

## **PUBLIC STORIES OF MATHEMATICS EDUCATORS**

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### **Responding to Inequities in Mathematics Education: Opening Spaces for Dialogue**

**Megan H. Wickstrom**  
*Montana State University*

**Susan A. Gregson**  
*University of Cincinnati*

Recently, mathematics educators have discussed the challenges of preparing teachers to effectively teach all students. When examining these challenges, researchers have acknowledged problems that often arise because “teachers—largely white, female, monolingual, and middle class—are not effectively prepared to teach mathematics to an increasingly racially, ethnically, linguistically, and socioeconomically diverse student population with which they often have had limited previous interaction” (Bartell, 2012, p. 113). This lack of preparation can be attributed, at least in part, to the fact that many teachers have limited personal experience with the types of inequities that exist across the educational system (Stinson, 2004). When we consider teachers’ readiness to teach mathematics equitably, it is also important to step back and consider our roles as mathematics teacher educators. For many of us, our lived experiences in the educational system are not far from those of the teachers we instruct. Therefore, we must ask how we can adequately advise and support preservice and inservice teachers to teach mathematics in equitable ways when many of us are still learning to navigate this terrain?

There has been a recent call to offer cases and stories to support mathematics teacher educators in discussing inequities in the classroom (White, Crespo, & Civil, 2016). Moreover, equity scholars have urged mathematics educators to “engage colleagues and friends in explicitly talking about race, class, gender, and other systems of privilege and oppression” (Aguirre et al., 2017, p. 140). This engagement requires a willingness to enter a “brave space in which some of our assumptions are questioned” (p. 128). We hope to add to these conversations by narrating our experiences with confronting inequities in K–12 classrooms, including our personal efforts toward finding the courage to present these accounts. Supporting teachers to

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MEGAN H. WICKSTROM is an assistant professor in the Department of Mathematical Sciences – Montana State University, 2-235 Wilson Hall, Bozeman, MT, 59717-2400; email: [megan.wickstrom@montana.edu](mailto:megan.wickstrom@montana.edu). Her research interests include the teaching and learning of mathematical modeling at the elementary level, creating mathematical tasks that promote equitable learning opportunities for all, and investigating and supporting teachers’ applications of research into practice.

SUSAN A. GREGSON is an assistant professor in the Curriculum and Instruction and Middle Childhood Education programs – University of Cincinnati, 511D Teachers-Dyer Complex, 2610 McMicken Circle, Cincinnati, OH, 45221-0022; email: [susan.gregson@uc.edu](mailto:susan.gregson@uc.edu). Her research interests include equitable classroom practice, political knowledge for teaching mathematics, and the preparation of mathematics teachers for effective teaching of marginalized students.

navigate inequities in mathematics classrooms involves continued uncertainty because no single solution works across all cases. It involves coming to understand the history and people in the communities in which we work, making a deliberate choice to address inequity, creating space for reflection and dialogue, and revising our strategies based on insights gained from working with others. Moreover, it means expecting that we will make mistakes along the way and figuring out how to be simultaneously comfortable and uncomfortable with that fact. While a certain level of comfort is necessary to move forward, it can make us complacent in situations where our expertise is limited.

A theme that connects our stories is our focus on creating spaces to “listen well” (Powell, 2012, p. 26) and to learn as a critical first step toward confronting inequity. In this public story, we account our respective strategies for creating these spaces with teachers and with each other as colleagues. By listening to teachers and engaging with them in practice, we are working to become more adept at creating opportunities for productive changes toward equity. We also recognize that improving our practice requires creating opportunities to connect with other mathematics teacher educators to discuss challenges in our practice and how we might address them. We hope that our stories may provide other teacher educators with examples of what the process of opening spaces for addressing inequity with teachers and with other mathematics teacher educators might look like.

We begin by describing our respective stances and a case involving inequitable mathematics teaching that we have encountered in our practice. We discuss our attempts to create spaces for productive change along with the teachers we mentor. Each account includes acknowledgment of our remaining questions and tensions. We then connect our cases by describing how and why we came together to write this article. We discuss our collaboration process and provide examples of how this process opened spaces for our own learning. We conclude with remarks about both the nature of efforts to address inequity in our practices as mathematics teacher educators and the continued challenges we see for this effort.

