

PANORAMIC PICTURES

Michael Ryan Moore, Editor

“All that a city will ever allow you is an angle on it—an oblique, indirect sample of what it contains, or what passes through it; a point of view.” Peter Conrad

This past week I found myself in the heart of Philadelphia, seated at a table over fifty floors above street level. From that height, the city speaks in a different register. The shouts of pedestrians and automobiles soften to a quiet yawn; the skyline, once forgotten overhead, now ripples below, with waves of concrete flowing across city streets. One short elevator ride and the city never seems quite the same.

Throughout this issue of *Perspectives on Urban Education*, we examine the hidden voices of our cities and our schools. In “Youth Resource Mapping: Partnering with Service Providers and Youth to Understand the Supply and Demand for Youth Services in a Local Context,” Sebastian Castrechini and Nicole M. Ardoin remind us that children and adults often tread different paths through the same spaces. Looking specifically within San Mateo County, Castrechini and Ardoin found that, although community partners offer multiple out-of-school time programs for youth, youth rarely availed themselves of these programs. In order to understand why, Castrechini and Ardoin enrolled youth as co-investigators, including local children in the design and implementation of a community resource mapping project. By involving youth from the outset, Castrechini and Ardoin were able to uncover a hidden side of community life, one which provided community partners with a better understanding of youth needs.

Looking broadly at these issues of access, Caroline Ebby, Vivam Lim, Luke Reinke, Janine Remillard, Emily Magee, Nina Hoe, and Maya Cyrus suggest that access begins at home. In “Community Based Mathematics Project: Conceptualizing Access through Locally Relevant Mathematics Curricula,” the authors argue that locally-relevant curricula—curricula that reflect students’ daily lives and lived realities—can provide students with greater access to educational and occupational opportunities. Here, the authors conceptualize “locally relevant” in its widest sense. Educators should not only couch content in local contexts—e.g. using local street names in a geometry lesson—but also introduce students to the local, and global, institutions that shape their communities.

From students, we turn to teachers. In “Using Critical Reflection to Improve Urban Teacher Preparation: A Collaborative Inquiry of Three Teacher Educators,” Beth Berghoff, Sue Blackwell, and Randy Wisehart each reflect on their work training pre-service urban teachers. Writing in turn, each author describes their own struggles and successes in instilling a sense of critical reflection in their students. In the end, the authors offer several guidelines for pushing pre-service teachers to see the complexity of urban school experiences and their role within them.

Recognizing one’s own role within a broader cultural context is a complex task. “‘I Do But I Don’t’: The Search for Identity in Urban African American Adolescents,” examines this difficult developmental process specifically within a population of inner-city, African American early adolescents. Building on Eric Erikson’s theory of identity development, Rebecca Gullan, Beth Hoffman, and Stephen Leff suggest that African American adolescents struggle to balance competing social expectations. On the one hand, these youth feel a shared identity with their peers, and yet, this shared identity often conflicts with mainstream achievement. In order to resolve this conflict, the authors argue that we must take an integrated view of diverse cultural groups, working to develop a “both-and” perspective of group differences.

Finally, “Learning to Read in the Wake of Reform: Young Children’s Experiences with Scientifically Based Reading Curriculum,” offers a unique glimpse into children’s early literacy practices. In this article, Tamara Spencer provides a first-hand account of el cuartito, a small classroom where three children and their instructor, Rosa, worked through a mandated literacy curriculum. Despite being identified as struggling readers, the children in the cuartito took ownership of their mandated curriculum, bringing their own knowledge and literacy practices to bear. By offering a glimpse of curricular mandates from the students’ perspective—and contrasting that view with top-down reform—Spencer reminds us that perspective makes all the difference.

Across this issue, we find several glimpses, oblique and indirect, into urban education. Though the articles range in topic, each emphasizes the importance of perspective, of multiple points of view, in revealing the landscapes around us. Whether from the eyes of inner-city youth or the digital display of a GIS map, every angle shows a slightly different picture of urban education. Together, our authors encourage you to take a look.

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