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Faculty Learning at Boundaries to Broker Racial Equity

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ABSTRACT

On many college campuses, faculty are being called on to act as change agents for racial equity. Through narrative inquiry analysis using the theoretical constructs of boundary crossing and boundary objects, this case study examined learning among faculty ($n = 12$) who attempted to broker structural changes at their universities through participation in action research. The findings illustrate that boundary negotiation across the “silos” of academic departments and administrative offices to promote racial equity involves perspective taking (regarding current norms and discourse) and perspective making (about equity as a legitimate institutional goal). These findings contribute to the literature on faculty agency and organizational learning for racial equity in higher education by identifying boundary objects as cultural tools that facilitate faculty learning and agency.

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Race; equity; organizational change; faculty; boundary crossing

Despite the increase in access to higher education institutions, racially minoritized students continue to encounter organizational structures that perpetuate unequal outcomes in retention and graduation. Several higher education scholars have developed theoretical frameworks and tools to account for the realities racially minoritized students experience on college and university campuses (e.g., Bensimon & Malcom, 2012; Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Walter, 1998; Museus, 2014). Racially minoritized students are more likely to encounter unwelcoming campus environments and hostile racial climates, which perpetuate racial inequities in student outcomes (Hurtado, Griffin, Arellano, & Cuellar, 2008). In response, students have demanded an increase in the racial diversity of the faculty and in racial literacy among White professors (We the Protestors, 2015).

In this study, racial equity references a situation in which educational practices and policies produce equal student outcomes among racial and ethnic groups and enable racially minoritized students to study in postsecondary learning environments free from discrimination and bias. Achieving the goal of racial equity requires professors to become aware of racial differences in classroom and program outcomes to effectively meet the

needs of racially minoritized groups (Bensimon & Malcom, 2012; Dowd & Bensimon, 2015).

Professors are in unique positions to advance racial equity across disciplinary departments and program offices. However, most often, they are socialized to be professionals in disciplinary fields bounded by epistemologies, theories, and methods rooted in White, male, and Western norms (Bensimon & Neumann, 1993; Delgado-Bernal & Villalpando, 2002; Gonzales, 2018; Posselt, Reyes, Slay, Kamimura, & Porter, 2017). Professors who wish to advance racial equity goals may be deterred by a lack of training (Gardner, 2010; O'Meara, 2010), by colleagues who feel that social justice work is not a legitimate part of a professor's role (Delgado-Bernal & Villalpando, 2002), or by an uncertain sense of authority within larger university power structures. Further, professional norms and reward structures prioritize faculty roles in other areas, especially research and teaching (O'Meara, 2010).

Given this social context, it is not surprising that professors who address issues of racial equity often do so primarily through individual, rather than collective, action (Felix, Bensimon, Hanson, Gray, & Klingsmith, 2015; Peña, 2012). For example, faculty may provide direct mentoring to racially minoritized students (Bensimon, Dowd, Stanton-Salazar, & Dávila, *in press*) or revise their course materials (Dowd & Bensimon, 2015). Less prevalent are cases of faculty who work across departments to enact larger structural changes.

A number of scholars have highlighted the role of practitioner inquiry, a form of action research, to encourage faculty to reflect on their conceptions of equity, examine their role as racial equity advocates, and bring about structural reforms in student admissions, assessment, faculty hiring, and resource allocation (Bensimon, 2007; Bragg & Durham, 2012). Inquiry is the systematic use of data to produce knowledge about a local problem and develop the expertise to change institutional structures, policies, and practices (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Reason, 1994). Inquiry can be motivated by a desire to address social injustices or can be carried out more instrumentally to meet institutional goals (Kinchloe, 1995). Studies have shown that the design of cultural artifacts for inquiry designed in the tradition of participatory critical action research (e.g., data disaggregated by race) can help practitioners develop a race-conscious mind set to advocate for racially minoritized students (Bensimon & Malcom, 2012; Dowd & Bensimon, 2015).

Although the existing scholarship on racial equity has provided a foundation to design inquiry-based interventions to motivate individual faculty to engage in reflective practice and make changes in their work, further research is needed to understand how to support faculty involvement with colleagues in collaborative efforts to advance racial equity goals in different areas of campus life. Researchers have not thoroughly investigated the ways

professors negotiate differences in professional practices, context, and language when seeking to enact changes across the silos of higher education. This study contributes to higher education research and practice by identifying and examining learning that occurs through the use of cultural tools designed to facilitate faculty agency for racial equity across organizational boundaries. Specifically, we focused on what faculty learn and do as part of a team- and inquiry-based intervention to advocate for changes in policy and practice in their own departments and in other campus settings.

This case study used narrative inquiry and the theoretical constructs of boundary crossing and boundary objects to examine the experiences of 12 faculty members from five comprehensive, public 4-year universities who acted as “boundary spanners” (Bensimon & Malcom, 2012). In this study, the term “boundary spanner” refers to faculty members who attempt to coordinate policy and practice changes that require the involvement of numerous faculty and administrative colleagues in a variety of areas. Boundary objects are cultural artifacts that facilitate boundary spanning.

To enhance understanding of faculty learning about equity agency at the boundaries of organizational functioning, we focused on two research questions in this study:

- (1) What experiences do faculty have when engaging in boundary crossing to work across disciplinary departments and program offices of higher education to pursue racial equity goals?
- (2) In what ways do faculty use artifacts (e.g., language about equity, data disaggregated by race) to engage in boundary crossing when working across the silos of higher education?
 - (a) What do they learn in doing so?
 - (b) What helps or keeps them from learning or growing in their roles as faculty?

