority students; viewing inequalities in the context of a history of exclusion, discrimination, and educational apartheid.

2. Being aware that beliefs, expectations, and practices can be racialized unintentionally. Examples of racialization include attributing unequal outcomes to students' cultural predispositions and basing academic practices assumptions about the capacity or ambitions of minority students.

3. Being willing to assume responsibility for the elimination of inequality. Rather than viewing inequalities as predictable and natural, an equity-minded practitioner would allow for the possibility that they might be created or exacerbated by taken-for-granted practices and policies, inadequate knowledge, a lack of cultural know-how, or the absence of institutional support.

4. Being able to demonstrate authentic caring (Valenzuela 1999). To care authentically means to reach out to students proactively and give them the tools they need to succeed—e.g., teaching them how to study, showing them how to format a paper. Authentic care encompasses substantial help-giving actions and should not be confused with being understanding or sympathetic. While understanding and sympathy may provide the motivation for help-giving actions, they are not sufficient to make a difference in minority students' lives.

In essence, equity-minded individuals are more aware of the socio-historical context of exclusionary practices and racism in higher education and the impact of power asymmetries on opportunities and outcomes for African Americans and Latinas/os. Individuals who are equity-minded attribute unequal outcomes to institution-based dysfunctions. Whereas deficit-minded individuals construe unequal outcomes as originating from student characteristics, equity-minded individuals reflect on the roles they and their colleagues play and the responsibility they share for helping students succeed.

We assess equity-mindedness indirectly by observing naturally occurring conversations in which members of evidence teams express their beliefs along the following three dimensions that define the construct:

- Beliefs about the *fairness* of unequal racial/ethnic-based group inequalities in student outcomes.
- Beliefs about the *causes* of unequal racial/ethnic-based inequalities in student outcomes.
- Beliefs about the *role of colleges and universities* in remedying unequal racial/ethnic-based group inequalities in student outcomes.

Equity for All as an Activity Setting for Collaborative Inquiry

To assist in the development and expression of equity-mindedness in ways that build a college's capacity to achieve equitable and uniformly high student learning outcomes, *"Equity for All"* provides an activity setting for collaborative inquiry that is mediated

by cultural tools and artifacts specifically constructed to reveal racial patterns of inequality. The primary method for increasing equitable and uniformly high student learning outcomes is to convene practitioners who are involved in an institution's formal learning systems and/or who are viewed as key actors in informal institutional networks. These practitioners form a community of practice that is referred to as an "evidence" or "inquiry" team, in keeping with the goal of developing a "culture of inquiry" to promote minority student success (Dowd 2005).

The teams are appointed by presidents based on specific criteria—e.g., faculty members who teach "high risk" introductory courses, academic leaders who serve on institution-wide committees and can act as boundary spanners, providing racial and ethnic diversity, etc. Learning in the evidence teams is mediated by the Equity Scorecard, a tool that facilitates the examination of disaggregated data on student outcomes to discover the nature and extent of racial-ethnic student outcome inequities in four realms (academic pathways, retention, transfer readiness, and excellence). For a detailed description of the Equity Scorecard and the four realms, as well as the corresponding outcomes data for each, see Bensimon (2004), Bauman et al. (2005), and the Center for Urban Education's Web site (www.usc.edu/dept/education/CUE). In addition, the project provides access to other special cultural tools and artifacts, including data sheets, vital signs protocols, interim report templates, equity index formula, and examples of graphic displays that make data easier to decipher. The project also introduces special language and concepts, such as the differentiation between Stage I and Stage II diversity; deficit, diversity, and equity cognitive frames; data vs. inquiry paradigms; and global vs. local knowledge.

Researchers as Facilitators of Practitioner-Researcher Inquiry Teams

A unique characteristic of the evidence teams is that in addition to faculty members and administrators, they also include co-researchers who are external to the college. As co-researchers, our role is to act as facilitators in the activity setting. The participation of external facilitators is sometimes needed for the following reasons (Tharp and Gallimore 1988):

- Practitioners do not always see their own social (eco-cultural) context.
- Supervisors and those with bureaucratic authority are inclined to focus on assessing rather than assisting inquiry.
- Practitioners may face real or perceived constraints on professional development and learning from authorities.
- Habits of interaction ("interaction scripts") are unconscious, deeply embedded in professional culture and taken as a given.
- Errors or weaknesses are not well tolerated as opportunities for learning.
- In-house training programs may simply perpetuate the existing culture and reinforce counterproductive entrenched knowledge (e.g., deficit-mindedness).