### **Megan’s Story**

I worked with Mrs. Cate,<sup>1</sup> a fourth grade teacher with 6 years of experience, as part of a 2-year professional development (PD) project focused on integrating learning trajectories as a formative assessment tool in elementary classrooms. For the study, I interviewed her and observed her class throughout the project. Mrs. Cate taught at Terrace Elementary School located in the Midwestern United States. Terrace is an urban school where the majority of students identify as Black or Latina/o and 80% of students qualify for free or reduced-price school meals. At the

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<sup>1</sup> All proper names are pseudonyms.

time, I was a 28-year-old White female mathematics education doctoral student and PD provider. As a former middle school teacher, I respect the intensity of classroom teachers' work. I was raised in a city that was similar to, and in close proximity to, the one in which my story took place. In addition, I student taught and volunteered in schools like Terrace Elementary, so I felt comfortable when working with students and teachers there.

I believe that mathematics should be co-constructed by the teacher and the learners and that it becomes meaningful through shared experiences and interpretations. All students are capable of learning mathematics, but it is critical to find ways to relate mathematics to their lived experiences. I focus on Mrs. Cate here because I perceived components of her teaching as inequitable, and it was difficult for me, as a mathematics educator, to determine if and how I should respond.

### *Equity Tensions*

Initially, Mrs. Cate's classroom seemed like a well-structured environment for student learning. During her first interview, she highlighted several features of her instruction that she felt promoted student discussion, reflection, and growth. Mrs. Cate explained that she organized students in groups to promote discussion. She also highlighted a bulletin board on the back wall lined with clipboards. She said that this was where she kept track of things each student was doing well and something for them to improve. In addition, Mrs. Cate implemented a mathematics journal to encourage students to express their ideas in writing.

Although Mrs. Cate articulated a solid rationale for the instructional strategies that she had put in place, I experienced them differently. Even though students were arranged in groups, Mrs. Cate rarely allowed them to talk or work together. I did not perceive the clipboards in the back of the room as a tool for accolades, as Mrs. Cate had intended, but rather as a way to compare and to demean students. In front of the class, she often said things to students like "I wish I could find something good to put up here, but I haven't seen any good work from you in 3 weeks." Lastly, the mathematics journal was often used as a punishment activity for when students' behavior was not appropriate during class.

My foremost concern was how she framed students' intelligences. Sternberg (2007) documented that although intelligence is often perceived as objective, it is very much subjective. Students' perceived performance in class is often tied to how the teacher perceives what it means to be "smart" and how well students' behaviors align with the teacher's expectations (Hatt, 2012; Wickstrom, 2015). Mrs. Cate evaluated and rewarded students based more on their behavior than their efforts toward mathematical learning goals. In this classroom, being good at mathematics was associated with listening, being quiet, not fidgeting or making faces, and speaking when called on. Hence, Mrs. Cate favored students who worked on tasks quietly, answered questions quickly and correctly, and "behaved" during instruction.

When students behaved appropriately, she rewarded them with candy or prizes. Students only discussed ideas or questions when directly asked, and students who acted out or misbehaved were sent outside or to the principal's office. Mrs. Cate had two students—Hadley, a White girl, and Kirby, a White boy—on whom she called frequently and often used as exemplars for the rest of the class. She told me that these two students were her top students because they were able to answer mathematics questions quickly and often correctly. Through observations, I noticed both Hadley and Kirby sat quietly in class. Mrs. Cate said, “Look how nicely Hadley is sitting and listening” to the rest of the classroom.

In contrast, several students did not behave according to Mrs. Cate's expectations. From the first day, I took note of her relationship with Timothy. Timothy was a Black boy, and his desk was positioned next to Mrs. Cate's desk and removed from the other students. Timothy often sat with his arms crossed and head down. One day during instruction, Timothy became bored and made faces at his friends across the room. When Mrs. Cate caught him, a confrontation erupted, and she sent Timothy out of the room. Mrs. Cate had a special desk for Timothy in the hallway where he would sit until she thought it was time for him to return. Timothy missed most of the mathematics classes and was often forgotten out in the hallway for long periods of time, sometimes over an hour. When I asked Mrs. Cate about Timothy she said,

[Timothy] is one of my highest testing math students, like the computer lab testing, which is kind of like standardized testing. But, those tests obviously don't tell us everything because in class, he doesn't get it [math].