Boundary crossing and boundary objects are relevant concepts to investigate professors’ capacity to bring about change, especially when problems of practice are situated in multiple areas of institutional functioning. As we show in the Results section, when faculty engaged in boundary crossing in a structured race-conscious inquiry process using cultural tools designed for that purpose, it opened up opportunities for coordination across organizational boundaries and for enhanced faculty agency in their own academic departments.

Boundary crossing for racial equity

Disciplinary departments and program offices have their own practices, language, and norms that are embedded in different epistemic cultures that adhere to

different ways of thinking and doing (Kezar, 2014). These cultural differences act as boundaries that create organizational silos. Cultural boundaries are noticeable when behaviors and social interactions are differentially patterned within an organization (Lamont & Molnár, 2002). Faculty who effectively advocate for racial equity in one area of responsibility may be unable to do so in areas of campus with different rules and norms from their own. To navigate these differences of organizational culture, faculty can make political and strategic decisions to draw on their knowledge about the inner workings of colleges and universities. For example, they might decide to communicate the significance of racial equity in a variety of different ways depending on the social context and who else is in the room (Ching, 2018).

The concepts of boundary crossing and boundary objects illuminate the challenges faculty members encounter as they move between organizational boundaries to advance racial equity. Boundary crossing is a process used to create connections in actions and interactions across practices (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011). In this study, boundary crossing was applied to understand how faculty who participated in team- and inquiry-based interventions learned to broker knowledge, strategies, and tools about racial equity during coordination with other members of their campus. Boundary theorists have conceptualized individuals and objects as existing at the boundaries of different worlds. From this perspective, boundary spanners are those individuals who hold positions that enable them to interact with separate and disparate social groups (Akkerman & Bruining, 2016; Bensimon & Neumann, 1993). Faculty can cultivate boundary-spanning capacities through their interactions with others. For example, by interacting with administrative staff who have insight into student life and faculty roles, faculty members can learn how to more effectively serve Black students (Posselt et al., 2017). Collaboration at the intersection of boundaries generates resources for learning that can lead to meaning making and the transformation of practices (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011; Akkerman & Bruining, 2016; Roth & Lee, 2007).

Boundary objects are material and symbolic artifacts that structure and activate processes of communication among different professionals (Star, 2010). Many common artifacts of educational practice function as boundary objects. For instance, academic transcripts facilitate conversations with minimal face-to-face interactions among professors, academic advisors, admissions officers, and students about the state of a student's progression. Boundary objects facilitate communication across boundaries and reduce the confrontations that can occur when actors in different settings must coordinate information and activities and are faced with the unwelcome task of explaining their practices to each other.

The Equity Scorecard as a boundary-crossing intervention

The Equity Scorecard is an intervention that provides language and data tools that call for race-conscious reflective practice and thereby creates structured

settings and processes for administrators, faculty, and staff to redesign organizational practices to make them more equitable. This work takes place in purposefully bounded settings (e.g., evidence team meetings) and utilizes cultural artifacts (e.g., peer interviews using an interview protocol) designed to enable boundary crossing.

Equity Scorecard teams make use of previously field-tested cultural artifacts for organizational learning and design their own artifacts for change as they learn to advance equity goals in different academic settings (Dowd & Liera, 2018). Participants in previous studies on equity-oriented practitioner inquiry using the Equity Scorecard have included professors at community colleges, where faculty reevaluated their assumptions about the behaviors of racially minoritized students (Bustillos, Rueda, & Bensimon, 2011); at public 4-year universities, where faculty abandoned inequitable uses of SAT scores for more holistic and inclusive indicators (Dowd & Bensimon, 2015; Dowd & Liera, 2018); and at private 4-year universities, where faculty reconceptualized their teaching and advising practices to better support racially minoritized students (Peña, 2012).

When an institution begins the Equity Scorecard process, team members and team leaders are selected for their boundary-crossing capacities (Bensimon & Malcom, 2012; Dowd, Bishop, & Bensimon, 2015; Neumann, 1991). In collaboration with senior administrators, team leaders use an Equity Scorecard team selection template to guide the team member selection process (Bensimon & Neumann, 1993; Neumann, 1991; see also Bensimon & Malcom, 2012). Faculty members in roles such as department or governance committee chair are prioritized for selection because people in these positions are well situated to span the boundaries of academic and student affairs and to revise the curriculum and faculty hiring. A team also typically includes a representative from the institutional research office who can obtain data and run reports for many departments and campus units.

As these examples illustrate, the construction of the Equity Scorecard team leader and team member roles at each institution is a curated process. Teams are intended to create an incubator for the development of language and materials to bridge differences across organizational boundaries. Racial and ethnic diversity among team members is also a goal. However, at predominantly White institutions, such as those in this case-study sample, a 10-person team typically includes only 1, 2, or 3 members who are from minoritized racial and ethnic groups in the local geographic region. Team leaders receive specialized training to facilitate the tensions of “race talk” (Pollock, 2001) that arise when teams discuss indicators of student success (called “vital signs” in the Equity Scorecard process) disaggregated by race and ethnicity. Team tasks of carrying out inquiry and action planning also produce tensions as team members attempt to prioritize goals and communication strategies (Dowd et al., 2015).

