



# PERSPECTIVES ON URBAN EDUCATION

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## **ISSUE THEME:** Schools, Communities, and Universities: Partnerships and Intersections

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# Issue Introduction

By Rashmi Kumar and Sonia M. Rosen, Editors

Volume 7, Issue 1 of *Perspectives on Urban Education* explores partnerships between and among K-12 schools, universities, and community members and organizations. Across the United States, educational reform efforts in urban districts have simultaneously created the necessity and opened up opportunities for collaborations among K-12 institutions, local universities, and community groups, making the discussion of this topic both timely and salient. Two critical characteristics have made relationships among these three groups complex. First, each group occupies different roles within broader conversations about education; second, they are positioned differently with respect to the populations they serve. As a result, it often appears as if K-12 institutions, local universities, and community-based organizations in urban areas have disparate priorities and dissimilar and sometimes incongruent objectives.

The primary goal of school-university-community partnerships is to enhance the opportunities available to all stakeholders in the participating institutions and to do so in such a way that K-12 schools, students, and teachers are situated at the center of these efforts. In this issue of the journal, our authors explore intersections between these distinct groups and the factors that inform their collaborative work. They highlight the paradoxes and tensions that emerge in such partnerships as well as examine how these difficulties get resolved. Finally, the authors articulate the various ways in which the progress and direction of their work is influenced by factors that are internal and external to the field of education.

The articles in this issue touch on ways these partnerships have impacted student learning, school climate, and teacher practice, among other topics. Among the feature articles, *ARISE to the Challenge: Partnering with Ur-*

*ban Youth to Improve Educational Research and Learning*, describes a project based on participatory action research. In this piece, Brown discusses her multi-year work involving university researchers, K-12 students, and pre-service teachers, exploring the disconnect between practice and research and the challenges that surface in this context. Cole's *School-Community Partnerships and Community-Based Education: A Case Study of a Novice Program* offers an analysis of high school students' engagement with social problems through their placement in local non-profit and social agencies and the course that accompanies this internship program. Cann and DeMeulenaere take a unique approach in their article *Forged in the Crucibles of Difference: Building Discordant Communities*, using autoethnography to consider what it means to bridge the roles of university educator and high school teacher in a university-school partnership. In *Authoring New Narratives with Youth at the Intersection of the Arts and Justice*, Vasudevan et al. write about an alliance that is less frequently explored in educational literature, the partnership between university researchers and an alternative program for incarcerated youth. Their article documents the collective advantages that can be leveraged by the knowledge and skills that each group brings to the endeavor. In another vein, Noltemeyer and McLoughlin examine the relationship between the use of exclusionary disciplinary practices and school typology and student ethnicity.

The Notes from the Field and Commentaries sections of this issue offer other entry points to this topic. For instance, two articles offer a big picture view of what it means to participate in these kinds of partnerships. Cucchiara's paper paints the historic and contemporary landscapes of university-run schools in the U.S., and Her-

shberg and Robertson-Kraft analyze the newly initiated Race to the Top Fund and its implications for urban schools, teachers, and teacher unions by articulating the increased emphases on teacher evaluation and student growth. Most of the articles in these sections, however, focus on practice. *Family Involvement in Four Voices: Administrator, Teacher, Students, and Community Member*, by Angela Wiseman, draws on fieldwork done in an 8<sup>th</sup> grade English classroom to examine various stakeholders' perceptions of and approaches to involving families in a community-partnered poetry program. In *Project Coach: A Case Study of a College-Community Partnership as a Venture in Social Entrepreneurship*, Intrator and Siegel document and reflect on their work of developing and implementing programs geared toward preparing future educators and involve adults and K-12 students from mixed age groups. Building on this theme, Catapano and Huisman discuss the process of preparing beginning teachers to teach with a thorough understanding of the needs of neighborhood schools. Similarly, Bartone emphasizes the necessity for pre-service and beginning teachers to develop a deep appreciation of the communities they serve, and Clapper et al. present a vision for a teacher preparation program embedded in a democratic K-12 school. Recognizing the relative lack of evaluations of science outreach programs developed by university faculty, Miranda and Hermann provide a critical overview of three successful programs and identify the attributes that have allowed these programs to sustain long-term partnerships. In a more self-reflective piece, Patrizio questions her own stance as a university researcher partnering with community organizations and contemplates on her deliberative process and the decisions that emerge from this process. The three

book reviews for this issue further point to emergent ideas and potential directions for future work in this field.

As a whole, then, this issue of the journal considers questions about school, university, and community partnerships and the possibilities and challenges that surround this topic. For instance, what factors lend themselves to creating strong, productive partnerships between K-12 schools, local universities, and/or community members/institutions? What are the characteristics of such partnerships? Who should be defining the goals in these collaborations, and what might such a process look like? What roles can various stakeholders play in these partnerships? How can all of these partners (K-12 schools, universities, and community members/institutions) benefit from such collaborations, and how can we gauge the effectiveness of these partnerships in fulfilling the goals of each set of stakeholders? What kinds of connections should teacher education programs be making with local K-12 schools, and how might teachers be better prepared to connect with the communities they serve? What can we learn from past and present examples of school-university-community partnerships?

# ARISE to the Challenge: Partnering with Urban Youth to Improve Educational Research and Learning

By Tara M. Brown, Brandeis University

## ABSTRACT

*This paper examines Action Research into School Exclusion (Project ARISE), a two-year research partnership between K-12 students and university researchers. Based on the principles of participatory action research (PAR), the project intentionally brought together university researchers, K-12 students, and pre-service teachers to bridge research and practice for the purpose of improving learning across these three constituencies. This project sought to better understand and improve the schooling experiences of youth at risk for exclusion from school through disciplinary action. Using several sources of qualitative data, this paper demonstrates the application and value of the partnership at multiple levels of educational practice.*

## INTRODUCTION

Despite mounting research on urban schools and the high-poverty, high-minority students they serve, long-standing problems in K-12 urban education persist and have, in some cases, worsened. As much educational research is seen as impracticable by school practitioners, one significant issue identified as a barrier to urban school improvement is the disconnection between research and practice (Stringer, 2007). This is due, in large part, to the incongruent “manner in which both theoretical and practical knowledge are conceived in relation to each other” (Roblyer & Edwards, 2000, p. 467). Many university-based educational researchers do not experience the particular challenges of the people they are studying and are not grounded in the everyday schooling conditions that influence the issues they are investigating. Researchers customarily enter the field in the role of “experts,” having already defined the problem(s) in their own terms. Subsequently, they “define [their] results in terms that academics create and less so in terms of the issues and perspectives of the people who are the subjects” (Córdova, 2004, p. 34) of their research. As a result, academic research can lack relevance and effectiveness in the local school context and with the populations being served there.

University-based research and aca-

demie researchers play a significant role in the training of teachers. Particularly in the case of new teachers entering high-poverty, high-minority urban schools, research suggests that this training is often sorely inadequate (Ladson-Billings, 2001; Lynn, 2007; Owens & Konkol, 2004; Webster Brandon, 2003). What academic researchers often fail to do in both of these interrelated endeavors—research and teacher training—is to frame the work around the perspectives of their most essential stakeholders i.e. the K-12 students. In the vast majority of school-university research partnerships, students serve as “data sources” and/or recipients of teacher practice; they are rarely genuine partners in educational improvement. This researcher and author views it as a tremendous squandering of expertise. Both university-based researchers and their teacher education students could learn a tremendous amount from young people’s unique and valuable insights into the conditions of schooling, (Brown & Galeas, 2009; Brown & Rodriguez, 2009).