Mrs. Cate's statement surprised me, because, I had a different perspective on why Timothy wasn't learning; he was not allowed to participate in class.

As an observer, I knew what was happening was not equitable. I often left observations feeling uncomfortable and concerned for students like Timothy. Whether knowingly or unknowingly, I felt Mrs. Cate's approach was creating racial divides in her classroom. As reflected in the school statistics, most of the students in Mrs. Cate's class were not White. In fact, there were only three White students in her classroom. Mrs. Cate positioned Hadley and Kirby as top students because they aligned with her expectations of what a well-behaved student should be. She allowed White students special opportunities such as explaining concepts and going to the chalkboard while often limiting opportunities or completely taking them away from Black students like Timothy. As Mrs. Cate continually equated “good” behavior with mathematical proficiency, both White and Black students missed opportunities to grow mathematically. Simultaneously, this approach unfairly marked Black students as mathematically inferior to White students.

As part of the PD, I encouraged Mrs. Cate to engage in mathematical discussions and activities with students. In the first week of observation, she would begin

with an inquiry-based task but quickly resorted to quiet work time after she felt students were becoming out of control. When debriefing these lessons, Mrs. Cate made statements like “that’s difficult with these kids” or “when working with these kids, I have to...” The language of “these kids” sparked my attention and I wondered if it referred to race, socioeconomic status, ability, or a combination of these.

In getting to know Mrs. Cate, I found out that she commuted a half hour to Terrace from a rural, primarily White community, which was not uncommon for teachers in the district. She discussed that her mother was a teacher and her mother’s passion for teaching motivated her to follow suit. She also revealed that even though her mother was an enthusiastic and hands-on teacher, she did not feel like she could use similar teaching strategies with “these kids.” When discussing the job at Terrace, she said, “But coming into the city was a whole different ballgame for me as far as what I saw growing up as a student and I guess I have to be strict and more firm just because of the city.” She also asserted that she had never been around a “minority” child until college.

In the first few weeks working with Mrs. Cate, I had the sense that she wanted to be an engaging teacher but felt she had to teach in a certain way because of her students’ backgrounds. Mrs. Cate’s story is not new in educational research. There is often a racial and cultural mismatch between teachers and their students (Goldenberg, 2014), and instead of recognizing and engaging racial and cultural differences, many teachers take the stance that learning means working harder and behaving (Haberman, 1991). In addition, I knew Mrs. Cate’s teaching style was not the only approach being used in her school; other teachers in her building had learned to navigate these tensions and to engage in inquiry- and equity-based mathematics.

### *Creating Space with Mrs. Cate*

It was difficult for me to know what to do in this situation, and I considered several possibilities. From the beginning, I knew I could not confront Mrs. Cate directly about her teaching practices for several reasons. First, Mrs. Cate perceived me as an outsider who did not understand the day-to-day realities of her teaching that made her teaching practices necessary and effective with her students. In addition, I was conducting research for my doctoral dissertation, so addressing my concerns with Mrs. Cate meant risking the study and my ability to work with her or other teachers in the district.

I began to address what I observed by listening to Mrs. Cate in the interviews and asking her questions related to some of her comments and strategies. I hoped some reflection might allow her to consider her actions and to gain insight into her practices. For example, after she sent Timothy out of the room, I asked her to talk about Timothy informally after class and then more specifically during interviews.

In these conversations, she seemed more comfortable telling me about her students and her teaching.

Consequently, I realized Mrs. Cate's perceptions were deeply engrained and reaffirmed daily. It seemed difficult to challenge these perceptions because as long as her students' behaviors aligned with her preconceived expectations for them, my questions would not likely shift her beliefs. Instead, I chose to demonstrate possibilities for more equitable instruction. I thought that if Mrs. Cate could see her students differently then she might begin to change how she viewed them. Moreover, given that my frequent interviews with Mrs. Cate took up her time, I wanted to reciprocate by assisting her with her work in some way. I offered to teach for her, to free up time for her to reflect on her students' thinking. Glaser (1982) and Lather (1986) describe this approach as *reciprocity* or "the exchange of favors and commitments, the building of a sense of mutual identification and feeling of community" (Glaser, 1982, p. 50). My purpose was twofold. I wanted to give back to Mrs. Cate, but I also hoped that demonstrating other ways of interacting with her students might provide openings for talking about equity. When I proposed the arrangement to Mrs. Cate, she hesitantly agreed that I could teach one or two lessons a week.

