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**What Are We Inducting Teachers of Color Into?
Disrupting Race-Evasiveness to Create
Responsive Professional Development and
Mentoring Policies and Practices**

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Abstract: Professional development and mentorship are key supports designed to facilitate growth and acclimation to the teaching profession as well as foster the stability and success of new educators. However, both fields of study have been occupied by a normalization of whiteness and white teachers, which often neglects the experiences, perspectives, and needs of teachers of Color. As we attempt to diversify the teaching force, it is important to understand how teacher professional development and mentorship can be responsive to teachers of Color. In this article, we review literature on teacher professional development and teacher mentorship for and by teachers of Color. Through the lens of our analysis, we explore limitations in current policy, and provide case study examples of how to serve teachers of Color. We also offer policy recommendations that can better guide racially literate and culturally sustaining professional development and mentoring practices, so teachers of Color can grow, thrive, and positively impact schools towards the goals for which they are being recruited.

Keywords: teachers of Color; professional development; mentorship; race; educational policy

¿En qué estamos induciendo a los maestros de Color? Cómo acabar con la evasión racial para crear políticas y prácticas de desarrollo profesional y tutoría que respondan a las necesidades

Resumen: O desenvolvimento profissional e a mentoria são suportes essenciais projetados para facilitar o crescimento e a aclimação à profissão de ensino, bem como promover a estabilidade e o sucesso de novos educadores. No entanto, ambos os campos de estudo foram ocupados por uma normalização da branquitude e dos maestros brancos, o que muitas vezes negligencia as experiências, perspectivas e necessidades dos maestros de Color. À medida que tentamos diversificar a força de ensino, é importante entender como o desenvolvimento profissional e a mentoria de maestros podem ser responsivos aos maestros de Color. Neste artigo, revisamos a literatura sobre desenvolvimento profissional de maestros e mentoria de maestros para e por maestros de Color. Através das lentes de nossa análise, exploramos as limitações na política atual e fornecemos exemplos de estudos de caso de como atender maestros de Color. Também oferecemos recomendações de políticas que podem orientar melhor o desenvolvimento profissional e as práticas de mentoria racialmente alfabetizadas e culturalmente sustentáveis, para que os maestros de Color possam crescer, prosperar e impactar positivamente as escolas em direção às metas para as quais estão sendo recrutados.

Palabras-clave: maestros de Color; desarrollo profesional; tutoría; raza; política educativa

No que estamos induzindo professores de Cor? Interromper a evasão racial para criar políticas e práticas de desenvolvimento profissional e mentoria responsivas

Resumo: O desenvolvimento profissional e a mentoria são suportes essenciais projetados para facilitar o crescimento e a aclimação à profissão docente, bem como promover a estabilidade e o sucesso de novos educadores. No entanto, ambos os campos de estudo foram ocupados por uma normalização da branquitude e dos professores brancos, o que muitas vezes negligencia as experiências, perspectivas e necessidades dos professores de cor. À medida que tentamos diversificar a força de ensino, é importante entender como o desenvolvimento profissional e a mentoria dos professores podem ser responsivos aos professores de cor. Neste artigo, revisamos a literatura sobre o desenvolvimento profissional de professores e a mentoria de professores para e por professores de cor. Através das lentes de nossa análise, exploramos as limitações na política atual e fornecemos exemplos de estudos de caso de como atender professores de cor. Também oferecemos recomendações de políticas que podem orientar melhor o desenvolvimento profissional e as práticas de mentoria racialmente alfabetizadas e

culturalmente sustentáveis, para que os professores de cor possam crescer, prosperar e impactar positivamente as escolas em direção às metas para as quais estão sendo recrutados.

Palavras-chave: professores de Cor; desenvolvimento profissional; mentoria; raça; política educacional

What Are We Inducting Teachers of Color Into? Disrupting Race-Evasiveness to Create Responsive Professional Development and Mentoring Policies and Practices

If we are committed to the recruitment and retention of teachers who come from underrepresented communities, it is not enough to hire teachers of color to merely occupy classrooms and translate documents—we must be more adept in identifying and valuing the community cultural wealth of knowledges and insights they bring with them to the classrooms and school communities that they work in. (Burciaga & Kohli, 2018, p. 7)