This paper examines *Action Research into School Exclusion* (Project ARISE), a two-year research partnership between K-12 students and university researchers. The project sought to better understand and improve the schooling experiences of youth at risk for exclusion from school through

disciplinary action. Based on the principles of participatory action research (PAR), the project intentionally brought together university researchers, K-12 students, and pre-service teachers to bridge research and practice for the purpose of improving learning across these three constituencies. This paper demonstrates the application and value of this partnership at multiple levels of educational practice.

## CONTEXTUAL CONTEXT

### The Role of Youth in the Work of the Academy

The involvement of youth – whether voluntary or involuntary, direct or indirect – has been essential to university-based educational research and practice since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Tyack, 1974). However, their participation has largely been characterized by a lack of control despite being the primary focus of this work. Some adults – e.g., parents and teachers – have also experienced a relative lack of power in educational endeavors within the academy. However, the silencing and objectification of youth has been particularly severe due to hierarchical power relations in schools and society, as well as the embedded cultural beliefs about children and adolescents.

As Buckingham (2000) asserts, young people are denied the right to self-

determination because they “have been defined in terms of their [supposed] lack of rationality, social understanding or self-control” (p. 14). This reflects a widely-shared cultural perception that because young people do not have the capacity to discern and address their own needs, responsible adults must act on their behalf (Buckingham, 2000). This perception is manifested in schools, particularly those serving children who are Black and Latino/a, low-income, and “low-achieving.” In these schools, young people’s activities tend to be highly regulated, regimented, and configured in ways over which they have little control and into which they have little input (Noguera, 2008).

Young people’s lack of power over the conditions of and investigations into schooling also reflect the dominant and long-standing belief within the academy that “naming the world [and others’ experiences within it] is the task of an elite” (Freire, 1970, p. 90). It also reflects the false dichotomy between the revered “scientific” knowledge of academic researchers and the “experiential” knowledge of local informants (Gaventa, 1993). Thus, while they may contribute “raw data,” youth have largely been considered unqualified to interpret that data and to discern how it should be used to inform institutional policies and practices. The devaluing of local knowledge, in combination with perceptions about the intellectual capacities of youth, creates a double jeopardy. This is intensified for socioeconomically and educationally disenfranchised youth who have been unduly scrutinized and problematized within academic research literature and disempowered in research processes.

The work within universities directly impacts the daily lives of low-income youth of color, through its influence on school policy and practice. Denying them any control over this research violates the democratic ideal that people should have “the opportunity to speak [their] mind, be heard and counted by others, and... to have an influence on outcomes” (Cook-Sather, 2006, p. 363) in matters related to their lives. Affording low-income youth of color some influence over the investigations and

decisions that impact their daily lives, however, is not merely a matter of ethics. These young people hold vital knowledge on experiences of schooling from which university-based researchers are largely distanced (Fine et al., 2005).

University researchers have developed expertise, written books and journal articles, and built careers upon the data extracted from youth, but the young people themselves have rarely benefited directly from these endeavors. However, a small but growing number of researchers are conducting research *with* and not simply *on* youth. Through this research, young people have gained valuable intellectual, academic, and professional skills and opportunities to insert their perspectives into realms of power and influence (Brown & Galeas, 2009; Brown & Rodriguez, 2009; Fine, Roberts, & Torre, 2004; Ginwright & Cammarota, 2007; Irizarry, 2009; Rogers, Morrell, & Enyedy, 2007). Project ARISE is an example of such research that holds youth development central to the mission of improving educational research, theories, and practices generated within the academy.

### Methodological and Pedagogical Bases

As both an empirical study and an educational experience, Project ARISE was organized around the theoretical, methodological, and pedagogical precepts of PAR (Freire, 1973; Shor, 1992). PAR is “systematic inquiry, with the collaboration of those affected by the issue being studied, for purposes of education and taking action or effecting social change” (Minkler, 2000, p. 192). In PAR, local knowledge is essential to understanding and intervening into problems. Representatives from the population under study act as co-researchers and are actively engaged in all stages of the research process (Córdova, 2004; Gaventa, 1993). This methodological approach reflects the imperative that socially marginalized peoples must interrogate and intervene into the conditions of their own marginalization in order to achieve the social transformation they desire (Freire, 1970).

As is often the case in PAR initiated by university researchers, I initially ap-

proached the youth in Project ARISE with a broad topic: the experiences of students excluded from mainstream learning environments. The youth and university researchers (two doctoral students and I) worked collaboratively to identify pertinent subtopics, design the study to investigate those issues, collect and analyze data, and represent and use study findings. The youth researchers came to the project with a wide range of competencies but no experience in empirical research. Thus, building upon existing knowledge and skills was a significant part of the project. To promote optimal participation, learning, and personal growth, Project ARISE was guided by several vital principles. There was an intentional and explicit commitment to treating and representing all team members as complex, intellectual, and valued human beings. The project capitalized on existing and developing knowledge, skills, experiences, needs and desires in ways that allowed everyone to participate in meaningful ways. Many research strategies were developed “in situ” to respond to immediate and emergent needs, unlike in more traditional academic research where methods are determined in advance of fieldwork.

PAR itself is a form of liberatory education in that it provides the opportunity for local researchers to “remake[s] authority... [and] exercise their own powers of reconstruction (Shor & Freire, 1987, p. 16-17). By engaging in and exercising control over the terms, outcomes, and uses of empirical research, they develop expertise in a form of knowledge production that has traditionally been the prerogative of university researchers. Dialogue is a critical tool in this process, providing opportunities for researchers to deepen their knowledge and apply it to the problem(s) under study. ARISE used dialogue to promote critical thought and action among all the participants—the researchers and our audiences—in the realms of research and practice.

Because PAR is aimed at *action*, or intervention(s) into the problem(s) under study, it is designed to produce knowledge that is directly relevant and applicable to the local context. Action

is not the finale of the research process, but “co-researchers test practices and gather evidence” (Reason & Bradbury, 2008, p. 1) in an cyclical approach to gathering, analyzing, and applying data. Action is a means of examining and enhancing the validity of the research findings as well as for creating social change. One means through which this was achieved in ARISE was by using study data and findings to design a series of workshops for pre-service teachers that deliberately bridged research, theory, and practice.

The next section of this paper gives an overview of the design and implementation of Project ARISE. In describing some of the research activities and the data collected, I provide examples and resources for those conducting PAR with youth, particularly in urban schools.

## PROJECT ARISE

### Study Setting and Selection of the Youth Researchers

The study was set in “Achieve,” an urban K-12 special education alternative school in the Mid-Atlantic, serving all Black and Latina/o, mostly low-income, students with a documented disability—emotional, behavioral, learning, physical and/or speech. The goals of the research were:

1. to better understand the schooling experiences of adolescents excluded from mainstream public schools for disciplinary reasons,
2. to build on the strengths and address the challenges of students at risk for disciplinary exclusion, and
3. to develop an action plan to improve the schooling experiences of these students.

The ARISE research team included nine youth researchers, two of my doctoral advisees, and me. The youth researchers were 11<sup>th</sup>- and 12<sup>th</sup>-graders—three African American boys, two Latino boys, three African American girls, and one Latina girl. They were targeted because I believed that they would be better able than younger

students to meet the social, intellectual, and commitment demands of the project and they were recruited through informational meetings in their English classes and school staff referrals. Additionally, the aim was to enlist 8-12 students who would continue into the second year of the project.

Although the project demanded high-level intellectual work, there were no academic prerequisites. My previous experience as a teacher demonstrated that youth who have not done well in school can and will engage in academic, intellectual pursuit when:

- it is relevant to their own lives,
- their knowledge and experiences are legitimized,
- they have control over the terms of their learning, and
- they are offered opportunities to access and present their learning in modes they can grasp.