Based on these concepts, the key principle for designing effective professional development programs is to ensure that effective assistance occurs among peers, among authorities and those whose professional actions are regulated, and between external facilitators and participants in the activity setting.

Evidence teams typically meet at least once a month for at least two hours. The team meetings serve as a "mediating" function for the goals of the project. Rather than trying to change attitudes and practices directly through, for example, a workshop that focuses only on the individual level of learning a predetermined strategy, the goal of the team meetings is to change the nature of the mediation and cultural practices that participants have at their disposal. By forming communities of practice around equity, an opportunity is provided for participants to create new identities and new meaning or sense-making around issues of equity, not in the abstract but on their own campuses and in their own classrooms.

Data Don't Drive

Even though *"Equity for All"* incorporates the practices and artifacts of technical rationality that are characteristic of accountability systems (Dowd and Tong 2007), it differs fundamentally from these systems in the distinction we make between data and knowledge. Advocates of accountability systems as well as proponents of evidence-based practices and cultures assume that data drive change. The most recent manifestation of this belief can be found in the Spellings Commission Report's *A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of Higher Education* (U.S. Department of Education 2006), which asserts repeatedly the importance of data, the inadequacy of data systems, the shortage of clear and accessible information, etc. The contention is that more and better data will result in improved decisions by policymakers, institutions, and the public.

In contrast, as indicated above, *"Equity for All"* is based on the recognition that "data don't drive" (Dowd 2005). Data are an essential element of *"Equity for All"* because without data there can be no inquiry. However, the usefulness of data depends on the questions, interpretations, and judgments made by individuals (Argyris and Schon 1996). As sociologist Richard Alford (1998, 29) so aptly observed, "Evidence never contains its own explanation." The critical difference between *"Equity for All"* and innumerable data-based interventions and accountability systems that have gained popularity in recent years is that in *"Equity for All"* "the emphasis shifts from the data to the decision-maker as the locus of change" (Dowd 2005, 23). In contrast, accountability systems and standards "de-emphasize the need to understand educational processes and institutional contexts" (Dowd and Tong 2007, 4).

Another important characteristic that sets *"Equity for All"* apart from other data-based models is its emphasis on fine-grained data that are more effective in pinpointing the root causes of problems. In contrast, accountability systems tend to rely on gross and standardized data that are not likely to spur institutional change or practitioner learning because they are too far removed from the world of the practitioner. In fact, most

institutions of higher education suffer from excessive data acquisition without the corresponding investment in learning structures and processes.

To illustrate, a remedial mathematics instructor may find it interesting that the six-year graduation rate for a particular group of students at his college is 48 percent, compared to 50 percent at a peer college. However, it is highly unlikely that this information will have an impact because in itself it will not make him wonder how his teaching practices might improve the graduation rate if, for example, he found a way of increasing student success in remedial mathematics. Graduation rates are so far removed from the mathematics instructor's classroom that they cannot serve as a guide for action (Argyris and Schon 1996).

In contrast, if this instructor were to be involved, as is typical in *"Equity for All,"* in examining data on the pass rates for students in remedial mathematics by race and ethnicity, or data on how students who earned a "C" in remedial mathematics perform in college level mathematics, the potential for change at various levels would be much greater. The reason for this is that the mathematics instructor is engaged in the construction of new knowledge in collaboration with others and because the data are relevant to what he knows and does.

In the following section, we illustrate the inquiry process of *"Equity for All"* more concretely by focusing specifically on the enactment of equity-minded sense-making. Two conversation segments from our field notes serve to exemplify the strategies of applying equity-minded interpretive schema to racial inequalities (Shrivastava 1983). These segments reveal how team members constructed meaning out of numerical data showing racial patterns of unequal outcomes. The first segment, which is taken from an exchange between a team member from a college community and a researcher from the Center for Urban Education, is about startling data on transfer rates for African Americans and Latinas/os. In the second segment, two team members are wrestling with the implications of data that show large numbers of minority students disappearing from a "basic skills pipeline" that leads to college level courses.