Faculty agency

Faculty agency is domain-specific, and professors exert higher levels of agency in some areas of their academic lives than in others (Campbell & O'Meara, 2014). For example, professors who perceive they have institutional and departmental support for their intellectual and professional growth report higher agency to achieve career goals (Campbell & O'Meara, 2014; O'Meara, Rivera, Kuvaeva, & Corrigan, 2017). In addition to contextual factors dependent on those around them in the work world, professors' previous experiences, current personal situations, and potential future circumstances influence their perceptions about their ability to advance their academic careers (Gonzales, 2018; O'Meara, 2015; Sulé, 2014). Gonzales (2014) illustrated this point by showing that faculty who received their doctoral training at Research I universities were more likely to emphasize research at the expense of teaching to support their institution's prestige-oriented efforts.

Critical race theorists have argued that racially minoritized professors must enact their agency merely to survive oppressive environments, even as they simultaneously take steps to advance their careers (Delgado-Bernal, Burciaga, & Carmona, 2012; Ford, 2011; Gonzales, 2018; Sulé, 2014). Given that faculty commonly act in ways informed by their context and social location, the agency of racially minoritized professors is often dually informed by experiences of racism and knowledge of academic norms and expectations (Gonzales, 2014, 2018; Sulé, 2014). Therefore, racially minoritized professors are as likely to enact their agency to replicate norms of the professoriate that accrue career rewards (e.g., publishing in top-tier journals) as they are to challenge aspects of the profession that disaffirm their social identities (Ford, 2011; Gonzales, 2018; Sulé, 2014).

Researchers have previously applied the concept of faculty agency primarily to examine career advancement and resistance to oppressive environments. This study conceptually framed faculty agency for racial equity through the lens of boundary crossing and boundary objects to explore the demands on faculty for enacting agency in different areas of professional responsibility. It advances the literature on faculty agency by adding greater emphasis on variations in the contexts in which faculty work. Faculty members in this study carried out work at the boundaries where the specially designed activities of the racial equity initiative in which they were involved (the Equity Scorecard) intersected with typical activities of departments and program offices. These boundary-crossing activities revealed norms that could then be changed to institute more equitable policies and practices.

Methodology

During a 2-year period, a state university system of about a dozen universities implemented the Equity Scorecard as one aspect of their performance accountability policies. Subsequently, during 2013 to 2015, we conducted a

case study on five universities in the system, which were purposefully sampled based on variations in each university's inquiry process during the Equity Scorecard implementation. At the time of the study, the five campuses in this case study were 4-year public, "primarily baccalaureate" institutions (Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 2013–2014). All campuses were located in predominantly White institutions. White student enrollment ranged from 78% to 87%. Black students averaged 8% of total enrollments. Latinx student enrollment averaged 4.2%, while Asian and Native and American Indian students made up a very small proportion of total enrollments (less than 2%). In addition to declining enrollment of White students, systemwide budget cuts depended on the enrollment and retention of students.

Methods

The study's data set was composed of semistructured interviews each lasting about 1 hr. Our interpretations of the interview data were supplemented by observations of three Equity Scorecard team meetings (at three of the five campuses), by observations of informal interactions among team members and leaders (e.g., in hallway conversations between interviews on campus), and by knowledge of the Equity Scorecard action research design. The interview protocol included questions about the participants' expectations and motivation for involvement in the inquiry project, their racial and ethnic identities, and their experiences with team meetings. Specifically, participants were asked about the actions taken to enact the Equity Scorecard teams' recommendations in addressing the equity gaps in student outcomes, the mechanisms of their participation in the change process, the use of networks and resources for change, and the factors that influenced change at their respective campus.

Sample

For this study, we focused on interviews with 12 professors that had been audiotaped and transcribed. Five professors from the study sample were omitted, including 2 who had not been part of the Equity Scorecard team process and 3 who declined to be audio-recorded. Three professors were interviewed twice, resulting in the data set for this study of 15 interview transcripts from 12 faculty members. As seen in Table 1, 6 participants were women; 7 were White (Drs. Andrew Swenson, Brian Landon, Julie Bryant, Liz Michaels, Stephanie Ayers, Susan Haught, and Theresa Sample), 4 were Black (Drs. James Maddox, Mason Woods, Owen Walker, and Renee Springer), and one was Latino (Dr. Miguel Rios). All faculty were tenured, with half at the rank of associate and half at the rank of full professors.

Table 1. Identifying characteristics of faculty members in the study sample.

Pseudonym	Campus	Race	Gender
Brian Landon	Drakesford University	White	Male
Miguel Rios	Drakesford University	Latinx	Male
Renee Springer	Valley University	Black	Female
Mason Woods	Valley University	Black	Male
James Maddox	Hillside University	Black	Male
Susan Haught	Olympia University	White	Female
Julie Bryant	Olympia University	White	Female
Liz Michaels	Old Main University	White	Female
Owen Walker	Old Main University	Black	Male
Andrew Swenson	Old Main University	White	Male
Theresa Sample	Old Main University	White	Female
Stephanie Ayers	Old Main University	White	Female

Analysis

We conducted three phases of analysis in this study and used Atlas.ti Version 7.5.12 for the ongoing composition of memos, coding, and analysis. The first step was to understand the larger narrative within each interview by breaking it down into component parts and seeing how the parts related to each other (Polkinghorne, 1995). We read and listened to each transcript to identify passages that we perceived as the beginning, middle, and end of stories conveyed in the larger narrative. In the second phase, we identified the plots in each interview transcript that spoke to events and actions associated with faculty agency to advance racial equity (Polkinghorne, 1995). We used Dauite's (2014) plot analysis technique to organize data into plots with initiating actions, complicating actions, high points, resolution strategies, codas, and endings. We identified 6 to 19 plots for each faculty participant for a total of 112 plots across all interview transcripts.