The most important qualities in recruiting the youth, as was anticipated and demonstrated throughout the project, were high levels of interest in and commitment to the project.

Conducting research with students in school, during school hours, can present many challenges, the first of which is getting into the schedule. In the case of ARISE, I was able to secure an elective block for two consecutive years with the help of an administrator whom I knew at the school. During the 2006-07 and 2007-08 school years, the doctoral students and I taught a *Social Action Research Seminar*. This is where much of the work of the project took place. The seminar, which met for four hours per week, was offered through a school program designed to prepare students for life outside of and after high school. Having a strong [research proposal](#) that clearly delineated the benefits for the students and the school, as well as a detailed curriculum that outlined how those benefits would be achieved, were vital. It was especially important to show how the project planned to strengthen students’ academic skills in literacy, mathematics, and critical thinking.

Being the teacher of record came with many of the demands of a class-

room teacher, such as lesson planning, accountability for student learning, and working within the time constraints of class periods. Facilitating Project ARISE—in addition to my teaching, writing, advising and committee responsibilities at the university—consumed more of my time and energy than I anticipated at the outset. As such, the assistance of the doctoral students was invaluable. In addition to acting as co-researchers, they helped to prepare lesson plans, facilitate seminar sessions, conduct interviews, and take observation field notes while I was teaching.

Further, as a faculty member, I was accustomed to many conveniences—a well stocked library, a copy machine, computers, the internet (without restrictions), pertinent software, video equipment, technology assistance, paper, and writing utensils. Such resources are often not readily available in high-poverty urban schools. I brought laptops, video equipment, handouts, books, and other supplies to and from the university, as I had no secure place to store them at the school. Thus, PAR researchers in urban schools must be prepared to provide all or most of the resources needed for their projects.

One aspect of PAR research that is seldom written about is how to cope with the personal needs and challenges of local researchers that significantly impact the work. Although I had experienced this as a traditional classroom teacher, these challenges were profoundly intensified in Project ARISE. Research team members spent a lot of time working closely together in and out of the seminar (e.g., workshops at the university and out-of-town trips to conferences) and we developed close relationships. In a research collaborative, especially in PAR, successful implementation of the study requires the participation and, thus, the well-being, of every team member. As an adult and university faculty member with significant resources, the young people depended on me to assist them with a variety of challenges in their lives. In talking to colleagues doing similar work, I learned that others have also experienced receiving late-night phone calls of distress, attending court dates,

talking to social workers, helping young people to find a place to stay, and counseling them through trauma and grief. However, as will be explained more fully, although the demands of school-based PAR projects with youth are great, the benefits can be tremendous.

## The Research Process

In the first week of the seminar I gathered information on the skills and interests of the youth, did team-building activities, and introduced the nature, purpose, and use of empirical research. I did not front-load the project with theoretical information, as is customary in training academic researchers. As most of the youth researchers had histories of academic challenge and disengagement, it was important to begin the project with activities that would allow them to experience early success. Rapid transition into the hands-on activities helped to build confidence and enthusiasm among the youth.

The ARISE study had a two-tiered design. The entire research team examined the schooling experiences of students at “Achieve” through interviews with students and teachers. Additionally, the doctoral students and I investigated the youth researchers’ experiences in the seminar. Data for this aspect of the study included in-depth interviews with the youth, their journals and work products, and audio and videotape of seminar sessions and presentations. Participation in this part of the project was voluntary which was explained at the outset, and assent and consent forms were provided for the youth and their parents. This aspect of the project, which is not the primary focus of this paper, was conducted as a more traditional ethnographic study. However, because there is still relatively little documentation of the processes and methods used in PAR studies in K-12 educational settings, data from this meta-level perspective is included to help build this knowledge base.

The areas of investigation in ARISE were organized around the experiences and concerns of the youth researchers who had direct knowledge of being excluded from school. We used two strategies put forth by Shor and Freire

(1987): “choosing problem-themes from student culture... [and] Studying academic or formal subjects in a situated manner” (p. 19). The first research activity was *Mapping Your Educational Journey*. On a planning form, all research team members (youth and adults) recorded the schools they had attended, significant events that had happened there and the feelings they evoked. They then translated their information into a poster, which was presented to the research team. Team members used the *Mapping Connections* guide to keep track of incidents and feelings depicted by the presenter that they could relate to their own experiences. Through this collective analysis, which included discourse and concept mapping, the team generated initial research subtopics. This activity put the young people’s experiences at the center of the research and built solidarity within the group.

As is vital to the research process, we then expanded our understanding of the subtopics by connecting them to more “formal” theories. Because most of the youth had very underdeveloped reading skills, we used a combination of documentary films, audio, and texts to make the ideas accessible. Two particularly helpful resources were *National Public Radio*, which has archived radio shows on a variety of school-related topics, and articles written by Dr. Pedro Noguera from New York University. We found Dr. Noguera’s scholarly texts to be among the most textually accessible and many of them examined issues pertinent to the study. They were also available, online, for free. The doctoral students and I abridged other articles and used an intense guided reading strategy (Brown & Galeas, 2009) and concept maps to make complex ideas accessible and to relate them to understandings generated by the research team. Additionally, each youth researcher kept a journal which helped me to assess their understandings.

Having synthesized others’ ideas which deepened the teams’ initial understandings of the subtopics, we developed a central research question for each subtopic. We then identified information needed to answer each

question as well as the means through which and from whom we could get that information. All of the questions lent themselves to interviews—with students and/or teachers—and an interview protocol was developed for each subtopic and constituency. I prepared guidelines for these activities, replicating the ideas within academic texts on qualitative research methods (Bodgan & Biklen, 2003; Kvale, 1996; Maxwell, 1996), which were largely inaccessible to the youth researchers due to how they are written. Based on Kvale’s (1996) *Interviews*, I developed a list of interview tips and the team viewed several online videos on how to conduct video-recorded interviews. The youth practiced interviewing with each other in a “fish bowl” activity. One youth researcher interviewed another while the rest of the team took notes on process, using the “tips” sheet. Each practice interview was debriefed by the team in order to improve technique before interviewing participants. The young people were particularly adept at creating relevant research questions and following up on interviewees’ responses to uncover the complexities of the experience of school exclusion.

## Data Collection and Analysis

When the actual interviewing began, about a month into the project, it was one of most exciting activities for the youth researchers. They interviewed thirty students in grades 9-12 and six teachers at the school for 15-20 minutes on each subtopic. *Interviews* were conducted in teams of three, with one team member interviewing, one filming, and one responsible for set-up, staging, and prepping the interviewees. We rotated responsibilities to ensure that everyone gained experience in the three areas. As interviews were conducted, two technologically savvy youth researchers downloaded the video footage to a computer, burned the interviews to DVD, and converted audio to mp3 files to be transcribed by the doctoral students and me. The enhanced levels of the technical expertise of the youth researchers played a vital role in carrying out research.

Using transcripts from the first few

interviews, I then began to train the youth researchers in coding. Struggles with reading and lack of enthusiasm indicated that coding large amounts of text was not a feasible analytic strategy for most of the youth researchers. Although all team members were familiarized with the process, only two young people worked on coding transcripts. Because it was important that all team members participate in analyzing the data, we developed a strategy for directly analyzing the video footage. I created a protocol that prompted researchers to identify significant words, ideas, concepts, emotions, and body language while viewing the interview on video tape. In teams and individually, youth researchers analyzed the footage using the protocol. They generated both deductive codes based on the experiences of the researchers, the outside texts, and inductive codes based on what was significant to the participants. By logging footage time, we were able to match up codes identified through video analysis with the corresponding transcript text.

