

Increasing Equity

Challenges and Lessons from a State Systemic Initiative

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As the United States enters the twenty-first century, teachers will be increasingly white, female, and middle class (Darling-Hammond 1990), whereas their student population will be increasingly children of color. The percent of children of color in grades K–12 schools will grow to 38 percent by the year 2010 and to 48 percent by 2020 (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development 1989; Who You Will Teach 1990). A large percent of these children will be from low-income families (College Entrance Examination Board 1985). Teachers will need to be better prepared than they are now to teach such a diverse population (Zeichner 1993). Moreover, U.S. schools are not succeeding in teaching all students. There are wide disparities in school achievement among whites and African Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans (Secada 1992). For example, in 1992, 29 percent fewer African Americans than whites met the National Education Goals Panel’s performance standard for eighth-grade mathematics, and Latinos’ and Native Americans’ rates of success showed gaps similar to those of African Americans (National Education Goals Panel 1994).

Despite the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) call to educate all children in mathematics, there is no guarantee that reforms in mathematics education by themselves will have the desired impact (Apple 1992). Curriculum reforms and even whole-school restructuring may not alleviate the discrepancies facing diverse populations (Lipman 1998). The depth and historic nature of the school crisis facing students of color suggest that solutions will not come easily.

Mathematics educators have been focusing on these urgent issues. Projects and organizations such as the Algebra Project (Moses et al. 1989), Project EQUALS (Kreinberg 1989), and Project Impact (Campbell 1996) have tried to rectify the aforementioned inequities in mathematics education. Some researchers and teachers also have focused attention on cultural diversity and the challenge of reaching all students (Cuevas and Driscoll 1993; Oakes 1990; Secada, Fennema, and Adajian 1995). The National Science Foundation (NSF) has also made equity a priority in its Urban Systemic Initiative (USI), a follow-up to its State Systemic Initiative (SSI). Luther Williams, director of the NSF’s education division, directed cities with USI grants to address equity specifically. According to Williams (1993), the USI was designed specifically to “obliterate the differential” performance between white students and students of color on standardized tests.

In this article, I share the challenges and lessons of one SSI project that tried to take Luther Williams’s perspective to heart. I describe one year (July 1993 to

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July 1994) of the project's attempts to help mathematics and science teachers increase equity for diverse students. I use Williams's view of equity as "obliterating the differential" and apply it beyond standardized tests to other, more authentic assessments as well. I also use Kreinberg's (1989) notion of equity as "socially just outcomes in mathematics education." During that year, I was director of mathematics education for the SSI and was also intimately involved in the development and implementation of the SSI's equity work. As a participant, my reflections and perceptions were influenced by my closeness to the work. Further, my perspective is affected by my identity as a white, male professional. In this paper, I draw lessons from both accomplishments and shortcomings in the hope that others can use them to prepare teachers to teach diverse children and to increase equity in their schools.

My data include notes, observations, journal reflections, open-ended interviews with three leaders of the equity work, minutes of approximately twenty-five meetings, records of six statewide in-service programs (one- and two-day sessions and two two-week summer institutes), anonymous survey feedback on statewide meetings from approximately 120 teachers and ten administrators working with the project, and statewide test-score data. The data also include the record of the self-evaluation conducted by the people centrally involved in the equity work (the "equity team") at the end of the year.

The state has one major urban center where most of the population and industry are located. Agriculture and small, scattered industries are located outside that area. In 1993, the population was about 20 percent people of color, predominantly African American; the public school population was 33.2 percent children of color; and around 90 percent of the teachers were white. African Americans, Latinos, and low-income children of all races had scored well below state means in mathematics achievement on standardized tests for at least the ten years preceding 1993 and did no better on new, performance-based assessments in 1993. Schools were historically segregated, but a desegregation suit and court order in the 1970s slowly achieved racial balance in the state's most densely populated region.

According to several people of color who worked with project schools, racism lurked beneath a relatively harmonious surface. The Ku Klux Klan, although opposed by most, remained active, had marched in the major university town in 1992, and had even picketed an SSI school when an African American student allegedly assaulted a white student. I saw racist, anti-Semitic graffiti near a project school. Thus, racist incidents were not entirely unique events.