Although students of Color¹ make up over 50% of those enrolled in U.S. public schools, and the diversity continues to grow, the teaching force remains almost 80% white (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023; Schaeffer, 2021). Research, however, has shown that diversity among teachers is essential to the success and well-being of students of Color (Carver-Thomas, 2018; Flores et al., 2007; Flores et al., 2011; Gershenson et al., 2017; Gilliam et al., 2016; Papageorge et al., 2020; Sleeter et al., 2014; Sleeter & Thao, 2007; Tandon et al., 2015; Villegas & Irvine, 2010; Villegas et al., 2012). It has been demonstrated that teachers of Color more frequently engage in culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogy (Gershenson et al., 2017), are less likely to refer students of Color out of the classroom (Lindsay & Hart, 2017), and have higher expectations for their academic success (Papageorge et al., 2020). Teachers of Color have also been noted to democratize expectations for student success that prompt increased self-efficacy, more engagement with homework, higher grade point averages, and increased rates of high school graduation and college enrollment (Papageorge et al., 2020). A growing body of research argues that when students of Color have teachers who reflect them racially, it positively impacts their literacy development and facilitates success that often persists even into adulthood (Gershenson et al., 2017; Gilliam et al., 2016; Papageorge et al., 2020). Additionally, Cherg and Halpin (2016) found that teachers of Color offer academic and personal benefits, not just for students of Color but for white students too. For all of these reasons, many districts are focusing resources to diversify their teacher force.

Unfortunately, while teachers of Color bring a plethora of gifts to the profession, they often are faced with challenging conditions that work against their sustainability and success (Partee, 2014). First, schools and districts often overlook the racially inequitable organizational conditions

¹ Throughout the article, when we refer to an individual racial group, we use the specific term (i.e., Black, Asian American, Indigenous). When we reference multiracial groups of racially minoritized people in the aggregate, we use the term “of Color,” and understand its history, current-day utility, as well as its flaws and limitations. We capitalize “Color” and the terms Black and Indigenous, just as terms like Asian American, African American, and Latinx are capitalized, to honor the dignity and identities of racialized people in formal ways. However, “white” appears lowercased. It is only capitalized if it appears at the beginning of a sentence or if we are citing a direct quote. We do this to acknowledge the historical roots of white as a racial category designed to assert power, engage in racial violence, and exclude.

into which teachers of Color are being recruited and inducted (Carr, 2023). They are frequently the least likely to receive targeted professional learning opportunities or be selected for formal and compensated leadership (Burciaga & Kohli, 2018). Teachers of Color have reported being othered, ostracized, belittled, insulted, and chastised by colleagues and administrators (Frank et al., 2021; Herrera et al., 2022; Kohli, 2021). Although the media often report that low salary and under-resourced conditions account for teachers leaving the profession (Terada, 2021), research indicates that many teachers of Color also leave due to a hostile racial climate, which takes a toll on their well-being (Kohli, 2021; Pizarro & Kohli, 2020). For the last few decades, the need for teachers of Color has centered on the impact they have on educational systems. However, what researchers, policymakers, and school leaders in a racially stratified school system have often failed to consider is: ***What growth opportunities and support systems do teachers of Color need to thrive and realize their transformative potential?***

Professional development and mentorship are key supports designed to facilitate growth and acclimation to the teaching profession as well as foster the stability and success of new educators. However, both fields of study have been occupied by a normalization of whiteness and white teachers, which often neglects the experiences, perspectives, and needs of teachers of Color (Flores et al., 2022; Kohli, 2021). Current structures of professional development and mentorship often center technocratic, positivist, hierarchical, and skills-oriented approaches. These structures do not always capture the broader sociopolitical and racialized demands put on teachers of Color nor the relationality that teachers of Color often value in the profession (Kohli & Pizarro, 2016). As we attempt to diversify the teaching force, it is important to understand how teacher professional development and mentorship can be responsive to teachers of Color. In this article, we begin with Part I, which builds on two sections of the *Handbook for Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers*—one focused on teacher professional development and the other on teacher mentorship for and by teachers of Color. In this section, we offer a brief literature review, explore limitations in current policy, and provide case study examples of how to serve teachers of Color. In Part II, we offer policy recommendations that can better guide racially literate and culturally sustaining professional development and mentoring practices, so teachers of Color can grow, thrive, and positively impact schools towards the goals for which they are being recruited.