From this point, the text and data analyses proceeded largely in a traditional manner. This was a collaborative, team-based activity, preceded by training in the nature of concepts and theoretical analysis (again after adapting texts on research methodologies to make the ideas accessible). We placed the data into matrices by code and used a constant comparison method of analysis, in which “incident[s] in the data [are] compared to other incidents for similarities and differences” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 73). We did this to get more clarity on each code and how it compared, conceptually, to others. This was particularly important as coding was conducted by many different individuals. As a result, some codes were kept intact and others were collapsed, broken out into more precise codes, or eliminated. Afterwards, we combined codes conceptually by grouping them into categories based on patterns that emerged among them. Categories included language bias, physical activity, heterosexism, and respect. Thereafter, theoretical comparisons were made by examining the “properties” (the characteristics that define each category)

and “dimensions” (the variation of characteristics within each category) of each category (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 101). This informed the ways in which we grouped categories under the broader themes of *teacher-student conflict* and *student-student conflict*.

After completing the first phase of coding and analysis, we decided on the “action” component of the study. This was designed to “bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions” (Reason & Bradbury, 2008). It included presenting the study findings to the school community and at national research conferences, writing a final report for school administrators, writing journal articles, and conducting workshops for pre-service teachers. The youth researchers participated in all of these activities. Below, I will describe the workshops for pre-service teachers in further detail, as another example of action.

## WORKSHOPS FOR PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS

The ARISE research team conducted four workshops for pre-services teachers in the College of Education of the 4-year university at which I was teaching at the time. Two were in the class, *Introduction to Special Education*, one was in *Diversity for Teachers*, and one was in *Social Foundations of Education*. Each workshop, which was videotaped, began with the youth researchers presenting the research questions, study design, findings, and implications. This was followed by a variety of activities developed by the team, including large- and small-group discussions, role-playing, and case studies based on particular themes identified within the data. Each presentation also included a spoken word performance by one of youth researchers who was also a poet.

One very effective learning strategy was the analysis of a video-based case study. The research team produced a 12-minute play entitled, *Classroom Chaos*. It exemplified issues within the research data connected to the themes of *teacher-student conflict* and *student-student conflict*. Some of the issues depicted were the banning of non-

English languages, teasing between students, student embarrassment, and inattention to students’ personal needs. The play was scripted, directed, and acted out by the youth researchers. It was videotaped, burned to DVD, and used as a teaching tool in the workshops. After viewing the video, the pre-service teachers examined the ways in which teachers can either ameliorate or contribute to the variety of causes of conflict that can arise in the classroom. This was an effective way to bring data to life and to increase understandings of how issues that emerged from the data can play out in the classroom.

As part of the workshop curriculum, each pre-service teacher was required to submit a 2- to 3-page reflection on the presentation. These reflections and the video footage of the presentations then became part of the study data set. We analyzed them to ascertain the effectiveness of the presentation, looking for both agreements and discrepancies between the pre-service teachers’ understandings and what we wanted to convey. These analyses were then used to strengthen subsequent presentations.

## The Issue of Respect: A Closer Look at One Presentation

One of the workshops conducted in the *Social Foundations* course contained thirty-one pre-service teachers who had not yet done their in-service training. This included two Asian, three African American, and one Latina student and the remainder were White. The research team focused on causes of conflict among teachers and students in this workshop. The youth shared research findings and personal reflections related to various topics, including racism, language bias, and heterosexism. Across all of these topics, *respect* was a significant theme, and the youth researchers discussed multiple ways in which research participants experienced disrespect. One was the banning of non-English languages in the classroom. The two Latina/o youth researchers presented this subtopic, which they related to their own experiences. After presenting the data, one youth researcher, Christina,



spoke about personal experiences of being removed from the classroom for speaking her first language, Spanish.

I was talking my language and [the teacher] didn't like the way I talked so she kicked me out a couple of times. I kept getting in trouble because I kept speaking in Spanish. Right now, I speak more English, but at the same time you want to keep learning your own language so that you won't lose what you learned. And that's my culture... Teachers don't understand the way the students are with their language. In the end, don't disrespect a student just because they're speaking their own language. (workshop, 04/29/07)

Christina explained that when speaking their home language is forbidden or punished, students experience it as disrespect. She shared the vital connection between her home language, culture, and identity. This was reiterated by José Angel who also described being removed from class for speaking Spanish. "June," a pre-service teacher, took exception to the youths' perspectives, saying, Like if we all started speaking our own language, saying what we wanted, how is the teacher going to teach anything or control it? It's hard in schools when you're told to teach something in, you know, standard English, and when [teachers] don't understand Spanish and [students] alienate the rest of the class... If I'm giving a lesson and, you know, and everybody needs to know what's being taught, like, speaking another language is just a very big distraction. (workshop, 04/29/07)

In response, José Angel spoke back very authoritatively in Spanish to the pre-service teachers, advising them to "use your mind" (workshop, 04/29/07), rather than responding in reactionary ways to the use of different languages in the classroom. Mike, an African American youth researcher, weighed in, and advised pre-service teachers to learn some Spanish, just as he had done, in order to better understand and connect with Spanish-speaking students.

June demonstrated little empathy or concern with how her own actions, as a teacher, might impact students. This was also illustrated in her reflection paper, in which she wrote, "The problem is that a student is disrupting the class lesson. I would not allow any student to speak their language when others are trying to learn because it's a huge distraction." (reflection paper 05/03/07) She continued, ...all I kept hearing was respect, respect, respect. What about respecting teachers first? The students seemed very idealistic in what they want out of their teachers. How long do they expect teachers to spend at school and with their students, if many have to work second jobs as SAT prep teachers or coaches just to make ends meet? They, as students, did not seem to understand the politics of education that exist today. How and why is it expected for teachers to know every little detail about every single student? (reflection paper, 05/03/07)

June discounted the young people's appeal for respect, posing it as naïve and based on inadequate knowledge. She implied that the difficulties that teachers face exempt from them from demonstrating respect in some of the ways identified by study participants, including getting to know students personally. Nor was she the only pre-service teacher who expressed defensiveness about demands for respect. For example, Steve, another pre-service teacher, said to the youth, You talk about respect and it's easy to put it on the teacher but it also has to come back to the students. They have to want to learn. They have to be open to showing respect to the teacher. From your point of view, it's the teachers that don't understand you but from the teacher's point of view it's the kids that don't want to learn. It's the kids that are trouble-makers. It's the kids that are loud and disruptive... So, all of you seem intelligent enough and you seem like great students, but it's the other kids. (workshop, 04/29/07)

Steve suggested that teachers and students have equal responsibility for classroom relations. He also insinuated that students who are disruptive, loud, resistant, and disobedient did not deserve respect. He insisted that students must meet particular conditions like wanting to learn, being open, and showing respect to the teacher. This was in opposition to what the researchers reported—that students both need and deserve unconditional, basic human respect. Steve's comment was skillfully addressed by one youth researcher, who pointed out that teachers are paid adult professionals, who must respect and invest in the success of their students regardless of the troubles they may cause.