In the final phase, we interpreted each plot as representing faculty learning about equity agency. We categorized each plot using four codes based on what Akkerman and Bakker (2011) identified (through a comprehensive review of the boundary-crossing literature) as four mechanisms for learning at the boundaries (see Table 2). The first mechanism is called "identification." Learning of this type is demonstrated by individuals who interact across organizational boundaries and come away with a stronger self-awareness of their own work world and roles relative to others. Learning using the second mechanism, called "reflection," involves taking the perspectives, knowledge, language, and practices of others into consideration and incorporating them into one's repertoire of practice. Categorizing plots as representing learning as identification and reflection highlighted for us the different ways in which faculty participants in this study positioned their roles and practices relative to others.

The third learning mechanism is called "coordination." Learning of this type occurs when individuals from different organizational areas use "boundary objects" to minimize the inefficiency and confusion of communicating across

Table 2. Counts of narrative plots categorized by learning mechanisms and participant.

	Identification	Reflection	Coordination	Transformation	Total
Stephanie Ayers	2	2	2	0	6
Julie Bryant	0	5	4	0	9
Susan Haught	1	5	2	0	7
Brian Landon	2	2	5	0	9
James Maddox	3	3	0	0	6
Liz Michaels	4	3	4	1	12
Miguel Rios	3	7	0	0	10
Theresa Sample	3	0	2	1	6
Renee Springer	7	0	3	0	10
Andrew Swenson	2	1	4	0	7
Owen Walker	2	3	4	1	11
Mason Woods	5	5	6	3	19
Total	34	36	36	6	112

differences (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011). For our purposes of studying the development of faculty as equity agents, learning that occurred through the mechanism of coordination was especially important because it “can be associated with role transition” (Schenke, Van Driell, Geijssel, & Volman, 2017, p. 5). When individuals learn through coordination, they also gain expertise in using boundary objects, because coordination always involves translating specialized information and knowledge from one setting to another. This category highlighted what faculty participants in this study were doing, with whom, in what context, and with what artifacts when they recounted narratives of the inquiry process that they viewed as important to their enactment of equity agency.

The fourth mechanism for learning at boundaries is called “transformation.” Transformational learning requires dialogue and joint work in which individuals question their own motivations, values, and practices. Transformation is a more exacting form of learning than coordination, which avoids conflict through the design and joint use of boundary objects that minimize friction. The reflective questioning of transformational learning enables new practices and procedures to emerge. By confronting boundaries and differences in practices, individuals who engage in this form of learning generate new views and ways of doing things that become incorporated into the organizational culture (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011). This form of learning was important in this study because it involves recognition that “problems cannot be solved with the professionals’ original tools” (Schenke et al., 2017, p. 5). Transformational learning represents the nuts-and-bolts enactment of faculty agency in collaboration as participants use newly developed cultural artifacts to change the nature of their professional activities. Further, in adopting new, “in-between” practices (Schenke et al., 2017, p. 6), participants’ understanding of the objective of joint practices also changes.

Positionality

The first author came into this work as a male Latinx graduate student who studied issues of racial equity. His experience as a first-generation Latino

college student who attended predominantly White institutions informed his critical perspective to examine racial equity. Because he had firsthand experience with being silenced in the college classroom, being stereotyped by White educators, and being discriminated against by White students, the first author believed that who one is matters in their level of engagement with issues of racial equity.

As a researcher who studies racial disparities and as a professor at a predominantly White institution, the second author has had numerous opportunities to reflect on and enact equity agency. These opportunities arise in different contexts, shaped by who else is in the room. These disparate contexts include research design and analysis, shared governance committees, teaching, and peer review of journal articles and grant proposals. The social contexts of these opportunities vary as they sometimes involve racially diverse colleagues and sometimes involve a homogenous, predominantly White group. In her research experience, group diversity matters to strengthen the individual agency of group members, but cross-racial understanding of motivations, risks, and potential rewards of advocacy for racial equity are not at all uniform. As a White woman born in the United States to English-speaking, middle-class parents, the second author is culturally imbued with the progressive liberalism of the Civil Rights era. Although predisposed to an optimistic outlook for the possibilities of change toward racial equity in higher education, she is aware that colleagues who bear the brunt of racism and institutional racism on a daily basis have good reason to be less sanguine. The racial realism of critical race theory holds important lessons for White researchers whose optimism may be naïve.

With this positionality in mind, it was essential for us for both epistemological and ethical reasons to utilize a rigorous methodology that iteratively elicited meaning from the data, involved several stages of peer review of our interpretations, and incorporated feedback that shaped rethinking and revision of this text. The task of interpreting the use of intentionally designed boundary objects for boundary crossing among culturally distinct organizational settings by diverse groups of institutional actors held intrinsic and instrumental value to us.

Limitations

The decision to use a sociocultural theoretical lens highlighted how faculty interacted with colleagues, tools, and sociocultural processes to enact their agency for racial equity. Power dynamics and emotional aspects of racial equity work are socially constructed and racialized. These topics have been addressed in other analyses from the larger research agenda from which this study emanated, but they are not addressed here, where the focus was on the professional learning and development of individual professors. A second

limitation of this study was the focus on the experiences of faculty to examine boundary crossing.¹ With additional observational data, the study could have been better positioned to contextualize faculty perceptions of behaviors (their own and those of others). However, the data did include faculty members who were part of the same Equity Scorecard team, which helped triangulate recounted events and perceptions.