Part I: Research and Policy Analysis of Professional Development and Mentoring for Teachers of Color

Handbook Overview

The *Handbook of Research on Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers* is a comprehensive edited volume that brings together research across subfields to illuminate the experiences, needs, and contributions of teachers of Color. It offers an important road map of how policies and practices can be scaled to better serve a diverse teaching force. In this article, we build from and expand on the two sections that explore professional development (Kohli, 2022) and mentorship (Flores et al., 2022) for and by teachers of Color to guide our policy recommendations.

Professional Development for and by Teachers of Color

Whether mandated or self-selected, K-12 educators participate in professional development throughout their careers. Unfortunately, many models of professional development privilege skill development at the expense of social analyses or justice-oriented practices; they often take a race-

evasive² approach (Cochran-Smith & Villegas, 2015), which underserves the needs of teachers of Color who tend to experience the profession in racialized ways (Kohli, 2019). The section of the *Handbook of Research on Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers* titled “Professional Development” analyzes the current literature and brings together four research chapters that explore professional development for and by educators of Color that attend to broader sociopolitical and racial forces that shape K–12 education. Here, we offer an overview of three key practices outlined in this section of the *Handbook* that have proven supportive of the growth and well-being of teachers of Color (Kohli, 2022).

The first is that ***teachers of Color benefit from professional development structured as racial affinity spaces***. Teachers of Color are often navigating racialized dynamics with students, parents, and peers that differ from the experiences of white teachers, and it is important that they have independent spaces to process this (Bristol, 2015; Kohli, 2016, 2019; Mosely, 2018). Bellinger and Mosely (2022), for example, described an affinity-based professional development organization dedicated to building and supporting Black teachers. This space held inquiry groups, book studies, and what they called “rejuvenation spaces,” which proved critical to participants’ professional and personal well-being in the face of antiblackness and racial hostility. Watson and Kehulauni Bauer (2022) demonstrated similar impacts on professional development for elementary teachers of Color committed to Ethnic Studies, who were not finding their home in broader elementary teacher training. The authors created and studied a space with teachers of Color that fostered community, cultivated reflective dialogue, and supported teachers’ capacity to disrupt racism. Part of the success of many of these affinity spaces is that they also allowed teachers of Color to dive into intersectional aspects of their identities and the work they may not have felt as comfortable exploring in a predominantly white context (Bristol, 2015; Wozolek et al., 2023; Kohli, 2021).

The second key aspect of teacher of Color professional development that emerged in this literature is ***the need for self-guided or teacher of Color-led professional development*** (Kohli, 2019; Martinez et al., 2016; Strong et al., 2017). Because school is often normed towards Eurocentric curriculum and individualistic, competitive learning models, dominant professional development is often aligned with these norms. As teachers of Color often have goals to shift education to be more responsive to communities of Color and structured in more relational, collectivist ways (Kohli & Pizarro, 2016), traditional models of professional development often fall short in training teachers to disrupt technocratic norms to education. Self-led professional development, however, allows teachers of Color to self-determine teacher learning that aligns with their values and purpose in the profession. Much of the literature on this topic is focused on teachers of Color facilitating this learning for themselves or other teachers of Color, but professional development led by teachers of Color has also been used for the growth of white teachers to be more responsive to students of Color. Lees et al. (2023) described a collaboration between Indigenous university faculty and community educators from the Lummi Nation who developed a training to expose teachers to Indigenous epistemological and ontological approaches to considerations of water and land. In this professional development, they showed teachers that within an Indigenous paradigm, the land and water are not just for the use of humans, but rather that humans should live in respectful harmony

² We employed the term *race-evasive* to describe an avoidance or neglect to the presence of race or racism. We use this term building on Bonilla-Silva’s (2006) conceptualization of colorblindness, but avoid this framing to challenge ableist renders of racism and racialization. As Annamma et al. (2017) noted, “Color-blindness, as a racial ideology, conflates lack of eyesight with lack of knowing.... However, inability to see is not ignorance; in fact, blindness provides unique ways of understanding the world to which sighted people have no access” (p. 154). Instead, race-evasive specifies “the power of white supremacy and whiteness...to actively evade discussions on race” (p. 154).

and collectivity with the elements of the earth. The teachers exposed to this learning had shifts not just in their curricular goals regarding Indigenous communities, but also in considering Indigenous ways of life. Professional development led by Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers can help to create shifts in the understandings and practices of all teachers.