It is interesting to note Steve's specious compliment to the youth researchers that they "seem[ed] like great students" who were "intelligent enough," unlike the "trouble-makers" he described. Steve introduced the idea that these youth, engaged in high-level intellectual work, were fundamentally different from others in their peer group. Thereafter, other pre-service teachers also posed the youth researchers as different from their peers, focusing on imagined, troublesome "other kids." For example, two White women asked the youth researchers,

Do you guys think you can go into some of those public schools and maybe do talks with some of them to help motivate *those* students? (workshop, 04/29/07) Is there anything that you can do to help influence *those* students, students that might not want to graduate, students in your own school? (workshop, 04/29/07)

Such comments took attention away from teachers' responsibility and placed it onto students. The irony, however, was that the ARISE youth researchers **were** those "other kids." As was explained at the outset of the presentation, they had all had significant troubles at school, including multiple suspensions and expulsions. One of the most vital objectives of the presentation was to help the pre-service teachers understand the significance of

respect, caring, and support for all students, including those with disciplinary troubles. However, in our review of the data from the presentations, we realized that some pre-service teachers had not fully grasped this point. In the next workshop, we focused more intently on language use and the importance of respect and asked the pre-service teachers to read an article on each of the topics in advance.

I give this particular account as an example of the disconnection between the objectives of the presentations and the understandings of pre-service teachers, which will provide context for the following section. There were actually many more examples of connection and genuine learning and growth in the workshops. This will be discussed below, as I examine how project ARISE benefitted the pre-service teachers, the youth researchers, my doctoral students, and me.

## IMPROVING RESEARCH, LEARNING, AND PRACTICE ON MULTIPLE LEVELS Pre-Service Teachers: From Abstract to Concrete

Teacher education programs often provide pre-service teachers, who are predominantly White and middle-class, with inadequate opportunities to build understandings of and respect for the knowledge, culture, experiences and perspectives of students in urban schools (Ladson-Billings, 2001; Lynn, 2007; Owens & Konkol, 2004; Webster Brandon, 2003). The workshops conducted by the ARISE team addressed this issue, bringing K-12 students and pre-service teachers together in a learning experience where power between them was inverted. When marginalized youth presented as researchers and experts, this disrupted pre-service teachers' existing beliefs and introduced new ideas for consideration. Much of this was related to race and culture, as the following pre-service teacher wrote in her reflection about one presentation:

Many people, including myself, think about race issues in schools as a huge part of the history of the 50s and 60s, not necessarily an issue of today. What came as a shock to

me was how frequently these issues still arise. (reflection, 05/03/07)

Another wrote, "The discussion that stood out to me was our discussion on language. I had originally believed that only English should be spoken in the classroom but after listening to these students, I now believe that different languages should be incorporated." (reflection, 05/03/07)

For individuals like these two White, English-speaking pre-service teachers, the significance of racial/ethnic and linguistic bias can be difficult to grasp if they are not personalized in some way. In teacher education programs, interactions between K-12 students and pre-service teachers are often structured around pre-practicum observations and student teaching. They tend to focus on the instructional, rather than the relational, aspects of teaching and learning. In these contexts, opportunities for analytic dialogue, centered on students' experiences, feelings, and perspectives, are limited. Within the ARISE workshops, such dialogue, based upon empirical research findings, helped the pre-service teachers to more concretely understand the challenges facing urban students. As one pre-service teacher reflected, I guess from growing up in a predominantly white, middle-upper-class town I have never really experienced any traumatizing events that have to do with race, sexual orientation, language, etc. I have never really thought about how lucky I had it until I heard their stories. I have to admit that I was really naïve as to what really goes on in the school system... (reflection, 05/03/07)

One objective of the workshops was for the pre-service teachers not only to gain a deeper understanding of student experience but also to consider how everyday teacher practices can promote learning and engagement, especially for students who have had difficulties with school. Many of the pre-service teachers, like the one quoted below, demonstrated evidence of this in their reflection papers.

Our class saw firsthand how our

very own system we are about to enter, holds the very students back that we are meant to promote. We can use this experience and learn how to reach troubled students. The ideas received by the students of respecting the students and being patient with the students [are?] is very beneficial for a soon-to-be teacher. (reflection, 05/03/07)

Clearly, one such workshop is woefully inadequate for promoting substantive change. It would be useful to pursue further research on how such workshops might produce a long-term effect on pre-service teachers when they have classrooms of their own. Even without such research, however, the pre-service teachers' reflections and high level of engagement in the workshops demonstrated that the vast majority of them were eager to learn from the youth and were compelled to think more deeply about the issues presented in our research. Previously, many had abstractly explored issues of diversity, as evidenced in their reflections. However, during the workshops they gained a more concrete understanding of racial/ethnic, cultural, linguistic and experiential differences and their impact on teaching in learning. Having dialogue with young urban researchers helped the pre-service teachers better understand how their beliefs and practices can play out with students in real classroom settings.

## Youth Researchers: Becoming an Authority

Through Project ARISE, the youth researchers engaged with complex theories and ideas about the conditions of schooling. Drawing on their own experiences as vital points of departure, they learned to conduct empirical research and create multiple representations of learning. The project provided spaces in which they could use their own "funds of knowledge" (Moll, 1992) to engage in learning with clear and relevant purposes.

Low-income students of color, particularly those with histories of academic and disciplinary troubles in

school and who are attending alternative schools, often experience curriculum that is not rigorous, interesting, or relevant to their lives (Brown, 2006; Fine, Burns, Payne, & Torre, 2004; Lange & Sletten, 2002; Laudan, 2006). When they talked about the intellectual quality of their learning in Project ARISE, they often contrasted it to other academic settings. For example, Lance remarked that the research seminar was “more mature than the other environments... We have to think of a way to present these projects in a way that other people understand, and [there] has to be a bit of professionalism inside of this” (interview, 04/30/07). Further, Bruce said, “it’s been great because like I got to do things that I really could have not done. Like two years ago, I probably was just like sitting class and not really doing anything.” (interview, 03/06/07)

Lance discussed the challenging and enlightening work of interpreting someone else’s words, saying, “I’ve learned more about how other students feel about school. I was watching the DVD that I’m helping edit and I was listening to the answers to the questions and I was trying to understand where they’re coming from as to why they don’t do the work. I kind of got a better understanding... [I] Still can’t understand it fully, but I have a better understanding because I’ve heard a lot of – I’ve seen like interviews with the students. I’ve heard them talk and thought and analyzed what they’re saying.” (interview, 04/30/07)

Additionally, Gary said that he can better “understand where teachers are coming from” and “understands [his] peers more” (interview, 02/06/07), through his analysis of the interviews.

The youth also talked about how they valued the opportunities to bring their own perspectives to the research process, as Daneel and José Angel explain below.

Daneel: ...the research that we do in the Arise Program... helps people who are trying to become teachers better understand how they can react to a child when they’re teaching

them or to better teach children. I think it’s unique to do something like that and to like give your point of view on how you feel on some of these issues. (interview, 05/24/07) José Angel: I actually loved it [the presentation] because I actually got to speak my mind. I spoke my language at it too. I got emotional, but I spoke my mind. You know, I spoke the words that I really wanted to speak to people, that I wasn’t gonna hide anymore. (interview, 02/07/08)

José Angel’s comments speak to the ways in which students often feel that “adults in their schools do not listen to their views nor do they involve students in important decisions affecting their own activities or work” (Mitra, 2004, p. 652). Research shows that this is particularly true of marginalized students of color (Alonso, Anderson, Su, & Theoharis, 2009; Fine, 1991; Fine, Burns, Payne, & Torre, 2004). The youth researchers talked about their authority to speak, juxtaposed to common perceptions about young people like themselves.