What is less typical was the educational establishment. The state superintendent who took over in the early 1990s was a risk taker and strong proponent of educational reform. The reforms were standards-based, and performance assessment was a major evaluation measure used throughout the schools. Constructivism in both teaching and learning was a guiding principle in teachers' professional development. Education had been greatly influenced by innovative programs with which the state had affiliations, such as RE:Learning (Peters 1992), the Coalition of Essential Schools (Sizer 1993), and the New Standards Project (O'Neil 1993).

The superintendent promoted the equity slogan Excellence and Equity for All. He created a statewide position for equity and school improvement, spurred the development of an equity plan, and reorganized his administration to create a

group responsible for implementing and monitoring the state's equity work. There was a multicultural education plan that requested but did not mandate that every school have a multicultural education coordinator. Staff within the state's equity group, however, stated that many schools did not comply. Thus, the banner of equity was fairly visible throughout the education system alongside gross educational inequities in the state that had existed for decades.

The SSI project was closely aligned with the state's reform goals and had three components: mathematics, science, and school change. Technology education was integrated into the mathematics and science education components. The project had a principal investigator and a project director for leadership, nine full-time and several part-time staff members roughly divided among the three areas, and two staff members voluntarily on the equity team with no actual hours allocated. Teachers and administrators from the schools were participants. During the 1993–94 year, project staff worked closely with seventeen schools. Each school applied to work with the SSI, signed a contractual agreement, attended in-service meetings, developed curricula, formed teams with administrators to work with the project, and developed a plan with staff support. Like the superintendent, the principal investigator and the project director were innovators who supported the initiative and autonomy of the staff. This support had major implications for the development of the equity work.

In this section, I describe the guiding framework of the equity work, the formation of the equity team, the challenges the team faced, and how the work developed.

Guiding Framework

As the year began, the staff involved in the equity work developed an initial guiding framework with two principal aspects. The first was the perspective of Bob Moses of the Algebra Project (Moses et al. 1989). According to the Algebra Project, mathematics, algebra in particular, is an essential component of knowledge and power in society. Communities without access to this knowledge cannot achieve full equality. Thus, mathematics courses function as gatekeepers preventing individuals and communities of color from full participation in society. Moses, a central figure in the civil rights movement, sees the struggle for educational equity as a successor to that movement. His central point is that marginalized and disempowered communities need to organize, become proactive, and play full roles in education reform toward their own empowerment. (Moses' position is not only that a successful mathematics program holds high expectations that all children really can learn higher mathematics but also that work needs to be done by these communities on their own behalf to educate themselves about the role mathematics plays with respect to power in society. The Algebra Project involves parents in learning about algebra and other mathematics and also helps organize them toward their own empowerment.) Although the SSI did not have a formal relationship with the Algebra Project, Moses' views influenced the development of its equity work.

The second aspect of the SSI's equity framework was that educators and school staff from mainstream or dominant cultures do not possess all the knowledge necessary to educate children whose cultures are different from their own (Delpit 1988). (Delpit's work includes an analysis of power relationships in schools and society. She advocates that educators with power need to explicitly help poor children and children of color gain entrées into the "rules of

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power” while respecting and building on their home cultures. Many of Delpit’s recommendations go beyond issues of instructional methodology [e.g., constructivism] and hence, the project could not address them all directly.) For example, many educators lack a knowledge of the communicative patterns engaged in by people of different cultures, their personal values, the mediation of social relations, and how children learn in their home cultures (Heath 1983). This essential knowledge resides in the people themselves—their communities, families, and educators who share their cultural background. To move toward educational equity and the school success of diverse students, mainstream educators and schools need to recognize that they do not have all the answers. This precondition provides a basis for more fully involving educators and communities of color as equal partners, with equal power, in the education of their children (Foster 1991; King 1991). As Delpit (1988, p. 297) states,

This can only be done, however, by seeking out those whose perspectives may differ most, by learning to give their words complete attention, by understanding one’s own power, even if that power stems merely from being in the majority, by being unafraid to raise questions about discrimination and voicelessness with people of color, and to listen, no, to *hear* what they say.