Relatedly, a third key finding was that ***teachers of Color benefit from professional development focused on strengthening their critical and racial literacies***—the capacity to identify and disrupt policies and practice that reflect and exacerbate systemic racism (Guinier, 2004; Ruiz & Sealey-Ruiz, 2022; Sealey-Ruiz, 2013). Teachers of Color are susceptible to a diminishment of their professional self-efficacy in the face of dominant white institutional norms. Having language and tools to make sense of and challenge the racism they see and experience in the education system has been shown to mitigate that experience (Kohli, 2018, 2021). One model that has been particularly assistive in this growth is critical professional development (CPD)—professional development that engages teachers in political discourse and reflection around their role in reproducing or resisting inequity (Kohli et al., 2015). Kohli et al. (2022), who studied a racial affinity CPD for teachers of Color, demonstrated that teachers who participated in the space experienced a decrease in their racial and ideological isolation, an increase in their self-efficacy to challenge racial inequity, and a renewed interest in remaining in the profession. CPD has been shown to support the development of individual teachers of Color (Nyache, 2016; Philip et al., 2017), curricular shifts (Sianturi et al., 2018), and collective justice-oriented visioning (Kohli, 2019; Martinez et al., 2016; Pizarro, 2017).

Mentoring for and by Teachers of Color

To support the retention of teachers of Color, mentoring is also a key tool in growth and professionalization. Traditionally, mentoring has been conceptualized in Eurocentric and hierarchical ways, in which the mentor (the knowledge-holder) guides the mentee (the knowledge-seeker). In the section of the *Handbook of Research on Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers*, the contributors suggested that ***mentoring for teachers of Color should engage critical approaches that center their experiences and are structured dialogically***, thereby deconstructing power relationships.

Using a socioconstructivist lens, Flores et al. (2022) argued that knowledge is shared, socially constructed, and mediated within a context. Teachers of Color bring cultural wealth and community knowledge into schools. Thus, if our goal is to transform schools, effective induction and mentoring to the teaching profession cannot be unidirectional and hierarchical in a field that is predominantly white with growing recruits of teachers of Color. Instead, the authors reminded us that learning is on a continuum and can occur in group contexts and among peers, and mentoring should be framed by this understanding. Rather than viewing mentoring from a traditional vertical lens, where the mentor identifies the topics to be addressed—an approach that is often devoid of any analyses of power—, critical conversations between the mentor and the mentee allow for naming and addressing concerns, particularly sociopolitically charged interpersonal and institutional challenges. For example, Dunn et al. (2022) pointed to peer-to-peer mentoring as a complement to formal mentorship that has been shown to provide social support to teachers of Color who are often racially isolated during their first year in the profession. Likewise, Allen-Handy et al. (2021) demonstrated that reciprocity of mentorship helped educators develop critical pedagogies. In addition to peer-to-peer models of support, researchers have argued that comprehensive induction programs must also acknowledge the racial inequities teachers of Color are facing as well as any commitments to justice and community.

The research, thus, demonstrates that ***mentorship should provide instructional support towards culturally sustaining and transformative models of schooling, and should also***

support teachers of Color to navigate the racialized structures of school. Framed as critical mentorship, Morales et al. (2022) and Walls (2022), for example, found that teachers of Color benefit from spaces that recognize the micro- and macro-aggressions they frequently encounter, that their needs and experiences are considered, and that their assets are leveraged. The authors of the section called for transformative, culturally efficacious mentors who (a) self-reflect on culture and power; (b) model critical thinking; (c) advocate for the cultural and linguistic wealth of communities of Color; (d) recognize the sociocultural learning context; (e) mentor and coach towards transformative pedagogy; and (f) support a culturally sustaining learning process for teachers of Color (Flores et al., 2022). Flores and Claeys (2022) described that this type of mentorship supports the retention of teachers of Color and fosters their growth and leadership potential.

Policy Research on Professional Development and Mentoring

The literature on teacher professional development largely calls for discipline-specific, collaborative, reflective, and sustained professional development over time (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Sims & Fletcher-Wood, 2021). Sims and Fletcher-Wood (2021) argued that this “consensus” view of professional development tends to center external experts, be application- or practice-based, and elicits teacher buy-in. In addition, similarly-situated literature has argued that effective professional development must be embedded in context, involve active learning, model effective strategies, and provide coaching (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). One recent systematic review of 78 American and international professional development studies noted trends focused on governance theory, accountability/professionalism, or organizational structures and leadership, thus highlighting the need for administrator learning along with teacher learning (Kirsten, 2020). The current dominant literature for effective professional development is thoughtful and centers teachers’ input and learning; however, it is generally race-evasive and tends to describe teachers as a monolith, ignoring racial dynamics of positionality and power. Thus, as we consider the unique needs of teachers of Color, there is limited guidance on how state and district policy should be designed to be responsive to teachers of Color.