In the first few weeks, I stuck to Mrs. Cate's lesson plans to gain her trust. Although the lessons were not student-centered, I made a point to elicit multiple students' perspectives, check with students to see how they were doing, provide scaffolding, and hold high expectations for everyone. As Mrs. Cate became more comfortable with me teaching, she asked if I would be interested in teaching mathematics intervention. Intervention occurred several times per week and consisted of students practicing facts on computers or by playing games. She directed that students should practice math facts and concepts but gave me the freedom to choose what I wanted to teach and how. Instead of having students independently practice facts, I designed mini-lessons for them to work cooperatively. For example, when students were studying area and perimeter, I asked them to help me design a backyard fence for a pet. This project led to discussions on how to use the space, the size of the pet, and whether the house could be used as a border. Students were excited by the tasks and often discussed them with me days after the lesson.

Teaching with and for Mrs. Cate created an opportunity for dialogue. After the first few intervention classes, Mrs. Cate made comments like "I need to try that" or "I was really surprised how [a specific student] kept working on the task." Eventually, she tried some of the tasks from intervention in her own classes and asked me for help in designing similar tasks. I believe Mrs. Cate wanted to be an engaging teacher, but she did not believe that her students could engage in rich mathematics. Providing students with challenging tasks gave us a glimpse of what they were capable of as well as concrete examples that highlighted particular students as creative and competent. It was difficult to discuss beliefs with Mrs. Cate directly, but I wit-

nessed several incidents that challenged her beliefs about students' mathematical abilities.

### *Remaining Questions and Tensions*

This case highlights the reality that opening much-needed spaces for conversations about teachers' practices and beliefs about students is difficult. My main concern in working with Mrs. Cate was that students were not receiving equal opportunities for quality mathematics education. I attempted to address this by modeling approaches that allowed students in an intervention class to demonstrate mathematical competence beyond good behavior. I saw evidence that teaching for and working with Mrs. Cate opened space to discuss students' mathematical thinking and provided concrete evidence that countered Mrs. Cate's perceptions of struggling students. And yet, as our collaboration ended, I was left wondering, "Did I do enough?" While I witnessed some positive change in Mrs. Cate's instruction, my lingering tension is that by focusing my efforts on developing rich tasks accessible to all students, I skirted issues of race and equity. I continue to wonder if I could have done more to help Mrs. Cate challenge her assumptions about Black students and to productively address the racial bias that I observed in her practice. More generally, I continue to grapple with how to broach topics like racism, classism, and ableism without fracturing relationships with my teacher partners.

### **Susan's Account**

As a mathematics teacher educator who has been a classroom teacher, school-based coach, and researcher in urban and rural schools, I respect the work of classroom teachers and believe that it is not possible to transform education to meet the needs of marginalized students without teacher knowledge, collaboration, and agency. I work in a teacher education program whose mission includes preparing teachers to work in urban schools. A significant tension of my practice is my desire to help early-career teachers challenge inequitable practices while avoiding the pitfall of portraying urban educators—especially those whose racial and economic backgrounds differ from their students—as the primary obstacle to equity. However, as a White middle class teacher, I routinely encounter and participate in situations where deficit notions of students of color—an intrinsic ideology of inequitable teaching—go unchallenged. I position myself as an equity researcher, yet I am troubled in situations like these in which I lack the tools or the courage to disrupt the status quo. Moreover, I find that when I operate alone, outside of a community of educators regularly committed to equity issues, the tools I have acquired to resist deficit perspectives become dull. Therefore, participating in communities where

educators with diverse experiences address tensions of equitable practice is essential for my own professional development.

The context of my account is a voluntary professional development group for preservice and early-career educators, the Mathematics Equity Group (MEG). I both facilitate and participate in the MEG. The MEG's goals include supporting teachers as they "identify and challenge discourses that further ingrain inequalities," develop "political knowledge and experiences necessary to negotiate the system," and develop "working networks of educators who share their emancipatory visions" (Gutiérrez, 2013, p. 62). MEG participants follow a modified version of Gutiérrez's (2012) *In My Shoes* discussion protocol in which a teacher describes a problematic scenario from personal practice. After clarifying questions are addressed, the group discusses strategies for addressing the situation with follow-up questions such as: What would that strategy look like? Is that something you can see yourself doing? Teachers are encouraged to consider the scenario with respect to their own practice as educators working toward equity.