These two complementary perspectives—organizing people from diverse communities to play an integral part in educational reforms and acknowledging their wisdom and experience regarding the education of their own children—guided the SSI’s equity work.

Forming the Equity Team

Adopting this framework resulted in a major step: the purposeful formation of a diverse group of people, mainly from the participant schools themselves, to lead the project’s equity work. The project’s equity team included eleven people over the year, of whom six were people of color. It was made up of teachers, current and past administrators, a parent, project staff, and state department of education equity staff. It was a volunteer group that operated by consensus. The equity team was started by SSI staff members and did not emerge from a community context or from a struggle for empowerment (as Moses’ and Delpit’s frameworks might suggest). However, the equity team moved in the direction of having people of color from participant school communities play leading roles in determining their educational fates and in affecting the whole state. Pivotal to the team’s development was that the project leadership accepted the notion that project staff did not have the knowledge that Delpit points out is essential. The leadership thus gave the equity team the power to lead the equity work for the whole SSI. This was significant, since the group was not advisory. Instead, it planned, coordinated, and led the project’s educational sessions on equity for participants at the regular statewide in-service programs and summer institute.

Challenges and Lessons

The equity team faced several recurring challenges over the year with which it consistently grappled. These challenges manifested themselves in different and interrelated ways. Although team members never thought they had resolved the issues entirely, each challenge presented a learning opportunity. The lessons I draw come primarily from the team’s efforts to resolve these challenges.

The first challenge the team dealt with was the relationship of making equity concerns explicit and embedding these issues in the day-to-day work. By “making equity concerns explicit,” I mean ensuring that equity is treated separately as a stand-alone topic. An SSI focused on mathematics and science would give equity a major focus of its own with concrete institutional support. For exam-

ple, there would be a specific equity plan, staff would be allocated to it (with hours assigned), and it would be on the agendas of meetings, in-service programs, and professional development sessions. In contrast, embedding equity issues would mean all the SSI work would have an equity thread woven throughout as a unifying theme. Teaching and learning for both students and teachers—curricula, assessments, pedagogy, activities, situations, contexts, and professional development—all would address equity issues in a seamless, integrated fashion.

The second challenge was the relationship between participants' acknowledging personal beliefs and philosophies about equity and their focusing on instructional means that might create more equitable learning experiences and outcomes. Addressing equity on the personal level means grappling with potentially volatile emotional issues (e.g., racism and sexism) and possibly creating confrontational situations, discomfort, and defensiveness among some participants, usually whites. Going the instructional route toward equity means researching various existing programs, choosing among them, and providing the appropriate education and support for participants to use the programs.

The third challenge was the relationship between equity as the deeply felt concern of a small number of individuals and equity as everyone's concern. Making equity the specific responsibility of a few concerned people ensures that someone is ultimately accountable for it, whereas making it everyone's issue means that no one is exempt from dealing with it.

The Development of the Equity Work

At the beginning of the year, project staff members were primarily white and male, there had been no full-time people of color, no staff were allocated specifically to address equity concerns, and no equity plan existed. Although the NSF did ask the SSIs to address equity, it did not ask for specific plans or staff allocation. Thus, the project had not yet taken any institutional steps to make equity overt. However, this changed when project staff rewrote job descriptions for two open positions to include knowledge of, experience in, and commitment to equity issues. Rather than advertise the positions in the same old ways that often leave institutions lamenting that so few qualified people of color apply, project staff targeted outreach to organizations of people of color and hired two full-time African American staff.