Extant policy research on teacher professional development illustrates a spectrum of state-level attention to and emphasis on teachers of Color. State professional development policies can range from highly prescriptive (common) to grounded in local control (less common) (Loeb et al., 2009). States with above-average student performance on national assessments and high levels of teacher satisfaction with their professional development opportunities share several key characteristics (Jaquith et al., 2010). For instance, policy frameworks tend to include multiple accountability systems to monitor the quality of professional development, require induction and mentoring programs for novice teachers, promote a professional learning community model, and ask for a network of independent providers or state service centers to provide teacher training (Jaquith et al., 2010). These accountability systems have multiple monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, including teacher satisfaction surveys, audits, tracking of participation rates, and district and school professional development oversight committees (Jaquith et al., 2010). However, similar to trends in professional development and mentoring research, this policy research tends to be race-evasive, missing opportunities to disaggregate by race and understand the participation and satisfaction of teachers of Color with what is provided.

Similarly, policy research on teacher mentoring also illustrates a spectrum of specificity, yet exhibits a comparatively limited focus on teachers of Color. Jaquith et al. (2010) noted that all four states in their study required induction and mentoring programs for beginning teachers. Specifically, these states have mentoring and induction program standards and require participation in said efforts to move from a temporary to a full professional certificate (Jaquith et al., 2010). Not all states, however, have clearly defined policies regarding mentorship that are responsive to the needs

of teachers of Color. Policy guidelines were more focused on providing support for subject content knowledge, school routines and structures, and classroom management (Auletto, 2021). There were also concerns over grade-level mismatch and meetings on assigned topics that limited open dialogue (Auletto, 2021). However, out of 354 teachers surveyed about their experiences and satisfaction with mentoring supports, only 4% of the study participants were teachers of Color (Auletto, 2021).

In another study, Polikoff et al. (2015) explored how several policy features in multiple states impacted the quality of mentoring interactions. For example, one state required each novice teacher to have a three-person committee to support and evaluate them, whereas another state used district criteria to select mentors, and a third state did not even have mentor training requirements (Polikoff et al., 2015). While there was significant variation in districts' mentor selection and training, none of this research was attentive to racial dynamics or the unique strengths and needs of teachers of Color (Polikoff et al., 2015).

Historically, the research on teacher mentorship and induction tends to fall into three categories of focus: (a) the induction period with an emphasis on working with current structures to be considered effective; (b) teachers who need to be placed on growth plans or whose students have not demonstrated growth; and (c) professional development for new initiatives. When considering the experiences of teachers of Color—who are navigating layers of racism, are often overlooked for formal and compensated leadership opportunities, and are serving as liaisons between the school and students, families, and communities of Color—their specific professional needs are not considered or addressed within mentorship programs and processes.

Tri-state Policy Comparison: Professional Development and Mentoring

Texas, Kansas, and California each have different structures regarding the professional development of novice and experienced teachers. These state-level policy structures impact the degree to which individual teachers can utilize the key professional development practices suggested earlier. Moreover, while Texas's professional development policy requires the least oversight and Kansas's professional development policy the most, because their policies do not explicitly include language about encouraging teachers to challenge inequitable structures, teachers of Color must be creative in order to circumvent policy limitations to engage in transformative professional development and mentoring opportunities. California's policy, however, is the most explicit and supportive as it relates to the needs of teachers of Color.

Teachers of Color in Texas, for example, could capitalize on the minimal oversight and independent study flexibility that exist within policy to meet their individual needs. The state requires 150 continuing professional development hours to renew standard teaching certificates every 5 years (Texas Education Agency, n.d.). Teachers have the autonomy to select their professional development activities within certain guidelines as they relate to their certification subject and are responsible for tracking their own participation (Texas Education Agency, n.d.). Up to 20% or 30 hours of the required 150 professional development hours can be an independent study of content knowledge or skills related to the certificates required (Texas Education Agency, n.d.). In addition, teachers must also complete hours with any one or more of the over 1,200 authorized professional education providers or their home districts (Texas Education Agency, n.d.). While the vast number of authorized providers allows some flexibility, the individual teacher would need to research the available options to identify the professional development that aligns with their values and needs. Considering current policies that ban particular racial discourse, very few will likely be structured around racial affinity spaces or work to strengthen racial literacies. Thus, while, in theory, teachers of Color could utilize an independent study flexibility to create community with others and develop their own critical and racial literacies, it is likely uncommon because Texas

teachers have to maneuver through bureaucratic systems to take advantage of existing policy towards their own transformative professional development and mentoring.