This account focuses on Mr. David's *In My Shoes* experience in the spring of 2014. Mr. David, an African American, was a preservice teacher in a multi-level (grades 4–6) urban field placement. Mr. David had significant pre-certification urban teaching experience as a full-time substitute in local schools with high poverty rates (over 98%) and large numbers of African American students (more than 95%). Six other MEG teachers, all White, and myself, participated in the discussion.

### *Equity Tensions in Working with the MEG*

Mr. David and I had previously discussed challenges in his field placement prior to this *In My Shoes* experience, so I thought I knew what to expect. He was concerned with both the exclusively procedural nature of the enacted curriculum, and a potential personality conflict with his cooperating teacher, Ms. Marcus. I knew that he had worked through these issues to some extent, so I encouraged him to share his story in MEG. However, as Mr. David presented, it became clear that his concerns were more complicated than I thought. He described a learning environment where students largely worked in silence; where norms for behavior were rigid and enforced punitively; and where seating, participation, and discipline were highly racialized.

Mr. David told the group about Jasmine, a Black child who he saw as being frequently and unfairly disciplined. For example, when another child walked by Jasmine's desk and inadvertently knocked a piece of paper on the ground, Ms. Marcus noticed and pulled Jasmine aside. Mr. David began shouting to imitate Ms. Marcus' tone: "I can't believe you had a piece of paper under your desk. I told you last semester. I told you this semester. Clean up under your desk." According to Mr. David's account, the teacher "reams her for like two to three minutes. And then the



little girl has to take the [math] test.” In a voice that was both incredulous and outraged, Mr. David went on to describe patterns he noticed in student seating: “All the little White girls sit in the front row in the middle. The Black girls sit behind them. The Black boys sit in the back right corner and the White boys sit in the front right corner.” Another participant interjected, “It’s that clear cut and obvious?” Mr. David acknowledged his own concern that perhaps he was simply imagining a bias. And so, he “started to keep track. [Ms. Marcus] only calls on the little White girls. I’ve seen the whole row [of Black girls] raise their hand. And she calls on the one little White girl, Ashley.”

Mr. David recounted another incident where he approached a Black student to talk about a fraction worksheet. As soon as Ms. Marcus saw them talking, she reportedly said, “What did you say Darnell? Do this reflection!” Reflections were a form of punishment in the class. Mr. David described trying to respectfully defend Darnell:

- Mr. David:** I talked to him. He wasn’t talking. I talked to him.  
**Ms. Marcus:** No! He knew what he was doing. He came in and he sat down next to you and he talked because he knew you would talk to him.  
**Mr. David:** No ma’am. I asked him.  
**Ms. Marcus:** If you are a student in this class and you think you can come in and talk to another teacher about anything that is going on, you are going to get a reflection!

As Mr. David told his story, I wrestled with multiple emotions. First I was horrified. I remember saying, “This teacher does not belong in the classroom!” and it was hard for me to move beyond this immediate thought. The situation felt like an extreme case of a racialized, authoritarian, and repressive environment where “the achievement gap is a mirror image to the punishment gap” (Yang, 2009, p. 51). But the example, though extreme, was not inconsistent with other situations I have encountered in schools that serve high numbers of marginalized students. I have witnessed both effective and ineffective colleagues and administrators forcefully reprimanding students. I have done some yelling myself over the years. Without firsthand experience in the setting, and without knowing more about a teacher and her practice, it could be possible to mistake, for example, warm demander approaches that involve “mean-talk” (Ware, 2006, p. 438) as oppressive.

I trusted Mr. David’s perspective of the situation, but I was uncertain how others in the group might interpret Ms. Marcus’ behavior. Teachers with limited experience of the range of effective discipline practices may misread classroom situations. They may view even warm demander pedagogy as harsh and inappropriate. Conversely, they may believe that discipline styles they would never choose for their own children are requirements for teaching marginalized students. I struggled with whether I should jump into the conversation to provide nuance. I also won-

dered whether without my intervening, the participants might dismiss this example as so extreme that they would never likely face a similar situation in their own practice? My response that “this teacher does not belong in the classroom,” was genuine, but could also be used as an excuse to dismiss efforts to learn to confront similar behavior that teachers might encounter with peers in the future. I also worried that giving this example too much attention and treating it as typical might make participants hesitant to see themselves acting because they feel too inexperienced to tackle such a pervasive problem.