Marcos: You know we can make a change in the world. You know, how kids can actually go up to grown-ups, ‘cause most of the time grown-ups think kids are, like, gangsters, you know, come from the ‘hood – just because you come from the ‘hood, they think you’re bad. You got a gun on you, you know what I’m saying? (interview, 02/07/08) Chantal: I see that it’s a need for teachers to understand us as students. Sometimes we get a bad reputation because of our actions, so we’re called the “underprivileged youth” at times... So, I mean, I just think it’s my job as a youth that is being called that to stand up and say, “No. We have a voice too!” (interview, 02/07/08)

For the youth researchers, all of whom had had significant difficulties with school and had been labeled as “learning disabled” and/or “emotionally disordered,” Project ARISE provided a vital opportunity to prove to others that

they were as competent and as worthy as they came to know themselves to be.

Learning among the youth researchers can be seen as a process of becoming an authority, which is far more powerful than merely being a research subject, even in a study that is subject-centered. For example, “student voice” research highlights the perspectives of youth, but they often have little control over the development of the research, and the academic researcher’s interpretation of their voices is the ultimate authority. This is because research-based knowledge is more valued and thus taken more seriously than anecdotal or experiential knowledge (Gaventa, 1993). Not surprisingly, when young people *become* academic researchers, they also gain authority through the experiences of doing so. They acquire research skills, develop “expert” knowledge, use empirical data to back up their assertions, and hone written and oral presentation skills. Also, not surprisingly, gaining authority helped to build self-assuredness among the youth researchers. As José Angel declared at one presentation, “We’re young kids. We’re 16, 17, 18, teaching grown-ups. So you can’t tell me I didn’t learn anything!” (workshop, 04/29/07)

### University Researchers: Improving Practice Within the Academy

During my first year as a doctoral student, I was teaching in a high-poverty, predominantly Black and Latino/a urban high school beset with the many problems found within and outside of these types of schools. In that year, I took a required curriculum theory and development course taught by an insightful professor whose K-12 teaching career had ended more than 25 years earlier. As she shared research-based “best practices” of curriculum development and implementation, I was most often left with the thought: “This will never work in my classroom.” That experience continues to serve as a cautionary tale about the imperative of keeping my own work as a university teacher and researcher grounded in the everyday experiences of K-12 teachers and students. As a

result of my own learning and development in Project ARISE, I am more than ever convinced of that imperative.

Partnering with the youth researchers greatly contributed to the reliability of the study's data, authenticity, and findings, as well as to my own development as a researcher. The youth raised issues of vital importance for excluded students. They helped to devise effective interview questions and to interpret the words of student participants in authentic ways. These are just a few examples of how they drew upon their unique expertise—which neither I nor the doctoral students had—to enhance the quality of the study. Their insights and guidance increased my skill in ascertaining how research participants make sense of their own experiences. They also helped the adult researchers to suspend or “bracket” preconceptions about the topics under discussion (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 6), a skill that is vital in empirical work.

Many university researchers and their work are “buffered... from the subtleties, nuances, and untidiness of human behavior in schools” (Davis, 2007, p. 570) when they work outside of the many school-based factors that influence the topics they study. In contrast, as a classroom teacher in the research seminar, I had to directly work inside and through many challenges that arose in the study. Through a process of simultaneously learning and doing, I had the opportunity to make sense of the research within the everyday contexts and work of students and teachers in ways that were both theoretical and practical. One example of this is how I adapted the data coding process. Many student research participants echoed the sentiments of one study participant who stated, “They [teachers] give us easy work. They treat us like we're stupid” (interview, 11/11/06). She, like most of the youth researchers, had intellectual capacities that far exceeded their extant academic skills. Connecting research to practice, I was compelled to find ways to meet the youth researchers where they were, both academically and intellectually, and to develop their abilities. This imperative was driven

by the participatory principles of the research, the goals of the study, and my responsibility as a teacher. Bridging important gaps between research and practice added legitimacy, relevance, and empathy to my university work with pre- and in-service teachers.

The ARISE workshops were one of the many ways in which I was able to draw upon the research to enhance my teacher development practice. In the seminar, the ways of working with the youth were just as important as the work itself. One vital aspect of the workshops was modeling respectful, caring, and productive relationships with young people. In the workshops, the doctoral students and I supported the development of the youth researchers as experts in their own right. When necessary, we addressed instances in which their intellectual contributions were discounted, demeaned, or misunderstood.

As discussed earlier, the workshops uncovered some beliefs and assumptions held by pre-service teachers, how they might be enacted in the classroom, and their potential effects on students. I was struck by how this might easily go undetected. Espousing the values of cultural competency and respect for youth in a college classroom does not mean that one will know how to put them into practice in the classroom. As an example, I return to the previously mentioned discussion on respect and language prohibition. The defensiveness and arrogance with which June responded to the youth researchers provided insight into how she, as a teacher, might respond to students whose perspectives and experiences are different from her own. Teachers who fail to interrogate their own racial/ethnic, class and language biases are likely to have profound difficulties in working with language “minority” students and students of color, whose numbers are rapidly growing in our public schools. They may unintentionally enact their biases in the classroom, to the detriment of their students. Pre-service teachers' interactions with the youth researchers helped me to more fully understand what competencies they must develop in order to be successful class-

room teachers, particularly in urban schools. With this understanding, I am able to design educational experiences that better address the learning needs of the pre- and in-service teachers.

Lastly, Project ARISE improved my practice of training the next generation of researchers and teacher educators. University faculty are rarely given direct instruction in how to train doctoral students through their research projects, even though this is a vital part of our work. Because ARISE was a PAR project, my doctoral advisees, like the youth researchers, were full participants in the research process, developing their own skills in research design and the collection, analysis, and use of data and findings. Engaging with them in the methodological and pedagogical work of ARISE, I was well positioned to help them identify and build the competencies and understandings that they will need to carry out their own research in urban schools.

## CONCLUSION

Project ARISE demonstrates that it is a myth that youth with underdeveloped academic skills, particularly formal literacy skills, cannot engage with complex ideas in a meaningful way. In fact, denying struggling students access to rich intellectual experiences is precisely one of the ways in which schools ensure that many low-income and “disabled” youth of color never advance beyond remedial learning. When we delimit youth's capacity to help us understand educational issues, we stymie their intellectual and personal development at the expense of the quality of scholarly knowledge and the interventions they inform.

As demonstrated in this paper, genuine collaboration with youth, particularly through PAR, has many benefits. In capitalizing on their expertise, not merely as “data sources” but as co-researchers within the contexts of schools, outside researchers are positioned to develop more sophisticated understandings of school-based problems. Such partnerships also increase the likelihood that research will be relevant and applicable to schools and

the young people they serve. Further, teacher educators' work is strengthened and gains legitimacy and relevancy when they co-construct knowledge with K-12 students and bridge the gap between theory and practice so prevalent in teacher education programs throughout the country. In utilizing youth expertise more effectively in university-based work, we will gain deeper understandings of the conditions that limit some students' success and how they can be effectively addressed.

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# School-Community Partnerships and Community-Based Education: A Case Study of a Novice Program

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## ABSTRACT

*This case study examines the struggles and successes of teachers and students collaborating with community organizations on the Second Tuesday Project, a community-based research and service program at an urban high school. Using qualitative methods, the study includes data from interviews, participant-observations, and focus groups to describe the experiences and perspectives of students and teachers participating in the Second Tuesday Project. Findings from the study highlight challenges with communication and curricular planning as well as successes with logistics and program flexibility. Implications for educators include the importance of clearly articulated goals, purposes, and guiding theories shared with all participants and a creative approach to removing logistical barriers between schools and communities.*

## INTRODUCTION

Community-based education has been increasingly introduced to teachers and students as a way to enrich and expand classroom learning. Related to place-based, environmental, or place-conscious education, these approaches share the goal of making learning more relevant and meaningful to students by situating it in local and familiar issues, contexts, and challenges. Curriculum is deeply connected to the people, landscapes, cultures and politics students can know and experience locally.