Findings

As we show in the first part of our findings, the evidence team designed protocols and created a bounded space with its own norms, practices, and expectations. The Equity Scorecard's focus on using data disaggregated by race to identify equity gaps as led by leaders who were coached to move team members from "race talk" to the design of inquiry activities and action plans created opportunities for faculty to reflect on and identify differences and similarities between racial equity work and traditional forms of faculty work. This is evidenced in the plot summaries shown in [Table 2](#). Approximately one third of the plots we analyzed as recounting faculty experiences had elements of the learning mechanisms of identification and reflection. For some White and Black participants, boundary crossing across differences within the team served as an opportunity to acquire a broader repertoire of perspectives, language, information, and practices that they would later call on for boundary crossing outside the team. For one Latino and two Black faculty members, however, the inexperience of White colleagues revealed through these discussions were primarily occasions, through comparison and contrast, to strengthen their self-awareness and identification as advocates for racial equity and for racially minoritized students.

As we demonstrate in the second part of our findings, faculty used boundary objects such as an interview protocol, a survey, an equity action plan, and their roles as Equity Scorecard team leaders and team members to enter new settings. As shown in [Table 2](#), a third of the plots we analyzed revolved around these attempts at coordination with colleagues in other organizational settings. At times, these forays were productive to advance racial equity goals on the campus, and at other times, they were decidedly not productive.

Even when boundary crossing was associated with the productive coordination between the Equity Scorecard evidence team's efforts and the activities of administrative offices and academic departments, only a few instances were associated with what we viewed as transformational changes in policies, practices, or faculty roles. We coded only 5% of plots analyzed as representing the learning mechanism of transformation, and these plots were from interviews with only 4 of the 12 faculty participants. This finding demonstrates the difficulty entailed in utilizing tools such as disaggregated data and

equity plans to change organizational practices and the importance of designing opportunities for faculty to learn how to engage in this work.

Perspective making and perspective taking through teamwork

For all the faculty participants in this study, being an Equity Scorecard team member was characterized by participation in evidence team meetings. Seven of 12 faculty members also recalled meaningful experiences collecting qualitative data through inquiry activities such as peer interviews, document analysis, and survey administration. The quality of interactions in the team meetings varied across the five universities in the case-study sample. Some team leaders managed to involve team members throughout the process, while others did not. The quality of team leadership and the variation in team members' previous personal and professional experiences addressing racism influenced the social context of the teamwork.

Drs. Stephanie Ayers, Liz Michaels, Theresa Sample, Andrew Swenson, and Owen Walker were members of the same evidence team. Dr. Michaels was a co-team leader acting in that role alongside an administrator who had extensive experience leading equity and diversity initiatives. This group of faculty members were active participants in meetings and all took on inquiry tasks. For them, team meetings fostered an exchange of viewpoints and information about equity issues on their campus.

Supportive social contexts

When asked how he felt as an African American during a discussion of data showing equity gaps facing Black students, Dr. Walker emphasized that the evidence team leader's use of "ground rules" created what he viewed as "very open dialogue." Although team members "were reflective of different units" and therefore came in with different knowledge of the campus culture, Dr. Walker felt that team members "were able to speak freely about what we thought." Among the ground rules was the dictum, "What we talked about in the meetings stayed in the meetings." According to Dr. Swenson, a White male professor, this rule contributed to "an ethos in the room" where there was "a lot of trust [that] people are doing their best to think from a position that is beyond their subject position according to race and gender."

Reflecting the intentional design of the evidence team as a place to foster learning about boundary crossing, Dr. Swenson's description characterized these race-conscious discussions as an exchange of perspectives that was characteristic of the learning mechanism of reflection. For some, this type of talk "was a new kind of way of thinking or talking about race" led by those who "were ready for it" and who were "all in." Dr. Swenson felt prepared to engage in these discussions because he was experienced as an advocate for the recognition and rights of lesbian and gay faculty members and students

on his campus. Perspective making and perspective taking through teamwork strengthened his identity as an equity agent and expanded his repertoire of practice. He could draw on his previous experiences advocating for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) rights and use the Equity Scorecard tools to address racial equity issues as well.

Unsupportive social contexts

In contrast, one Latino and two Black professors who began teamwork with strong identities as equity agents experienced discussions at team meetings that revealed the inexperience, naïveté, and insincerity of White colleagues. These faculty members did not experience teamwork as a learning opportunity to expand their repertoire of practice. Instead, teamwork became occasions for these professors to strengthen their identification and self-awareness as equity agents through comparison and contrast in interaction with their colleagues.

Drs. James Maddox, a Black male professor, and Miguel Rios, a Latino professor, were frustrated by the quality of discussion and action planning among their evidence team colleagues. Both served on teams on which the team leader took on the bulk of responsibilities for representing the team throughout the process and was not effective in involving team members in inquiry. Drs. Maddox and Rios relied on their initial and ongoing identification as social scientists to critique and distance themselves from the process. They continued to participate in team meetings, but they did not participate in inquiry activities. They advocated the use of perspectives that they held at the start of the team process and struggled with the perspective-making and perspective-taking tasks required for boundary negotiation within the dynamics of the team.