Despite these tensions, I fought the urge to share every concern that popped into my head. When you have experience, you want to share it—especially as a trained teacher educator. Yet, I have learned from multiple *In My Shoes* discussions, that when I limit my contributions, other participants’ questions and comments take the group in insightful directions. The MEG protocol is designed to probe further, to connect participants with each other’s experiences, and to develop each person’s capacity for acting in related situations in ways that align with the kind of teachers we want to be. So, I decided to trust the protocol. I encouraged Mr. David to phrase his concerns about this inequitable situation as a question. He responded with, “What is it that I can do in the limited time I have in this practicum to give those kids a different experience?”

### *Creating Spaces through MEG*

The participants began with clarifying questions such as, “Who is Ms. Marcus?” and “What is her teaching background?” A generative moment came when Ms. Shelby, a first-year teacher, revealed that she was in the same teacher’s classroom for her first practicum, 2 years earlier. Ms. Shelby was eager to discuss her frustration in that placement where the way students were treated made her “feel terrible.” Ms. Shelby shared her earliest attempts at teaching in the placement describing how Ms. Marcus both discouraged her from trying student-centered approaches and appeared vindicated when Ms. Shelby tried them, and they did not go well. Ms. Shelby reported “feeling like a failure” in that experience.

Discussion turned to the suggestion phase as participants applied possible strategies developed in previous MEG discussions to Mr. David’s situation. For example, Ms. Cass, suggested “playing dumb.” Mr. David might use his position as a novice to question Ms. Marcus’s methods, bringing attention to both her problematic behavior and potentially opening space for discussion through questions like, “What is the purpose of the reflections?” Another approach was “claiming a requirement.” Mr. David might claim that making sure all students’ voices are heard is an official component of his practicum, and therefore, he would have an excuse to use methods that insure students are called on randomly. A third suggestion was

that Mr. David might “highlight the competence”<sup>2</sup> of Black students by amplifying their thinking with the cooperating teacher with comments like, “So and so has a really good idea.” Mr. David asked the group to consider whether any of these ideas might backfire. Following Gutiérrez’s (2012) protocol and hoping to broaden participants thinking about this question, I posed an additional question to the group: “Pretend you are in your first year of teaching and Ms. Marcus is on your team. What would you do?”

The discussion opened to more carefully consider Ms. Marcus’s background, and to an extent, the sociocultural and institutional practices that may have shaped her views. Ms. Cass offered this speculation:

Maybe she really is racist, but maybe she has been trained that way? I am not saying it is good training, but what if having all the girls sit in front was her training? Knowing this would put things into perspective to me about how you would handle things if this was your team teacher.

This comment helped the group to step back and consider the institutional conditions under which teachers’ perspectives develop. Discussion shifted slightly from how to “fix this colleague” to the circumstances under which teaching behaviors like those Mr. David observed may have developed and could continue unchecked. As an example of institutional conditions that normalize inequity, I noted “Culture of Poverty” trainings that have been required in many districts and which promote racialized stereotypes of low-income children and their educational needs (Gorski, 2008). Other participants asked questions about the school climate and if other adults were aware of the atmosphere in Ms. Marcus’s classroom. We speculated about whether the lack of African American male teachers in both the building and as student teachers coming from our program might have affected this teacher’s perceptions of the appropriate mathematical goals and roles for Black students and helped to make it seem acceptable to discipline them more harshly than White students. We talked about some of the reasons that a new teacher might be afraid to speak up against injustice.

To close the session, Mr. David explained that he had already implemented a “killing with kindness” approach with Ms. Marcus in which he strategically and deliberately praised her for everything she did in the classroom—even actions he disagreed with. He offered to help with everything from making copies to cleaning the board to tutoring challenging students. Mr. David reported that this strategy allowed him to achieve key short-term goals despite the limits of this placement. Ms. Marcus became more approachable to him; she offered advice and mentorship, although that advice was sometimes questionable relative to equity. Because she allowed him to take over the mathematics teaching when he was present, Mr. Marcus

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<sup>2</sup> MEG participants revised this term from “assigned competence” Cohen (1998).

gained experience teaching conceptually rich mathematics in a setting that was more racially and economically diverse than his pre-cohort experiences. While teaching, he highlighted the strengths of the range of students in the class and provided an example for all students of a Black male mathematics teacher. He did not expect that his approach would change Ms. Marcus's future behavior, but it allowed him space to provide some support for Black and White students and also to hone his skills for future equity battles.