Rationalizing Racial Inequality in Community College Transfer Rates to the State's Public Research University

As mentioned earlier, the Equity Scorecard consists of four realms. Among community college teams, a common measure for the "excellence" realm is the number and percentage of students by race and ethnicity who transfer to the state's most prestigious institution. When the Atwater Community College *(a pseudonym)* evidence team examined data for this measure for a bounded cohort of students, they found that none of those who transferred to Hattiesburg University *(a pseudonym)* were African American, only one was a Latina/o, and 70 percent were Asians or Asian Americans. This finding prompted the following discussion:

Campus Member: *Many of my Asian American students want to major in mathematics, and science, and engineering. They don't want to major in the liberal arts. It is a hunch, but I am sure that many of the other groups, such as African Americans and Hispanics, all major in the liberal arts, and maybe Hattiesburg just doesn't pick them [African Americans and Hispanics] because they [Hattiesburg] look for science and engineering majors.*

CUE Researcher: *I am not sure I understood the point about students being in the right major to transfer [to Hattiesburg].*

Team Member: *I have asked my students, and they say if they major in liberal arts, you will not be able to transfer to Hattiesburg.*

CUE Researcher: *Are you saying Asian students are more likely to major in math and engineering?*

Team Member: *I always ask students what their major is, and very few Asian students say, "My major is Liberal Arts."*

The purpose of engaging campus teams in the examination of data disaggregated by race and ethnicity is to increase awareness that patterns of racial inequality may persist even within a racially and ethnically diverse student population. In the excerpt presented above, the team member looks for reasons that might explain the extreme differences in transfer rates and suggests that these could be the result of students' self-determined choices of majors. Because more Asia Americans than African Americans or Latinas/os major in science and engineering, he presumes that Hattiesburg is more likely to admit transfers from these programs than from the liberal arts. The team member's sense-making rationalizes the pattern of educational outcomes, and he does not give further thought to why not one African American and only one Latina/o transferred to Hattiesburg.

From the perspective of socio-cultural theories of learning, if the objective is for this individual to view the transfer pattern for minorities as abnormal, someone in the team must assist by providing a model of equity-minded sense-making. In this instance, equity-minded sense-making is demonstrated by the CUE researcher. Rather than ignoring the comments, being judgmental, reacting negatively, or challenging them openly, the CUE researcher poses questions that create an opportunity for the campus member to reconsider his interpretation of the data. These questions can also elicit different interpretations from other members of the team who have noticed the inequalities revealed by the transfer data.

Rationalizing Inequalities as Successful Completion of Educational Goals

Basic skills courses in California's community colleges take up a major portion of the curriculum and course schedule. On some campuses, as many as 80 percent of the entering students are placed into one of the several levels of basic skills reading, writing, and mathematics. Therefore, for the Academic Pathways perspective of the Equity Scorecard, some of the evidence teams traced the slow and difficult climb from the lowest level course in basic skills English and/or mathematics all the way to the English and mathematics courses that are required for the associate's degree and/or transfer to a four-year college.

For members of minority groups, as many as 95 percent of those who started out in the lowest level never made it to a college-level course. In the segment that follows, we observe two members of the Azure Community College evidence team attempting to make sense of the large loss of students who are placed in basic skills courses. Team Member 1 interprets the data as bad news in that it indicates large numbers of students are disappearing. Team Member 2 interprets the data as possibly good news, as it may mean that students are no longer at Azure because their goals have been met.