The next step was creating the equity team itself. A staff person contacted educators of color from project schools and the state's education department, and the team grew from there. Through discussions and planning statewide meetings of participants, the equity team articulated three main goals: to create a safe atmosphere where participants could openly raise genuine concerns, feelings, thoughts, and experiences related to equity, racism, gender bias, and other potentially emotional and volatile issues; to provide school staffs with theoretical frameworks, concrete and useable information, and specific methodologies and techniques to teach diverse students; and to ensure that equity was both "up front" *and* embedded in everything that the project did. That is, the team wanted it to be clear to everyone working with the SSI that she or he would have to address equity explicitly in her or his work. For example, teachers could specify how they would try to ensure equity in the curriculum units they were adapting and developing, or schools might develop concrete equity plans. Although the major emphasis of the project would still be mathematics, science, and technology education, the team wanted project participants to be conscious of equity and to integrate it into all their work.

The equity team spent much of its time designing, planning, leading, and eval-

uating sessions of the statewide meetings (a major professional development vehicle of the project), as well as defining its own role. The first of these equity team–led sessions involved sixty-four participants, almost all white teachers. The half-day session made equity explicit (the team’s third goal), but it did not create a safe place for all participants to discuss deeply felt issues openly, nor did it provide frameworks, methodologies, or information to help schools deal with equity (the team’s first and second goals). A fair number of responses to this session were negative, such as one comment heard at the session, “I’ve been multiculturalized to death,” with which others agreed. At the same time, others reacted strongly to their colleagues’ resistance to openly addressing equity issues.

At the end of the two-day in-service session, the participants anonymously filled out evaluation surveys that asked them to complete the following statement: “Something that puzzled or concerned me [about the session] is _____.” Of the forty responses to this question, twenty-four were about equity, by far the greatest number of reactions to any one topic. There were three types of responses. Despite the numerous negative comments at the session itself, only one was obviously negative: “Why do we have equity session [*sic*]. This was a real cutoff/stop to a stimulating day, should have been planning time instead.” The second type of response (eleven in all) could have expressed genuine concern, lack of clarity, or a negative reaction. An example of such an ambiguous response is “Why was so much time spent on equity?” Because the equity team did no in-depth follow-up to the surveys, they did not clarify these responses. The balance (twelve, or 50 percent) remarked on other people’s reactions. One person wrote, “How narrow-minded some of our project fellow teachers are!” Another mentioned, “The very conservative and some negative statements made during the equity session.” Yet another response was “close-minded ideas regarding diverse populations.” Perhaps the broad range of views on the subject was best captured by the participant who completed the statement “Something I learned is” with the comment, “Different individuals have vastly different perceptions of multiculturalism—it is *touchier* than I thought” (the writer’s emphasis).

Thus the project turned the corner and placed equity squarely on the agenda. As one participant wrote, “The project deals with more than simply math and science integration.” Some felt safe enough to express various views, including strong negative ones, and others commented about their colleagues, although anonymously. However, team members were uncertain about what had really been accomplished. They recognized that the session was a beginning and that they had given participants few theories, concrete strategies, or methodologies. In fact, the participants reached the consensus that they needed such information because, they stated, they were genuinely trying to achieve equitable classrooms but they did not know how. Several teachers said that they wanted help in reaching and teaching diverse populations and wanted to know about different methods of doing so. The equity team also acknowledged that the appropriate use of various techniques for teaching for diversity depended strongly on the participant teachers’ understanding of the issues (Bartolome 1994). Simply presenting ideas to teachers ensures neither that teachers learn them nor that teachers use what they learn in their own classrooms (Zeichner 1993).

Because beliefs are slow to change, the team thought that participants needed to confront questions about their own perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs toward diverse children in their classrooms. But because many people became defensive and stated that they needed more technical information, the team researched several existing instructional projects that addressed teaching for diversity and educational equity. Elizabeth Cohen’s (1994) Complex Instruction

project provided a possible solution to this dilemma.

Complex Instruction is based on a mathematics and science curriculum (De Avila, Duncan, and Navarrete 1987). Complex Instruction also helps teachers design and use curriculum for heterogeneous groups. The equity team did not support tracking (Oakes 1990), and thus exposing teachers to programs that gave them real alternatives to tracking was congruent with the team's goals.