Dr. Rios critiqued his university's lack of leadership when he said, "I don't think the institution really looks at how their policy impacts certain groups." This lack of commitment to racial equity was glaring to him. Although he was an Equity Scorecard team member, he did not view that role as an opportunity to change institutional practices and he did not believe the university's efforts to promote equity would be consequential. Dr. Maddox viewed the inquiry process as frustrating and overly simplified in ways that angered him. Referring to the vital signs representing racial equity gaps in student access and retention, which were discussed at team meetings, he emphasized that race "is such a complex situation . . . the numbers all make me skeptic[al], because there's just so much that plays into this and we don't know other factors." The lack of additional variables to contextualize the discussion of vital signs led Dr. Maddox to observe that some of his team members believed that "the way to address [racism] is very simple; we just need to sit down, have a conversation and talk about common ground and get to know each other." Through his experiences on the Equity Scorecard

team, Dr. Maddox solidified his identity “as a [researcher] who studies about race.”

For Dr. Renee Springer, a Black female professor, equity work during evidence team meetings required an “understanding that we were not talking about students and their problems and their weaknesses.” Dr. Springer’s level of comfort in talking about race with team members depended on whether she perceived that they were “genuine and they mean what they say.” Her perceptions of her colleagues’ genuine interest in making changes were affected by the lack of decisive action and her team leader’s admitted lack of expertise in addressing racial tensions and disparities in the educational offerings of the university.

Unlike Drs. Maddox and Rios, Dr. Springer attempted to learn through the opportunities for coordination afforded by membership on the Equity Scorecard team. However, the frustrations of boundary crossing in interaction with her White colleagues led Dr. Springer to disinvest from the action-planning process of the evidence team. As her identification as an equity agent strengthened, she increased her direct mentoring of Black students by involving them in a large research project that she designed with their participation. She also became involved in a project to expand formal mentoring opportunities by participating in another university workgroup whose efforts floundered when the chair of the group left the university. Even as her aspirations for collective action diminished, Dr. Springer’s identification and activities as an equity agent strengthened as she became more aware of her own capabilities and commitments in contrast with colleagues who were less prepared to address racial disparities at her university.

Crossing the boundaries of university silos using boundary objects

As reflected by the column labeled “Coordination” in Table 2, 10 of 12 faculty members who served on Equity Scorecard teams (with Drs. Maddox and Rios being the exceptions) got involved in attempts at coordination outside the evidence team setting to change institutional policies or practices. This involvement occurred most often through practices they adopted as part of their advising and governance functions, which were areas in which they felt they had authority to implement changes.

Attempts at coordination of equity efforts across different organizational units provided insight to faculty participants on the Equity Scorecard evidence teams about resistance to change they encountered from faculty colleagues and administrative staff within and outside the Equity Scorecard teams. The resistance faculty participants described reflected the friction and inefficiencies in communication and coordination that is typical among units with different organizational cultures. The negotiation of cultural differences across organizational boundaries provided

opportunities for learning through the mechanism of coordination. Learning occurred through successful and unsuccessful attempts at boundary crossing.

Using data and action plans as boundary objects

Most professors who experienced learning through coordination consciously navigated organizational boundaries between the racial equity work of the Equity Scorecard team and the normative practices, language, and politics of everyday work life prevailing at the university. Faculty members acting in evidence team member and governance positions learned they could use discourse about budgets and performance accountability to advocate for racial equity using language and cultural artifacts familiar to that used by senior administrators. For example, Dr. Brian Landon, who was the chair of the Strategic Planning Committee, explained that his team “linked [equity goals] to the strategic plan” because they were “familiar with the need to link initiatives to both the strategic plan and to things like performance-based funding.”

The Equity Scorecard inquiry process allowed faculty members to use data disaggregated by race to create lines of communication between team members and non-team members, even in the absence of consensus about the importance of racial equity. Faculty members used Equity Scorecard data and data tools to collaborate while also seeking to avoid the confrontations that arise in regard to issues of race. The majority of faculty participants were able to use ideas and materials developed at the Equity Scorecard evidence team meetings to provide them with an entrée to unfamiliar settings, to give their request for access to information, credibility, and to legitimize their recommendations for change.

Dr. Mason Woods, a Black male professor, believed the Equity Scorecard’s data focus gave him access to information that “a lot of us, especially in faculty, did not know. We did not know what the hierarchy was. We did not know who made the decisions in admissions.” Yet such knowledge is essential to effective advocacy, as Dr. Swenson emphasized when recounting his experiences in the inquiry process. Racial equity work, according to Dr. Swenson, required professors to take “a 30,000-foot view about the functioning of the university” to understand the systemic and structural issues that were reproducing racial disparities in educational participation through local practices. For that reason, Dr. Brian Landon took steps as chair of the Strategic Planning Committee at his university to require departments to use data disaggregated by race to track student recruitment and retention. The data disaggregation was a first step for colleagues to become aware of racial inequities. Similarly, Dr. Julie Bryant, a White woman who was the leader of her evidence team, used data disaggregated by race to “go to different parts of the university and say, ‘There’s this gap; we’re going to try and figure out why.’”

These strategies exemplify the boundary work of professors who attempt to translate racial equity goals into local practices by working within the system to change the system. By design, these strategies were not explicitly disruptive. The way faculty used these boundary objects was typical of boundary-crossing work through coordination. Boundary objects were used to reduce the friction that comes when conflicting beliefs, language, and practices come into interaction within an organization.

Learning from tensions and failure

Equity Scorecard protocols created additional opportunities for learning through boundary crossing beyond those that existed through regular organizational routines such as governance committee service. For example, Drs. Owen Walker and Theresa Sample were paired for an inquiry activity and used the partnership to gain insight about student recruitment and matriculation. However, as Dr. Michaels (who was a team leader for Dr. Walker's Equity Scorecard team) recalled, the team "had to work really hard to develop working relationships with admissions, so they did not feel that we were causing trouble."