In order to situate learning in authentic community contexts, schools rely on partnerships outside of the school to support the learning process. Longo (2007) explains,

Education in the community is active learning that takes place outside of, but often connected with, the classroom. It involves more than a one-time community service project; it means intentionally putting education in the context of long-term community-building efforts. It is most often place-based, using a collaborative, integrated, problem-solving approach. (p. 10)

These collaborative, integrated, community projects often involve direct partnerships with local community organizations, agencies, or institutions.

Researchers argue that community-based education fosters students'

civic participation (Gruenewald, 2003; Lane & Dorfman, 1997; Theobald, 2006; Williams, 2003) and increases student motivation and engagement (Lewicki, 2000; Melaville, Berg, & Blank, 2006; Smith, 2002; Theobald & Curtiss, 2000; Umphrey, 2007). Brooke (2003) explains,

By centering education in local civic issues, history, biology, economics, literature, and so forth, learners will be guided to imagine the world as intradependent, filled with a variety of locally intradependent places, and to develop a richer sense of citizenship and civic action. (p. 6)

Keyes and Gregg (2001) argue that place- and community-based education has been shown to increase student attendance, graduation rates, parent participation, and community unity.

For educators interested in community-based practices, these outcomes serve as motivation and justification for their efforts. But community-based education is more than simply engaging students in community work outside the classroom. Hogan (2002) describes some of the challenges community-based classrooms encounter by comparing them to traditional classrooms. She argues that although traditional teaching methods allow teachers to create lessons appropriate to individual student abilities and learning levels, these project scenarios are of-

ten artificial simulations or offer limited contextual immersion, so they do not allow students to build identities as contributing members of a large community. In contrast, community-based and service learning programs offer the full richness of authentic contexts, yet present the difficult pedagogical challenge of tailoring experiences to maximize student involvement and growth. (p. 618)

Understanding the pedagogical challenges of community-based education is most useful for educators hoping to incorporate community-based pedagogies in their classroom.

This study is part of a larger research project using place and spatial theories to explore the connections between community-based education and students' sense of place. The purpose of this paper is to examine more closely the day-to-day experiences, successes, and pedagogical challenges of teachers and students working with community partners as part of the Second Tuesday Project (STP), an urban, community-based research project for students at Jefferson Center High School in Riverside.

In this study, I wanted to look more closely at how teachers grappled with the pedagogical challenges community-based education presents. Specifically, how do teachers and students create

and experience classroom curriculum to support community-school partnerships? What are the essential components of community-based education in the classroom that foster meaningful and relevant experiences and learning? What insight can the successes and challenges of a community-based education program like the STP offer educators interested in fostering similar community-based projects?

## RESEARCH CONTEXTS AND METHODOLOGIES

### Research Context

The city of Riverside is a large, Midwestern city of over 300,000 people. Jefferson Center High School is a public magnet school located in the heart of Riverside, directly across the street from the city's large, public university. Students at Jefferson Center come from all over the city, but a majority come from the low-income and urban neighborhoods surrounding Jefferson Center. 78% of Jefferson Center's 1300 students qualify for free and reduced-lunch. 92% of Jefferson Center's students are African-American, 4% are White. On standardized tests, Jefferson Center students perform as well or slightly better than their district peers; though the school is not considered one of Riverside's best schools, it is also not considered one of the worst.

Jefferson Center draws students interested in its five career-focused school-within-a-school programs. Each of the schools (the Math and Science Academy, Communications, Teaching and Technology, Human Services, and the Zoo Academy, co-taught with educators from the nearby Riverside Zoo) enrolls about 250 students. Each program consists of a Program Facilitator who teaches half-time and a small faculty of 8-10 teachers responsible for core courses (Math, Science, English, Social Studies) and program-specific courses (Communication, Sociology, Zoology). Students across programs share language, arts, music, and physical education classes. Each program is located in its own wing or floor of the school. Because students are enrolled in the same program

throughout their four years at Jefferson Center, the programs have a distinct small-school feel; students' lockers are located in their program wing and hallways are filled with faculty and students who know each other well.

This study took place during the 2007-2008 school year, the second year of the Human Services Program. Formerly the "Paideia Program," faculty restructured the program around careers in the Human Services in order to receive additional vocational funding. Tom Spillings, the Human Services Program Facilitator, explained:

In the last two years, with parents increasingly confused with what Paideia is... and knowing our clientele, knowing our students and their career interests, we found a good fit with Human Services. It was a career pathway they were just starting at the state level...it gave us the opportunity to bring in state money to supplement and augment what we do here in the program. We are facing budget shortfalls. Annually we have been cutting teachers so finding a natural fit with Human Services - which was also a state recognized vocational/career pathway - brought us additional state funding. (Spillings interview, 2/15/08)

The capstone course in the Human Services Program is the 12<sup>th</sup> grade Human Services class co-taught by the program's 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade English and Social Studies teachers. The central focus of the course is students' community-based research project, the Second Tuesday Project (STP). The STP is a research and service project aimed at understanding Riverside's efforts to improve the quality of life for its citizens. Teachers describe the project in introductory materials as "a team-based, multi-disciplinary, senior level project that requires each student to research a specific social issue within the Riverside community (i.e. homelessness, hunger, poverty, pollution, etc.) and implement a plan to help resolve that issue" (Course overview handout, 9/7/07). Over the course of the year, students research a community issue through secondary sources (popular media, professional journals, refer-

ence books, and online databases) and through first-hand experiences volunteering at a community organization related to their issue. Students spend one day a month in the field working with an agency mentor who oversees their service. On-site, students volunteer in whatever capacity their mentors determine and are expected to conduct research interviews throughout the school year in support of their final research paper and presentation. The culmination of the project is a week-long symposium of students' research; students present their study to classmates, faculty, administrators, parents, and community agency representatives.

### Research Methodology

**Participants.** The Second Tuesday Project at Jefferson Center was selected as the site of this study for a number of reasons. First, the lead teacher Jerry Michaels is an old friend and was enthusiastic about the inclusion of his students, faculty, and program in the study. English teacher Sandra Patterson was also enthusiastic about the project and more than willing to offer her classroom, time, and energy to support this research. Second, the STP is decidedly place- and community-based. Michaels describes the fundamental questions guiding the program as "How does the Riverside society help its members who are most at need? How do we provide a decent life to people in our community? How do we help people who are less fortunate?" (Michaels interview, 12/19/2007).

Michaels and Patterson are veteran teachers at Jefferson Center High School. They are both in their 50's, White, and middle class. Over the course of the 2007-2008 school year, I observed Michaels' and Patterson's classes, attended formal and informal faculty meetings, and conducted both structured and unstructured interviews with them.

Participating students included the Human Services' senior class of 38 students, eight of whom volunteered to attend four after-school focus group sessions and two individual interviews. Additionally, those students provided me with samples of class



work and their final research papers. Students ranged in age from 16-19 and all identified as African-American.

I am a former high school science and English teacher, White and middle-class. My experiences as a teacher, parent, and, most importantly, a former resident of Riverside (I attended public elementary and secondary schools in Riverside) helped me foster positive relationships with participants; teachers tolerated my presence as they would a pre-service teacher. Students regarded me similarly; I was an adult with little authoritative power but one who asked a lot of questions and offered a reasonably interesting after-school activity with ample free food.