### *Remaining Questions and Tensions*

Mr. David's story provided an opportunity for preservice and early-career mathematics teachers to consider, question, and analyze one inequitable classroom environment from multiple perspectives. Participants used the example to engage more nuanced questions about the nature of the institutional climate under which such inequitable conditions exist. The MEG participants had the opportunity to think specifically about how they would handle similar situations in their own practice.

For me, questions and tensions remain. Ms. Shelby's revelation about her experience with Ms. Marcus surprised me and was a reminder that MEG participants, like all learners, advance from their current understandings. At some point, I asked Ms. Shelby why she did not raise her concerns with this teacher in the group while they were happening. She reported that she had not thought about the problems as equity issues until she heard Mr. David's story. While I was pleased that the discussion opened space for Ms. Shelby to see her own field placement differently, I was disheartened to think that neither our preservice urban education program nor previous MEG sessions had prepared Ms. Shelby to speak up about a classroom environment where she felt this uncomfortable. Issues of power were likely at play. Unlike Mr. David, whose prior experiences in urban schools gave him perspective, without that experience, Ms. Shelby, may have been less willing to question her placement—trusting that our program would not have put her into a situation where she would experience inappropriate teaching. And, like it or not, I cannot separate my role as a professor in my program from my role as a participant in MEG. I represent the institution that made Ms. Shelby's placement. Thus, it makes sense that she might not have felt comfortable questioning her placement in my presence. It took Mr. David's participation in MEG to bring problems to light.

Likewise, many of my lingering questions involve discussing educational racism in an environment—mathematics teacher education—with low numbers of African American teachers. There is no doubt that Mr. David's story was powerful because his experience with racism in American life and schools provides him with authority about what is and is not normal. Yet, he cannot speak for all Black people. How can I, as a White facilitator of MEG, do a better job of challenging participants to consider inequity beyond the superficial when they do not share Mr. Da-

vid's intimate knowledge of its effects? How can I provide direction for novice teachers without claiming to have all the answers? Where should my models come from? For example, the fact that Mr. David, a Black male graduate student with advanced mathematics skills, had to go to such lengths simply to be accepted as a legitimate teacher in the eyes of his cooperating teacher was a lesson for all of us. The group had the possibility to directly consider how subject position, level of experience with racism, and amount of urban teaching experience, can influence how one views a similar situation. Yet, I did little to explicitly help the group make these connections or to consider what such subjectivity means for promoting equity. Moreover, I believe I had a responsibility as a facilitator to frame this reality with hope and possibility for change; but in this case, our discussions never got to that level.

### Connecting Our Cases

We (Susan and Megan) met at a conference for mathematics teacher educators. Megan was inspired by a presentation about the MEG because it was the first time she had heard open, detailed discussion of the challenges of learning to address inequitable teaching practices, especially racialized practices, in a professional setting. Megan saw many similarities between Mrs. Cate and Ms. Marcus, but, until that point, had been nervous about discussing the situation with Mrs. Cate openly. Megan was not sure what others could learn from her case and questioned the appropriateness of how she addressed the situation. Susan admitted that she, too, was nervous, especially about revealing such details of teaching without having the example either seen as business as usual and therefore demonizing to urban teachers, or having the example be dismissed as an abnormal outlier and therefore not important to address. Susan was also nervous about opening details of MEG for scrutiny when she questioned her own expertise at addressing racism. But a central goal of MEG is to learn to talk about and act against injustice even when it makes participants nervous. Thus, we decided we should further discuss our stories together to see what we might be able to learn and to share with others.