Dr. Walker expected that administrative staff in the admissions office would say "OK, who are these people . . . [and why] are they on our turf?" because his university had "so many different units" and his colleagues were not "used to working across." To conduct the interview, Drs. Sample and Walker used a process and questions designed in the Equity Scorecard team setting. Dr. Walker found that using the interview protocol was an effective strategy. In addition, "working with someone, you did not feel like you were out on your own." The artifact of the peer interview protocol served as a boundary object for negotiating cultural difference. After Drs. Sample and Walker conducted the interview with the admissions office staff, their inquiries were viewed as credible and trustworthy. More generally, the team structure itself and the charge to the committee from the provost created "credibility both within our committee and in the university," according to Dr. Michaels. This credibility "propelled" her team to move forward in ways that other committees could not because they "just didn't have the clout."

Some attempts to build on the provost's charge to the Equity Scorecard team to conduct inquiry misfired, however, and increased friction between the team members and others who were not familiar with the team's norms. Drs. Bryant and Susan Haugh, a White professor on Dr. Bryant's team, used a survey to collect information about student retention practices across the university. Seeking information about the ways in which departments were supporting Black and Latinx students, the survey asked department chairs, "Do you have anything that you do for retention and completion to help kids succeed and make it through?" According to Dr. Bryant, "[T]he unfortunate thing is that the survey was not worded as well as it could be. It was both a

little confusing for department chairs, and also some department chairs took offense.” The norms of race talk that had been introduced in the evidence team setting marked the team members’ inquiry activity as an unfamiliar cultural practice and therefore elicited a suspicious response from many department chairs.

Drs. Bryant and Haugh both highlighted this experience in their interviews. The failure of coordination was upsetting to them. The evidence team’s survey did not serve as an effective boundary object. It increased conflict and friction. Unlike the inquiry artifact of an interview protocol, which was administered in a face-to-face peer setting, the survey administration did not enable relationship building through perspective making and perspective taking. The survey was clearly an attempt at coordination among units that backfired, but it was instructive to both of them, as they vowed to avoid similar missteps in the future. They invested their equity efforts elsewhere—in Dr. Haugh’s case through service on a governance committee and in Dr. Bryant’s case in her ongoing leadership of the team—but they did not abandon them.

Their experiences with faculty in this study illustrate how learning through boundary crossing has the potential to strengthen faculty agency for racial equity even when specific attempts at coordination fail. In addition, we saw that learning through reflection and coordination go hand in hand. Faculty members came to view their activities as team members and equity agents as distinct from the roles and identities of colleagues who did not adopt the stance of equity agents.

Transforming advising practices and the nature of advising

Drs. Michaels, Sample, Walker, and Woods were the four faculty members in this study whose learning was associated with the transformation of institutional practices and policies. Dr. Woods described that through his advocacy, his department had changed “the language that we use when we create our syllabi,” and “the whole idea of everything is merit-based.” Dr. Woods also scheduled external speakers for department meetings who could speak about diversity and equity topics and facilitated conversations in his department about perceptions and indicators of merit. To advocate for a major change in the ways his colleagues were selecting students for undergraduate research assistantships, he used data to show his colleagues that “almost all of the students who do research with us are White and a lot of them are male, even though females are 65% of our major and we have a substantial portion of students of color.” He used this data analysis to engage in boundary crossing and bring language and perspectives to his departmental colleagues that were typical of the Equity Scorecard team setting. “Maybe it’s about merit and maybe

it's not. We just take the top-tier students on as our research assistants, but think about how research experience could help [racially minoritized] students," he argued. Further, he incorporated "a whole-equity component" into the administrative task of academic program review, which prioritized strategies that faculty could use to "have discussions with students in class and try to minimize potential bias that we discovered through student and teacher interviews."

Dr. Michaels also used data disaggregated by race to question equity gaps in gatekeeping courses in her department. She created a new departmental routine for faculty to use data disaggregated by race to track equity gaps in gatekeeping courses and created new advising practices designed to support Black students. For example, Dr. Michaels "looked at the pass/fail rates in terms of the equity gap in some of our classes on campus in [my department]" and found that it was "huge." These data motivated Dr. Michaels to use the relationships she had developed with senior administrators during her service as Equity Scorecard team leader and during previous service chairing various governance committees to obtain funds to renovate a physical space as a peer-tutoring center. She also created a new field experience course in which students could earn credits for peer advising and recruited students to participate in the inaugural cohort. The experience was also transformational for Dr. Michaels's identity as an advisor. She came to view some practices that she previously viewed as "mothering moves" as "advising moves," a reflection that indicated a changing sense of legitimate faculty work.

These examples illustrate the ways in which coordination through boundary crossing can result in changes in practices and structures. Similarly, Drs. Sample and Walker worked with colleagues on their evidence team to bring about consequential curricular reforms in their own departments and in others.

Discussion

In this study, boundary work involved faculty participating in a bounded space (the Equity Scorecard evidence team) in which team members could talk in a mixed group with administrators and staff members from different programs, offices, and departments. Specialized cultural practices and processes were introduced to the team as part of the adoption of the Equity Scorecard action research process as an intervention for organizational learning about racial equity. In addition, team members developed their own norms of interaction among themselves. The evidence teams were intended to be incubators for discussions about and action planning to address racial equity issues as locally instantiated at each university.