In contrast to Texas, teachers in Kansas must have their professional development plans for license renewal pre-approved to earn licensure renewal (Kansas Department of Education, 2023). In fact, Kansas policy stipulates a thorough documentation and approval process for professional development, and the ability of teachers of Color to create racial affinity spaces, engage in self-study, and strengthen their critical and racial literacies is dependent on external approvals. Similar to Texas, Kansas requires teachers to earn a minimum of 160 professional development points based on in-service education and service to the profession to renew their certifications every 5 years (Kansas Department of Education, 2023). Each district must submit a 5-year plan that outlines its local professional development council, comprised of teachers and leaders, and district and individual-professional development plans (Kansas State Department of Education, 2023). Teachers must plan collaboratively with their supervisor, the supervisor reviews and approves the plan, and the plan is reviewed and approved by the council (Kansas State Department of Education, 2023). The available policy guidance for the district professional development plans still follows a traditional focus on technical needs. For example, the district plan should address skills that teachers may lack and should align with school improvement targets of student performance and staff development goals (Kansas State Department of Education, 2023). The policy guidance for individual teacher plans notes that plans should include clear statements of the desired knowledge, its implementation, and three indicator levels with periodic and annual monitoring (Kansas State Department of Education, 2023). Teachers can earn additional professional development points if they can demonstrate that their professional development and subsequent activities have improved student outcomes and led to school policy or organizational changes or revised curriculum (Kansas Department of Education, 2023). Thus, while opportunities could theoretically exist for teachers of Color to challenge inequitable organizational structures, they are all dependent on prior approvals.

Among these three states, California's teacher professional development standards allow the most flexibility to support teachers of Color. Beginner teachers who have earned their preliminary credentials are required to complete a 2-year induction program with a mentor (California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2017). The induction program includes a mentor assignment, and the design of a personalized professional development plan must address the state's standards for the teaching profession (California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2017). In addition, the state's Quality Professional Learning Standards apply to all teachers and include a focus on equitable outcomes and ongoing, intensive, and embedded practice as well as collaborative and shared accountability (California Department of Education, 2015). Importantly, the standards explicitly call for linguistically and culturally responsive materials and actions to address academic, systemic, and climate equity (California Department of Education, 2015). In contrast to teacher certification renewal in Texas and Kansas, California teacher certification renewal is not linked to a minimum number of professional development hours or plans. Instead, teachers should use professional learning standards to design their plans, to address their individual needs, and to implement them in their schools (California Department of Education, 2015). In addition, these standards are not intended to evaluate teachers (California Department of Education, 2015). The equity professional learning standard function, coupled with all other California educational standards, creates a policy environment that could allow teachers of Color to create racial affinity spaces, engage in self-guided professional development, and strengthen their critical literacies.

The mentoring and induction landscape of these three states additionally illustrates the spectrum of policy supports and requirements for beginner teachers, yet consistently it is race-evasive and centers white teachers. Therefore, for teachers of Color currently to access professional

development and mentoring models that serve their needs, it would be up to individual teachers to adapt existing structures and supports.

Case Exemplar: Institute of Teachers of Color Committed to Racial Justice

One example of a professional development and mentoring organization that is successfully supporting teachers of Color nationally is the Institute for Teachers of Color Committed to Racial Justice (ITOC). Founded in 2011, ITOC has supported over 1,500 educators in their retention, growth, health and wellness, and leadership capacities. Importantly, ITOC describes itself as “an ongoing critical development space” that is explicitly dedicated to building community through CPD and a “femtorship” program, which reframes hierarchical and paternalistic models of professional development mentorship and, instead, is structured as collective and lateral learning.