At the next two-day, statewide in-service session, the equity team set up four half-day, concurrent equity sessions. One session focused on Complex Instruction and was attended by about fifty of the eighty participants. The other three—facilitated discussions of case studies on gender dynamics, race, and the inclusion of children with disabilities—were poorly attended. Participant feedback on the anonymous forms was much different from that of the previous session. Of the twenty-four responses about equity, four were negative, twelve mentioned Complex Instruction positively or wanted more information about it, and eight were neutral questions or comments. This time, no one commented about their colleagues' negative reactions to equity. The equity team inferred from these data and from the earlier feedback that it was probably the nonconfrontational nature of the sessions that had caused the change in the responses, because attitudinal change is quite slow (Ahlquist 1991). Some participants who attended the case studies discussions on gender and race reported believing that the very nonconfrontational nature of the instruction session on Complex Instruction was what caused poor attendance at the more controversial sessions, specifically on race and gender. However, although some equity team members shared this assessment, they were unable to evaluate the validity of this speculation.

During the project's two-week summer institute at the end of the school year, the equity team continued the general thrust of avoiding explicit discussions of race, class, and gender and set up multiple, optional, half-day sessions that exposed teachers to a wide range of projects and ideas. These included sessions on untracking, helping teachers focus on the cognitive strengths of their students from diverse cultures; multicultural education; the Gender/Ethnic Expectations and Student Achievement (GESA) program (Graysol and Martin 1990), which is designed to help teachers examine the relationship of classroom interactions to achievement; and Complex Instruction.

Aside from the professional development sessions, the equity team worked in two other areas. The project's school-change staff were leading the project in using action research (Kemmis and McTaggart 1982) to examine the project's own growth and development and helping teachers to use action research as a way to reflect on and change problematic aspects of school practice. Building on this, the equity team worked with the school-change staff to encourage teachers to use action research to study and rectify classroom inequities. For example, one school had a drastic overrepresentation of children of color in special education classes; some of its teachers used action research to examine and to begin to correct its tracking and special education practices.

Finally, the equity team organized professional development and education for the project staff itself. The state's lead equity staff person (an equity team member) held two sessions for all project staff members to prepare them to work with schools on equity. At the team's suggestion, project staff and leadership collectively studied some articles on equity relevant to their work.

The story is not complete without a description of the context in which this work is situated. There were several enabling conditions that facilitated and amplified the equity team's leadership and work; these may have implications for others doing similar work. One, the project leadership granted the power.

They did so because they accepted the thesis that the voices of people of color are central in the struggle for equity. They recognized limitations of their own and the staff's knowledge in this area, believed in the issues, and realized that systemic reform meant that grassroots leadership had to emerge. Two, project leadership had support from the state education superintendent, who promoted equity and created organizational structures and positions to lead the state's educational equity work. Three, education in the state was undergoing rapid change. On the agenda were performance-based assessments instead of standardized tests, collaborative and collegial relationships in and among schools instead of top-down management, uniform content and performance standards with locally determined curricula and pedagogy, and innovative school restructuring and professional development attempts. The climate was conducive for school personnel to examine their basic beliefs, and the equity team took the opportunity to broaden the assumptions being examined. Four, the equity team members had a strong, shared sense of purpose, firm commitment, and belief in the value of the work. They worked extremely well as a team, and they quickly seized the opportunity to contribute to a change process. And five, although people of color took the lead on the team, the team's self-evaluation at the end of the year indicated that the team felt a strong mutual respect and an awareness of each member's knowledge and contribution to the team effort. Thus, certainly within the team, the silenced dialogue, was broken and genuine partnerships emerged.

LESSONS LEARNED

During the year, the equity team focused on defining its role and beginning to lead the project and its schools to deal explicitly with equity. Despite the short length of time, the team had an impact—some of it lasting.

From the team's efforts, clear lessons can be drawn. These have definite policy implications. Six significant lessons emerged from the team's attempts to resolve the challenges they faced.