Team members were expected to learn about institutional responsibility for equity and their own agency for change not only by attending team meetings, but even more essential, by conducting action research in various settings across campus where, through boundary crossing, they could produce generative ideas for change. However, disciplinary departments and program offices have their own norms, language, and practices that often do not align with those from the Equity Scorecard. Learning about their roles as racial equity advocates gave professors insight about the similarities and differences of racial equity work from other forms of faculty work. They also learned about how equity work differed within and beyond the curated space of the Equity Scorecard team meetings.

Our research questions revolved around understanding the experiences of professors on these boundary-crossing teams as they related to the development of faculty agency for racial equity. Faculty experiences varied depending on several factors. These factors included a professor's previous experiences with equity work, their racial and ethnic identity, and their relationships with Black and Latinx students. The quality of team leadership and interactions among team members also shaped individual experiences. Three professors on three different teams perceived the quality of teamwork as being compromised by the insincere, cynical, or naïve participation of White colleagues. They did not subscribe to principles behind the action research design, which relied on practitioner inquiry as the driver of organizational change. They viewed the process as inadequate to address systemic power and the harsh realities of racially minoritized students' experiences at predominantly White institutions.

Eight of the 10 professors who engaged in inquiry activities in this study learned what is involved in the coordination of information, policies, procedures, and cultural artifacts (often, but not solely, data) for boundary crossing. They gained technical knowledge of these artifacts and used them to establish their legitimate role in advocating for change. Through participation in multiple areas of university functioning, participants were able to communicate equity perspectives, arguments, and action plans persuasively to faculty and administrative colleagues. They learned about racialized student enrollment patterns on their campuses and gained new perspectives on the authority that they held as professors to prioritize racial equity goals on behalf of the university.

Among those who invested in relationship building across the bounded silos of university practice, faculty members learned to use boundary objects to reduce the frictions and inefficiencies of communication across cultural and organizational differences. This finding aligned with those of Ching (2018), who showed that equity advocates adapt their messages about equity for a particular social context, depending on their understandings of others who are present. These findings contribute to the literature on faculty agency by identifying the qualities of

boundary objects that act as cultural tools to facilitate boundary crossing in higher education. As shown in previous studies, working alongside critically conscious team members (Peña, 2012) in a supportive social context (Campbell & O'Meara, 2014) is associated with effective boundary crossing.

Boundary negotiation in this study typically involved a strategic negotiation to attempt change in the system from within the system. The reforms described in this study were incremental. We found only a few instances of change that we viewed as transformative. The Equity Scorecard's perspectives, language, and tools did not offer three of the five racially minoritized professors a more coherent, plausible, and rhetorically compelling view of the steps needed to achieve racial equity. The slow pace of incremental change frustrated these faculty members, who had direct knowledge of the racism racially minoritized students were encountering on their campuses. They did not believe the process would result in new practices and policies that would make a meaningful difference in the lives of Black and Latinx faculty and students. This finding lends support to Gonzales's (2014) proposition that professors' historicized sets of lessons and experiences influence the faculty work they accept as legitimate.

Implications

Professors in this study were provided with professional development to critically interact with their context. The findings indicate that when faculty were provided with resources to identify their roles as change agents, expand their perspectives, and work across differences, some learned about what it takes to coordinate change across organizational boundaries and few were successful in transforming policies and practices to make them more equitable. The findings illustrate the strengths and limitations of using a team- and inquiry-based intervention to support faculty who wish to enact agency for racial equity in contexts such as these. They also show the conditions under which such interventions are most conducive to promoting change toward racial equity.

At the same time, however, they show that racially minoritized faculty who faced a cultural taxation in performing work to promote equity and diversity (Padilla, 1994) experienced an additional burden through this type of design as well. Students who experience racism call predominantly on the time and attention of racially minoritized faculty who they believe have shared life experiences and values. Getting involved in diversity and equity may not be a choice for these faculty members, especially when students who are experiencing racism ask for their help and guidance. White faculty members, on the other hand, often have a more privileged status in regard to equity work and sometimes subscribe to a color-blind, meritocratic ideology devoid of a critical consciousness concerning social issues (Bensimon, 2007). These

faculty members may view social justice work as part of the political domain and as not pertinent to their professional responsibilities.

These findings can be applied to add nuance in developing the recommendations of several previous studies on a variety of strategies involving faculty in racial equity change efforts. For example, Ching (2018) recommended that colleges create a series of workshops devoted to professional development on the topics of equity and equity mindedness and that they adopt a realistic strategy for how best to encourage faculty, staff, and other practitioners to participate in them. Peña (2012) recommended that institutions design sustained inquiry opportunities in which dialogue and activities for reflective practice are structured to create conditions that foster critical consciousness. And Felix et al. (2015) called for the institutionalization of clear and measurable racial equity goals through routine use of disaggregated data.

To add nuance based on what this study showed about the benefits of engaging faculty as boundary crossers and change agents, we highlight the following recommendations for the design of future interventions. We recommend that institutions consider creating working groups within larger taskforces. Anticipating conflicts around means and aims may reduce the frustrations of faculty who encounter what they perceive as the naïveté of their colleagues. Similarly, working groups could enable racially minoritized faculty and White faculty members to caucus within affinity groups from time to time. As the findings of this study showed, it would also be productive to allow faculty members who subscribe to similar epistemological beliefs about organizational and social change time to self-select into groups and work together. The political caucus model may be beneficial to enable bargaining and negotiation to occur around the use of resources and the prioritization of ideas. A corollary to this recommendation is that it is important to design boundary objects to diminish the extent to which the working groups act at cross-purposes.

Note

1. As part of the larger study, 24 administrators were interviewed. To keep the focus on faculty agency, we do not report data from the analyses of interviews with administrators in this article.

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