Team Member 1: *I'm not sure if it's wise to consider basic skills a goal. It's not really a goal. But a goal is transfer, certificate, vocational, so...*

Team Member 2: *But what happens to the student that's only taking basic skills [as their primary goal]? Do you think they've met their goal...?*

Team Member 1: *No, I don't...Generally speaking, I don't think that was ever their goal. They were placed in basic skills because of their assessment scores. And if they're gone, probably, again this is anecdotal, they weren't very successful.*

Team Member 2: *They've settled for taking the basic skills....*

Team Member 1: *Not that they've settled, they were placed there. They maybe got discouraged, didn't see a lot of success, and they moved on to other things—maybe work and maybe they'll come back at a later time.*

Team Member 2: *And I would say that the opposite is also possible—that some students come to us for basic skills. For example, ESL students, they might want to improve their English literacy skills and that's all. I don't know for a fact, I don't work with them—and I'm thinking that both are true.*

Team Member 1: *They are both true, but my experience is that very few of the students I've seen, and again, anecdotally, had said their goals are basic skills.*

Team Member 2: *Oh, yeah, it would be hard to say that's my goal.*

Team Member 1's interpretation of the great loss of students reflects equity-mindedness for the following reasons. First, he notices the exodus of students from basic skills courses and interprets the pattern as being unacceptable. Second, he points out to Team Member 2 that transfer or "earning a degree or certificate" are typical educational goals and that it is unlikely that students would consider basic skills courses to be in the same category. Team Member 1 is unwilling to interpret the data as indicating that the departing students having very modest goals, as Team Member 2 suggests. Third, when Team Member 2 expresses the opinion that students might have "settled" for just taking basic skills, Team Member 1 points out that it is not a matter of students having made a conscious decision to "settle" for basic skills—"they were placed there."

Team Member 1 interprets the data as a warning about failure, but he does not attribute the failure to the students. Taking their perspective, he talks about how being placed in basic skills courses can have a negative effect on an individual's sense of purpose and hope. He understands that students in community colleges, and particularly those in basic skills placement, are more likely to be under-prepared for college-level work and feel they do not belong. It is possible that some leave voluntarily because they feel stuck and are unable to envision their situation improving.

Team Member 2 interprets the data from the students' perspective as well. However, he views the loss of students as a natural occurrence stemming from students' aspirations. From his perspective, it is possible that some students' highest goal may be to take basic skills courses, and if their goals were higher, they might decide to settle for less.

Needless to say, neither team member knows for certain what is going on. However, their interpretations suggest dramatically different next steps in the inquiry process. Team Member 1's interpretation would encourage the group to engage in deeper inquiry to find out more about which students from which racial groups are being lost, how they compare to students who persist (e.g., educational goals, age, attendance status, etc.), and what might be discouraging them from persisting.

On the other hand, the interpretation given by Team Member 2 might bring the inquiry process to a halt if he had more influence over the rest of the team than Team Member 1, or held a position of greater power and authority, or other team members were more likely to share his views. In fact, Team Member 2 had greater positional authority than Team Member 1, yet the majority of the team agreed with Team Member 1's interpretation.

Throughout the duration of the project, Team Member 1 was usually quiet. Although his position in the college was in the lower level of the hierarchy, it brought him into regular contact with students, which gave him insight that the other members lacked. His knowledge of students provided him with the expertise to challenge Team Member 2's efforts to interpret gaps as successful outcomes and model equity-mindedness for others in the team.

Reflections on Equity-mindedness

We have provided two segments of conversation to illustrate different means of assisting equity-minded interpretations. In the first, the CUE researcher assists equity-minded sense-making by posing questions that call into question what appear to be stereotypical explanations for differences in the transfer outcomes of Asian Americans, African Americans, and Latinas/os.

In the second segment, a team member takes the lead in assisting equity-mindedness by modeling it more assertively than the CUE researcher. The CUE researcher asks non-judgmental clarifying questions as a means of encouraging the campus member and others in the team to reflect on the data critically. In contrast, Team Member 1 assists equity-mindedness by objecting to Team Member 2's misinterpretation of racial inequalities as evidence of success. Team Member 1 models equity-mindedness by focusing on the meaning embedded in Team Member 2's self-serving view of the data. From Team Member 2's perspective, the data reflect students' choices and goals, which he assumes are made freely and independently. However, Team Member 1 points out that students do not *choose* to enroll in basic skills courses; they are *channeled* into them. He also indicates to Team Member 2 how unlikely it would be for students to have "basic skills" as their educational goal.