In discussing our work, we asked "Is it appropriate to share these stories?" and "What is our purpose in sharing our stories?" We both felt inherent tensions within these cases. First, both of our accounts involved practicing teachers and the question of inequitable behaviors in their classrooms. It was challenging to retell these accounts without feeling like we were portraying the teachers as ineffective, uncaring, and racist while portraying ourselves as just and equitable researchers. We knew that both cases were complex and that publishing these accounts meant risking that both teachers' practices and our own responses could be painted in binary "right or wrong" terms. In short, we did not want to paint classroom teachers from a deficit perspective, but working with teachers toward equity often creates

these awkward situations, and it is important to be honest about our struggles and to share our strategies, no matter how imperfect. We also had to face the fact that writing about inequitable teaching practices and our own ability to confront such practice would not be as clean cut or straightforward as reporting on traditional mathematics education research. This complexity made us both uncomfortable and forced us to confront our own uncertainty about what counts as important knowledge for the field and where in the literature stories like ours belong. Lastly, as White, middle class teacher educators, we had concerns about whether our voices warranted being heard (Megan) and whether we have enough perspective to do justice to the complexity of the issues (Susan).

We decided the best way to proceed would be to write down our cases and continually talk to work through our tensions as we wrote. As we worked, our discussion points repeatedly centered on the following questions:

- Why did we respond to these scenarios the way we did, and why did we feel, at the time, that our responses were appropriate?
- What was and was not helpful in how we each responded to our situation?
- How were our responses too safe, and how could we have pushed our boundaries further?
- How would we respond now if faced with a similar situation? Why?

In writing our accounts and discussing these questions, we learned about each other and ourselves. For example, in discussing how and why we responded the way we did, Megan wondered if she could have done more to explicitly discuss issues of equity with Mrs. Cate. Susan helped Megan to realize that the ways we address inequities are situated in our positionality and context. They can be improved over time. If faced with a similar situation now, Megan would feel more comfortable approaching Mrs. Cate differently. For example, when Megan witnessed Mrs. Cate favoring certain students, she might now ask, "How can we involve all students in the lesson and help them feel confident in their abilities?" She would consider saying directly, "In my view, it is not okay that all students are not working on the task." She might also challenge Mrs. Cate to look for other students in the classroom who demonstrated competency.

Likewise, Susan learned much from repeated discussions with Megan. Unlike Megan, Susan's main research focus is equitable mathematics practice. Thus, our experiences with the equity research base were quite different. There were times, especially at the beginning of our partnership, when Susan's experience with the literature got in the way of her own growth. For example, Megan suggested early on that the Pedagogy of Poverty framework (Haberman, 1991) might situate both of our experiences. At first, thinking that those ideas were dated and did not focus enough on racism to meet our needs, Susan questioned Megan's idea. However,

Megan's thoughts about how the frame put her situation into perspective pushed Susan to take a second look at what she thought she knew. After reflection, Susan decided that Haberman's (1991) findings were still relevant and useful in many ways, especially for the novice teachers in her MEG group. In future MEG discussions, Susan now plans to discuss the Pedagogy of Poverty frame by encouraging the participants to consider how the tenets of the original frame relate to racial injustice.

As we participated in these conversations across time, our discussions opened spaces to process the equity challenges each of our stories raised. We found time to consider and talk through other approaches for acting the next time we are faced with such situations. And we developed a stronger understanding of each other's perspective, which has allowed us to see each other as allies in in this work.

A crucial element to having productive discussions was the fact that we both acknowledge that racial inequities exist and that addressing racism in the field is an essential component of our job as mathematics teacher educators. Both of us have worked with colleagues who accept inequitable teaching practice as the status quo or believe it is a wasted effort to address inequities because teachers' beliefs cannot be changed. Moreover, we both have experienced instances where addressing inequity was treated as something to check off a list of expectations rather than an ongoing process. Addressing inequities involves developing, refining, and rehearsing potential strategies. Our collaboration allowed space to reflect and be better prepared when faced with a similar situation.

It was through these conversations that we realized why our voices warranted being heard. The purpose of sharing our stories is to highlight that we all have the capacity to enact change, but we need the support and courage to start somewhere as well as the understanding that addressing inequity is not an all or nothing endeavor. Advocating for equitable teaching practices takes continual reflection and dialogue. It involves reflecting on when and where to assert yourself and why and discussing the appropriateness of your actions with others. We realized that our conversations gave us space to feel like we were being heard and an outlet where someone else was acknowledging our tensions so that in the future we would have tools to assert ourselves in appropriate ways. We hope that our accounts motivate other mathematics educators to continue to discuss issues of inequity in their work as well as spark a larger conversation on the creation of mathematics education equity discussion groups at the post-secondary level.

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