The first lesson is that *equity concerns have to be embedded and explicit at the same time*. The team's ultimate aim was for equity to be integrated with all the work all the time—that is, embedded—and not an add-on. Both project and state leadership shared this view. However, the team found that equity could not just be embedded for several reasons. This was largely due to the situation prior to July 1993. There had been no equity plan. There were no full-time people of color on the project. There was no professional development for teachers, administrators, or project staff in helping diverse students learn. There was no systematic study of the issues. At the two-week summer institute prior to this year, there had been only one full-group lecture on culture. At that institute, each school team had to create an exemplary mathematics and science unit; project staff did not ask schools to address equity in that work, and none did. Lastly, and most important, there was no leadership by people of color to the project on equity issues. Although the project stated firmly the importance of equity, little had been done concretely.

On the basis of this history, the team believed that equity had to be explicitly addressed in order for it to become second nature for all parties. Team members believed strongly that equity concerns needed to be thoroughly integrated with instruction, assessment, beliefs and expectations toward students and families, and students' activities. This was not controversial. What was controversial was asking people to deal with equity explicitly. That was

where the resistance emerged as evidenced by the reactions to the different equity sessions.

Understanding the relationship of embedding equity in all phases of the learning experience to explicitly placing it on the table without either sacrificing the integrity of the issues or provoking overreaction was a major—and unresolved—challenge. This relationship was complicated and surfaced in different ways. For example, during a meeting after an in-service session, a principal in the project said, “It’s [equity is] too much for teachers to think about right now ... we are asking them to think about so many things, it’s an additional burden to ask them to spend time focusing on and going to sessions about equity ... that needs to be embedded.” This reaction to the SSI’s extensive professional development, from the equity team’s viewpoint, relieved participants of their responsibility to confront certain uncomfortable issues. The question of how to ensure that equity was truly integrated remained unanswered, but the team learned that equity must be explicitly raised and embedded until it is genuinely integrated into people’s everyday work.

The second lesson is that *equity (or any deeply felt issue) must have its dedicated advocates, and it must be the concern of everyone in the organization as well*. After the year ended, the two project staff members active on the equity team left the project. In general, when a group of individuals honestly acknowledges that they are not experts on a particular topic, it is positive. However, that recognition may have the effect of relegating the responsibility for the work to a small number of people who are actively involved. Unfortunately, after the two staff members left, no one was assigned to work on equity, and the equity team dissolved. A relationship that began between the project’s equity team and the state educational equity group failed to materialize. The state’s lead equity person reported that he had not been contacted by anyone from the project for at least a year and a half after the staff people left. The internal education on, and study of, equity for project staff was discontinued. It is true that the project embraced Complex Instruction wholeheartedly, sent staff members to be trained in it, began implementing it in the schools, and institutionalized it in the state. In that sense, equity became a part of the organization. But the other work, specifically the promoting of the leadership of people of color from the project schools, stopped with the parting of the project staff on the equity team. The lack of people of color in the project’s leadership was not addressed or resolved, either. This mixed record suggests that although equity must be everyone’s concern, there must also be specific individuals to push it.

The third lesson, directly related to the first two, is that *equity must be dealt with through both personal belief systems and through instructional means*. Clearly with Complex Instruction, the project worked on instruction; however, there has been no other professional development for either staff or project participants on teaching diverse children. It is as if the concern for instructional solutions not only took primacy to dealing with more personal beliefs but also caused the latter to disappear. Instead of considering instructional solutions and the reassessment of personal beliefs as mutually exclusive and instead of embracing one pathway without the other, projects need both, like the relationship of explicitness to embeddedness. Furthermore, work in both areas needs to be coordinated and mutually supportive.

The fourth lesson may be obvious, but it is nonetheless significant: *Institutional support is necessary but not sufficient to make egalitarian beliefs into reality*. The project never allocated staff to work explicitly on equity—that is, no one had any assigned hours for equity. The staff members on the equity team took their own time to do that work. Perhaps this was because the NSF did not direct the SSIs to spend funds in this way. The NSF may have

believed that its original SSI conceptualization paid sufficient attention to equity, but the experience of this project suggests otherwise. Naturally, project staff had a tremendous amount of work to do. Because equity was not truly integrated, time and energy specifically for equity usually detracted from other work (such as developing math units). The equity work suffered, even with all the voluntary commitment of the equity team members. Without institutionalization, good ideas remain as intentions and desires and important initiatives remain as individual endeavors.