In contrast to conventional teacher professional development models, ITOC follows the framework of CPD which Kohli et al. (2015) theorized as “a model...where teachers are engaged as politically-aware individuals who have a stake in teaching and transforming society” (p. 7). ITOC has provided a unique space for teachers nationally to convene and grow for the last 13 years. In the wake of the 2020 health and racial pandemics and amidst legislative calls to ban or limit teachers’ lessons about race and racism, ITOC provided opportunities for teachers nationally to engage in dialogical learning about critical topics that were impacting their classrooms, but to which they had little access. Teachers were offered mini-courses, talks, and workshops on Critical Race Theory, approaches to mental health, and ways to build community in the face of isolation. Keynotes and workshops were facilitated by experts of Color, and literature was provided on theoretically grounded topics like antiblackness, raciolinguistics, settler colonialism, and ableism. Teachers were guided to reflect on how these issues impact education and what they can do to identify and address these issues in their classrooms. Such programming builds on the interest of racial justice-oriented teachers of Color—critical intellectuals, capable of transforming its landscape. Extending this work, the program offers racial justice innovation grants that allow participating teachers of Color to identify their own growth needs and provide support to them in the process of engaging in both learning and leadership. Teachers have received these grants to challenge inequitable disciplinary practices, grow an awareness of racial microaggressions on campus, and create local teachers of Color affinity spaces.

Similarly to ITOC’s embrace of critical professional development, ITOC also reconceptualizes traditional teacher mentorship and offers a femtorship program. ITOC affirms bell hooks’s (1994) critique of Western pedagogy and “use[s] the term femtorship to denote a critical relationship between persons in which they offer and accept guidance” (ITOC, personal communication, September 22, 2022). In other words, femtorship destabilizes a traditionally Western hierarchical relationship between mentor teachers and mentee teachers and, instead, puts forth a horizontal relationship between “femtors” and “femtees.” Unlike traditional teacher mentorship, femtorship is a reciprocal “critical relationship” between femtor teachers and femtee teachers. To cultivate this critical relationship, ITOC’s Femtorship Committee pairs femtors and femtees based on growth interests. For example, a veteran educator may be new to restorative justice practices and could be paired with someone who has fewer years in the classroom but more experience practicing restorative justice in their classroom. Notably, through reframing sessions on mentorship, community building, and regular meetings, ITOC’s femtorship model explicitly centers the knowledge, experiences, and perspectives of teachers of Color and challenges hierarchical notions of power and value.

Discussion

Professional development and mentoring serve as support systems and induction mechanisms for the teaching profession. If structured and responsive to the needs of teachers of Color, they can also serve as catalysts to maximize their transformative potential, shifting from *What can teachers of Color do for the existing system?* to *What can the system do to support teachers of Color as they leverage their transformative power to reimagine schooling for students of Color?* However, through this review, it is clear that dominant models of both professional development and mentoring continue to work from a technocratic and positivist, hierarchical, skills-oriented approach that essentializes teachers as a monolith; is race-evasive; and neglects the experiences, needs, and possibilities of teachers of Color. If our goal is to disrupt this majoritarian discourse and reclaim space for teachers of Color within education, we cannot simply adapt existing paradigms as these are often historically and politically imbued in systems that inherently privilege whiteness. We must, instead, rethink existing practices and policies that guide professional development and mentoring that allow teachers of Color to realize the transformative visions for which we are recruiting them into the teaching force.

At present, we have evidence that teachers of Color can have a great impact on transforming education for students of Color (Carver-Thomas, 2018). Creating conditions for teachers of Color to grow, thrive, and stay in the profession requires a decentering of whiteness through an interrogation of and a reimagining of the systems, practices, and leadership that shape mentorship and professional development. Initiating policy to include the experiences, needs, and visions of teachers of Color in professional development and mentoring offers an opportunity to include a broadening of which knowledges are recognized and compensated. For higher education institutions, school districts, and states to collaborate with tribal nations, teachers, and communities of Color through sustainable, reciprocal partnerships, they must rethink whose perspectives matter and allow for a more diverse representation in professional development facilitators and mentors. As school districts recruit more teachers of Color, they must also anticipate a shift in classroom curriculum and pedagogy. Teachers of Color often bring varying forms of knowledge, experience, and perspectives to their practice that have been noted to be more relational, collectivist, and holistic—ways of being that typically serve in contradiction to the dominant norms of schooling. Teachers of Color need professional development and mentoring that center who they are and what they bring to the field, which the literature states should exist through a critical standpoint, deconstructing hierarchical notions of learning and embracing collective, collaborative, and relational structures that acknowledge race and racism. In the subsequent section, Part II, we offer policy and practice recommendations.

Part II: Policy and Practice Recommendations

Fundamentally transforming mentoring and professional development for teachers of Color requires moving beyond creating flexibility in policy and practice. Critical mentorship and critical professional development that are responsive to the needs of teachers of Color must denormalize the needs and experiences of white teachers and must engage teachers of Color along the way. In developing policy and practices, we offer some guiding principles and recommendations.