In both segments, we observe the use of categorization to justify racial patterns of inequality. The American sociologist Sacks (cited in Perakyla 2005, 875-876) introduced the concept of "category-bound activities" to describe the association of a specified group of people with particular kinds of activities. In the first excerpt, the campus member frames transferring (or not transferring) to a selective research university and majoring in science, mathematics, and engineering (or not) as "category-bound activities" that are typical of students who are Asian American or African American or Latina/o. In the second segment, the categorization reflects expected (low) patterns of achievement for certain minority groups. Team Member 2 does not seem surprised that the majority of minority students seem to disappear from basic skills. In fact, he normalizes the data pattern by reasoning, implicitly, that minorities "settle" for basic skills and are not interested in degree or certificate programs; or, if they ever had degree aspirations, they changed their mind. His interpretation implies that as no degrees or certificates are given for the completion of basic skills, students are likely to leave because their goals have been met.

The conditions under which individuals formulate categories and the consequences they may bring about are of interest because they reflect what individuals and groups may consider to be appropriate (Perakyla 2005). Category-bound activities are created through individual and collective sense-making, and they offer a view into the production and reproduction of unequal outcomes. In both segments, the categories assigned to minorities make unequal outcomes appear to be justifiable. For example, in the first segment what seems to be missing from the campus member's reactions is surprise, concern, or shock in response to the nonexistent transfer rates to Hattiesburg for African Americans and Latinas/os. The fact that the data do not elicit alarm—e.g.,

"This is terrible!"—or a desire to know more—e.g., "How could this be?" or "What is going on here?"—could be an impediment to learning and change at both the individual and the group level. To conclude, we will discuss briefly why this is so.

Practice theorists drawing on the work of Dewey (1938) and Vygotsky (1978, 1987), maintain that practitioners learn and change when they encounter an indeterminate situation that makes them realize their actions are not producing successful results with all students. According to Polkinghorne (2004), an indeterminate situation is one in which practitioners find that "their practices fail them." Ideally, the patterns of inequality revealed by the data in the two conversation segments would have moved the participants to consider how their practices as instructors, counselors, and deans are implicated in the production of inequality. Neither segment showed that this happened. In both segments, sense-making was driven by the need to justify patterns in the data, not by the desire to know more.

At this stage of our analysis, we are able to document changes in formal learning systems and informal institutional practices at several participating campuses that reflect a nascent equity-minded sensibility. Admittedly, it is far more difficult for us to document the impact of equity-minded assistance in bringing about a change in the beliefs, knowledge, and practices of institutional members. We cannot, for example, assert that the campus member in the first segment or Team Member 2 in the second one developed new beliefs about minority students, or became more self-aware of the beliefs embedded in his practices and the impact these might have on their effectiveness with minority students.

Conclusion

"Equity for All" was designed to develop awareness of race-based inequalities in educational outcomes; assist practitioners to interpret race-based disparities through the lens of equity; and to view inequalities in outcomes as a problem of institutional accountability that calls for communal action. Even now, issues of race, diversity, and equity create discomfort among institutional actors, and the typical response is avoidance. By dressing equity in the style of accountability and all of its trappings—quantitative measures, benchmarks, indicators, baselines—race talk, we discovered, is less self-conscious. The techno-rational look of the Equity Scorecard framework makes it possible to engage in difficult race talk because it is a medium that exudes factual objectivity.

"Equity for All" reflects our belief that in order to bring about significant improvements in minority student outcomes, institutional change has to be conceived as multidimensional, context-dependent, and practitioner-driven. In this article, we have focused on practitioners as agents of change. We have shared the value of accountability artifacts—the Equity Scorecard—and cultural practices—disaggregated data and equity-minded facilitation—to mediate practitioner learning, self-change, and agency.

To close, we draw on William Plater's speech, "The State of Diversity: IUPUI on the Threshold of Change: Time is Winding Up," delivered in observance of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday. Reminding the audience that "King at the time of his murder was not happy about the rate of change because he knew we could do more, and more quickly" (2003, 1), Bill Plater goes on to say:

> But he [King] knew that the only way to ensure progress is to keep score—to hold individuals, institutions, communities, states, and the nations of the world accountable for what each has done...we [at IUPUI] have also begun to measure that progress so that year by year, act by act, we can see where we need to turn next, where we need to redouble our effort, and where we can take pride in having met a goal (2003, 1).

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