

## New Science Teachers Making Sense of Equity and Excellence in their Teaching

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**Overview:** The teacher identity construction (TIC) framework (multiple identities, legitimate knowledge production, and dialectical relationships) provided a lens to explore new Teachers of Color negotiations of equity and excellence in their practice.

**Audience:** Administrators in schools and school districts; Providers of teacher professional development.

### Key Points

- Attention to equity and excellence involves complex negotiations for new teachers.
- These negotiations are shaped by teachers' own histories and the histories of schooling institutions.
- Teachers' different multiple identities shaped the differing ways in which they perceived and attended to equity and excellence.
- What legitimate science knowledge production should/could look like in classrooms was inextricably intertwined with teachers' conceptions of equity and excellence, and degree of entanglement.
- The dialectical relationships the teachers considered functioned as scales of the intertwined salience of equity and excellence in their conceptions of science teaching.

**INTRODUCTION** Understanding construction of science teacher identities is important in an era with divergent emphases: one pushing for excellence conceptualized as students mastering science ideas, concepts, and practices and teachers focusing on core practices aligning with market-based approaches to teacher education, and another for more persistent discourses of equity and social justice addressing inequitable resources and opportunities due to oppressive systems. Teachers of Color often feel the weight to address issues of equity and justice for all students and especially Students of Color and act as advocates for racial justice. In this phenomenological study, we explored how embracing and negotiating conceptions of equity and excellence are intertwined with the construction of science teacher identities of three Teachers of Color.

**FINDINGS** The histories of the three teachers were meshed with histories of larger institutions—science, schooling, and society—and together these were shaping their conceptions of equity and excellence. In making curricular and instructional decisions in their classrooms, they were moving closer to considering excellence and equity as integral elements of each other. Yet, this occurred in different ways based on their available identities and the ways in which the teachers saw these identities as useful in their teaching practices. This intermingling of equity and excellence also took place as the teachers considered differently what counted as knowledge that their students needed to know at different times. They also grappled with

several dilemmas defined by opposing poles that functioned as scales on which their attention to equity and excellence was forming. The three dimensions of the framework of teacher identity construction (TIC) in contentious local practice—multiple identities, legitimate knowledge production, and dialectical relationships—provided ways in which conceptions of equity and excellence manifested similarly and differently.

**TAKEAWAYS** The teachers grappled with the development of what can be called an equity-excellence unit of meaning, where they were coordinating meanings of equity and excellence, and the salience of each constitutive part of this unit of meaning was played out differently for each teacher when considering different parts of the TIC framework. Given these variations, focusing on each part of the TIC framework in teacher education (pre-service and in-service) could be beneficial. We also need to legitimize communities where the teachers teach and their students live as sites (spaces and places) of knowledge production on teaching in addition to the knowledge production within traditional science communities to support attention to equity and excellence. Moreover, dialectical relationships are notoriously complex to negotiate, involving a delicate balance between polarities deeply intertwined with equity, justice, and excellence. Explicitly addressing such relationships would support teachers to develop deeper understandings and become more conscious of the ways they negotiate contradictions leading to the creation of their equity-excellence unit of meaning.

**Embracing Equity and Excellence While Constructing Science Teacher Identities in Urban Schools: Voices of New Teachers of Color**