The fifth lesson was that *a statewide education reform project could begin to implement Delpit's framework of "breaking the silenced dialogue."* The gains that were made during the year—putting equity explicitly on the table, broadening the dialogue, adopting instructional means to help teachers (e.g., Complex Instruction), developing relationships with the state's equity staff and with experts outside the state, ensuring professional development for the project staff, integrating equity issues into action research studies, and raising the consciousness of all—were largely due to the leadership and initiative of the equity team, made up primarily of people of color directly involved in schools. The team had its weaknesses, including that it did not recruit community people or students into its membership and that it stopped meeting after the project staff left. Genuine initial steps were taken, however, toward real collaboration between mainstream white educators and people of color.

These first five lessons were the principal ones with clear policy implications. The final, sixth lesson is not new. I present three points that, taken together, can be generalized and interpreted as additional evidence for the well-known idea that genuine change is hard and slow. First, equity work needed to be continual and systematic. The model of "three workshops and a cloud of dust" would not work. Second, just because a state embraces the NCTM *Standards*, constructivism in teaching and learning, alternative assessment, and school restructuring does not mean that expectations for children or perceptions of ability change quickly. Every project staff person reported instances of teachers referring to children as "low," "middle," and "high." They also saw and reported differential treatment of students based on race, gender, and placement (e.g., special education). Finally, changing the conversation at the building level from mathematics and science teaching and learning to talking about math teaching and learning *and* equity is difficult, and it requires a major reorientation in the thinking of all parties in the process. How to change that conversation is a question that mathematics educators concerned with educating all children need to address.

The challenges for the team—the relationships between explicitness and embeddedness, beliefs and instructional methodologies, having a few advocates and getting everyone involved—were not definitively resolved. The team members saw the aspects of the challenges in dialectical relationship to one another. This was different from the dominant view among the project and participants, which was that equity should primarily be embedded, addressed through instructional means, and be everyone's concern. The second view may have the effect of keeping the struggle for equity harmonious and safe, but it may not get at the heart of the issue. Figure 2.1 captures the distinction, with the arrows representing the view of the equity team and the circle representing the dominant view. I suggest that important philosophical differences in approaching educational equity underlie the two perspectives.

Even though I draw lessons from our collective experiences that suggest certain answers to these challenges, definitive conclusions cannot be drawn because of the limited amount of time the equity team functioned. Therefore I leave, as open questions: What is the appropriate resolution to the challenges that the equity team faced for a systemic reform effort dealing seriously with equity concerns? How, concretely, can both aspects of each of these challenges

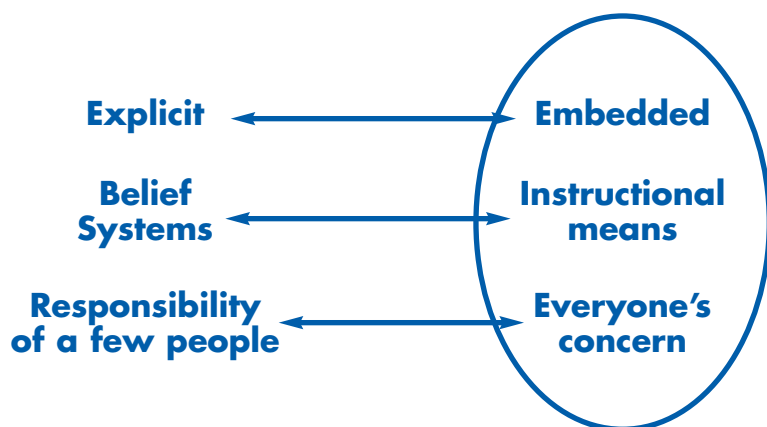


Fig. 2.1. Distinction between how the equity team and the project as a whole viewed the struggle for equity

be addressed in various contexts? These two are significant questions for mathematics educators, policymakers, and educational leaders seriously concerned about creating socially just outcomes in mathematics education for all students.

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