

Building Racial Justice Into a Master's Program: Lessons From a Five-Year Equity- Mindedness Initiative

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This chapter describes a five-year equity initiative to transform a language teacher education professional master's program into one that cultivates racial justice and equity-minded practices in graduates. This chapter will review program work over the last five years on two critical efforts involved in the ongoing five-year equity-minded initiatives. The program activities include data review and planning from 2017 to 2018 and equity curricular re-design from 2018 to 2020, where faculty revised program goals, curriculum, and syllabi. Critical race theory and equity-mindedness frameworks guided this equity initiative's process, goals, and content. The authors argue that building racial justice into a professional master's program requires applying a critical race analysis to the normative assumptions about academic program redesign. Individual and institutional challenges are discussed, and recommendations for building racial justice into the curriculum, instruction, and program policies are provided.

INSTITUTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION PROGRAM CONTEXT

This chapter offers an examination of the challenges and opportunities associated with redesigning a program centered around an explicit commitment to equity-mindedness. In this case, we describe a

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language teacher education professional master's program engaged in a five-year process to shift its practices and culture in ways that cultivate racial justice and equity-minded practices in its graduates. In particular, what are the significant factors that must be addressed to build racial justice into a professional master's program? We will argue that critical race, and equity-mindedness offer useful and necessary frameworks to redress normative assumptions which too often undermine efforts to advance racial justice in academic programs.

To contextualize the case explored in this chapter, we begin with a discussion of the key demographics and institutional qualities which shape the project. The role of race, class, and identity are central to this case and the organization's work toward educational equity and language acquisition. While the majority of the student body and half of the faculty within the professional school at the center of this analysis are non-white, the university demographics differ as a Private White Institution (PWI). While the university publicly embraces diversity and inclusion, the need to confront ideologies, practices, and policies that have been historically centered around whiteness (Morales, et. al., 2021). The school's mission is to prepare leaders to achieve educational equity. This equity-focused mission was established in 2017 and continues to inform the redesign of the academic program in the school. To understand the tension and complexity of fulfilling that mission, it is necessary to further explore the specific university demographics and how the vision for their work is articulated.

How “Inclusive”? and “Equitable” Is the Institutional Context?

The university is located on the West Coast of the United States and was founded in the late 1800s and has approximately 40,000 students. This academic program is in the university's top-ranked School of Education with ten master's degree programs. The school-based plan for excellence in teaching for the university includes the words “Inclusive” and “Equitable” as core components in the definition of good teaching it helps to develop. It argues, “instructor and students adopt a social justice orientation in which they interrogate systems of power and privilege that shape learning and instructor fosters a welcoming environment that appreciates and values diverse perspectives, backgrounds, and cultures”.

The orientation toward social justice seems to resonate with the diverse student body the institution draws. Within the School of Education, there are approximately 1,000 on-campus and 1,500 online students. Nearly half of the students (45%) are first-generation, and most students (65%) identify as non-white. Over two-thirds (78%) of the graduates with teaching credentials work in high-needs public schools after completion of their graduate teacher education program. There are approximately 100 full-time faculty members at the school, and one-third are tenured or tenure-track faculty. About half of all full-time faculty is white. Throughout this chapter, we use the term “minoritized” to emphasize “the social construction of underrepresentation and subordination in US institutions” (Harper, 2012, p. 9). Yet, while this term captures structural and institutional oppression, we recognize it does not capture the proportionality and intersectionality of that oppression in particular contexts when referring to Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian, and Pacific Islander individuals and communities.

One Professional Master's Program in Education

This chapter focuses on one of the professional master's programs at the education school that prepares English as additional language teachers. Faculty in the English language educator professional master's program revised the program in three main phases over the last 15 years. Pre-2010, the professional

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