Guiding Principles for Policy Development and Practice Improvement

- Center the lenses, perspectives, expertise, and knowledge of communities of Color in the development of policies, programs, and practices to support critical professional development and critical mentorship. This work should be determined and guided by teachers of Color.

- If teachers of Color engage in facilitating their own learning, we must recognize their leadership by providing them with time and compensation that honors their labor and expertise.
- Examine the real estate that whiteness occupies in teacher mentorship and professional development. Developing culturally sustaining professional development spaces and critical mentorship for teachers of Color should not serve as a detour for the crucial work of interrogating whiteness.
- Be vigilant in ensuring that culturally sustaining professional development spaces and critical mentorship opportunities for teachers of Color are not additional responsibilities but, rather, the core methods through which they receive the support and professional community they need.

Policy Recommendations for Teacher of Color Responsive Professional Development and Mentoring

Develop Sustained Partnerships with Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Tribal Nations, States, School Districts, and Community-based Organizations

- School districts should foster relationships with higher education institutions, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), tribal nations, and community organizations to disrupt the hierarchical systems of knowledge validations and, instead, advance epistemological, ontological, and axiological diversity in training and support.
- Policy around requiring or encouraging such partnerships must recognize the historical experiences of teachers and communities of Color in school and support higher education institutions, school districts, and states in developing approaches to collaborating positively with communities.
- Partnerships across institutions and communities and understanding the requirements of government-to-government relationships with sovereign tribal nations necessitate ample time and resources to develop and be sustained over time.

Adequately Fund Professional Development and Mentoring Beyond Induction That Center Teachers of Color

- Funding should go towards professional development and mentoring created by and for teachers of Color. Funding support must be provided for teachers of Color to identify and develop professional development and mentoring opportunities to support their specific needs. Funding is required to compensate teachers of Color to lead and facilitate professional development and mentoring initiatives that support their communities.
- Funding support must be provided to educator preparation programs and school districts for hiring mentors, particularly mentors of Color, compensating mentors for their additional time, and assisting schools in securing substitute teachers for their classrooms.
- Schools and districts should evaluate if facilitators of professional development and mentoring meet the unique experiences that teachers of Color face personally and professionally, including developing their knowledge and understanding of how to engage in critical mentoring and the transformative possibilities of teaching.
- Congress should reauthorize the Higher Education Act (HEA) and ensure that teacher preparation programs include strong clinical training, rigorous requirements, and training for mentors in critical and racially literate ways so they can support and be responsive to teachers of Color.

- Title II, ESEA, could be a source of funding for preparing quality mentors and providing mentoring and professional development that are grounded in the experiences, perspectives, and needs of communities of Color. To ensure accountability, the use of this funding should be tied to specific metrics and outcomes including: (a) employing rigorous selection and assignment of mentors matching teacher demographics and growth goals as well as school context and demographics; (b) participating in professional learning communities that center community of Color experiences, perspectives, and needs; and (c) providing release time to engage in mentoring and reflective activities that are designed for teachers of Color.

Share the Responsibility of Decentering Whiteness in Professional Development and Mentoring

- The responsibility of creating working conditions where teachers of Color can thrive is not just the responsibility of teachers and school leaders of Color. White teachers and leaders need professional development experiences to recognize their own identity, position, and privilege and how these affect their relationships with their colleagues of Color as well as their practices as leaders.
- Professional development should exist to strengthen the racial literacy of all educational stakeholders and to examine school racial climates with the goals of creating working and learning conditions for teachers of Color that are culturally sustaining without exploiting their labor.
- To ensure quality critical professional development and critical mentoring, leaders should be provided with the coaching and support to recognize their own identity, position, power, and privilege and how these affect their practices as leaders or facilitators of professional development.
- To support conscious critical professional development and mentoring, instructional leaders and facilitators should engage in individual and collective practices that support critical reflection, perspective-taking, and informed action.
- In assigning mentors' responsibilities, district leaders should ensure that mentors are not also assigned supervision and evaluative duties. Where dominant supervision and evaluation activities tend to be hierarchical and judgmental, critical mentoring by contrast creates a collegial space where knowledge and experiences are shared and valued in reciprocal ways.
- Funding is needed to support transformative critical mentoring and professional development research and practices.

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SPECIAL ISSUE

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