**Curriculum study.** I was interested in the daily struggles and successes of teachers and students grappling with the challenges of community-based education in the classroom. I wanted to understand participants' experiences with the Second Tuesday Project and the way they made sense of their participation in or facilitation of the project. I was interested in processes, interactions, and dynamics that occur within a community-based classroom – how community-based education works – or “the nature of phenomena” (Wiersma & Jurs, 2005, p. 18). Because of these guiding interests, qualitative research methodologies were most appropriate to this study; they emphasize the lived experiences of individuals and the meaning individuals make from these experiences (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998).

I relied upon participant observation methods to guide my study of the Human Services Course curriculum. For one or two weeks of each month of the 2007-2008 school year, I visited Jefferson Center High School, observed the 12<sup>th</sup> grade Human Services Course, attended Human Services faculty meetings, facilitated student focus group sessions, and interviewed students, faculty, and administrators about the program. I collected classroom materials including course descriptions and handouts, formal program communications with parents and community agencies, students' in-class assignments, and final research papers. I attended the students' research sym-

posium at the end of the school year.

Interviews with faculty examined curricular goals and outcomes, experiences with the Second Tuesday Project, and reflections on community-based practice. Interviews with students explored their experiences with the STP and its influence on their learning, growth, and civic participation. I facilitated student focus group sessions primarily for broader research goals of understanding students' sense of place but discussions also examined students' collective STP experiences and participation.

In addition, I supported classroom curricular efforts by facilitating a two-day workshop with students on community-based research. The first day, I introduced my study and use of community-based research methods, drawing similarities between students' STP research methodologies and my own. The second day, I described the process of developing a research plan and began brainstorming and identifying research questions with students.

All interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed. I took field notes during classroom observations, interviews, and focus group sessions. Typical of qualitative research, my data analysis was ongoing and recursive (Merriam, 1998; Wiersma & Jurs, 2005). I utilized the content analysis and constant comparison methods (Merriam, 1998) for making sense of multiple sources of data and identifying recurrent trends and ideas in order to thread together common themes illustrated in my findings.

**Theoretical foundations.** In this study, I was interested in the day-to-day experiences of students and teachers participating in a community-based research project. Important to my data collection, analysis, and interpretation was a sensitivity to the way participants described their experiences and developed an understanding about themselves, their school, and their community through the project. Social constructivism guided my understanding and interpretation of participants' experiences. Lincoln (2005) writes, “constructivism... attends to the meaning-making activities of active agents and cognizing human beings” (2005,

p. 61). She explains that both physical and temporal data contribute to the process of meaning-making. Specifically, “meaning-making... engages two dimensions of individual social life: actual events and concrete situations, and the particular and individual mental stances which impute meaning to those events and situations” (Lincoln, 2005, p. 61). In this study, I was interested in the day-to-day physical events and concrete situations of students and teachers participating in the Second Tuesday Project. I was also interested in participants' interpretation of classroom and community activities – how they described, analyzed, internalized, or challenged those experiences.

## FINDINGS

Careful study of the community-based Second Tuesday Project at Jefferson Center High School highlighted three dimensions of its curricular structure and practice central to the pedagogical successes, failures, and overall experiences of its participants: logistical flexibility, communication and planning, and curricular connectivity.

In this section, I will first summarize the 2007-2008 school year in the Human Services classroom by examining curricular activities and student/teacher classroom experiences. I will explore the day-to-day struggles and successes more specifically through an examination of the three key dimensions of the curriculum's structure and practice that were most challenging and rewarding for participants.

## Course Overview

The school year began with Michaels introducing and describing the program to students. In introductory materials for faculty and students, Michaels wrote:

The purpose of the STP is to help students discover how to develop successful interviewing skills, utilize advanced research technologies, create and implement solutions to community problems, construct a formal paper detailing their discoveries and experiences, and present their findings in a multi-media Power Point platform. Through the STP, students identi-

fied a Riverside community issue or problem and then found a community agency or organization related to that problem where they could volunteer and conduct field research throughout the year. The Human Services course supported students as they identified their issues, volunteered monthly at their agencies, researched the issues/problems, wrote a research paper, and presented their papers at a program-sponsored research symposium.

The Human Services class met daily for the first 45 minute class period of school. Most days, Patterson and Michaels met briefly before school started to discuss the day's plan and then split the 38 Human Resources seniors into two groups, working in their own classrooms with the groups. Classes were held jointly for introducing new assignments, for organizing research logistics, or when guest speakers were present.

One of the earliest and most memorable activities students cited from the course was the Graffiti Wall, a "last minute stroke of inspiration" (Fieldnotes, 9/7/07) from Patterson who came up with the idea moments before class started the second week of school. She used the activity as a brainstorming and discussion tool to introduce community contexts, issues, and problems. She asked students to "graffiti" on a large roll of butcher paper problems or issues they identified in their communities. Students were enthusiastic, focused, and direct about the task; they quickly filled the poster with issues like drugs, pollution, violence, STDs, and prostitution. Throughout the week, students continued to add concerns to the wall and discuss the issues highlighted. Patterson considered the activity a success as it introduced the idea of community-based curriculum and initiated thought and discussion about students' concerns for their neighborhoods and communities.

After spending the first two weeks of school introducing the STP and filling the graffiti wall, introductory units on homelessness and domestic violence began. Students read local articles on the topics, wrote response papers, and discussed the issues with classmates. Guest speakers from Riverside's social service agencies visited the class-

room to discuss local approaches to addressing these issues. During this time, students also identified their research issues and made initial contacts with related community organizations and agencies. In October, they spent their first Tuesday in the field.

Students' experiences at their STP field sites varied widely. Karen worked with a child development agency that conducted home visits with low-income families in order to improve parenting skills and school readiness. Briana researched the inner workings of the city's foster care system by volunteering at an agency that coordinated social workers and volunteer child advocates.

Adam was frustrated by the lack of organization at his agency, a job-support center for teens and young adults. Throughout the year, he described feeling "bored" at the agency where his "best day there ever" was when he was given fliers to post on a bulletin board (Fieldnotes, 2/20/08). Dana shared this sentiment, and although she enjoyed taking tours of the city with representatives from the Urban League documenting links between urban environments (pollution, property upkeep, road conditions) and crime, she described most of her Second Tuesdays as spent "spinning in my chair, reading brochures and watching my mentor work at her computer" (Fieldnotes, 2/20/08).

Other students worked "shucking boxes" (Fieldnotes, 1/10/08) – organizing donated school supplies to send to needy schools. Some volunteered at women's shelters and attended group therapy sessions on domestic violence. Kayla-Jean volunteered with the Riverside Black Theater Company and helped with event promotion, rehearsals, and office work. Additional agencies working with students included YMCA after-school youth programs, elementary schools, homeless shelters, nursing homes, and HIV/AIDS support organizations.

On the school days following their "second Tuesdays" in the field, students returned to Michaels' or Patterson's classrooms for group discussions about their experiences. These discussions served primarily as a reporting and sharing tool; Michaels and Patterson called

on individual students asking them to describe their activities in the field.

A significant portion of class time, especially later in the school year, was spent in the Human Resources computer lab. Students were assigned to do online research, begin writing papers, or develop their presentation slides. Michaels and Patterson often used this time to catch up on grading and paperwork, and students were left to work independently. Responses to this freedom varied, as some students were highly directed and focused but many others were easily distracted by unsuccessful Google searches, disruptive classmates, Internet access, or other school work.

Occasionally, students and teachers welcomed guest speakers from local community social service agencies who discussed the goals of their agency/organization, broader community issues like poverty and crime, or careers in the social services. They also embarked in small and large groups on field trips to various agencies, organizations, and institutions as part of the research process. The final research symposium was the culmination of the STP and the Human Services program. Students' research and presentations varied as widely as their placements and will be discussed below.

### Logistical Flexibility

Central to most community-based curricular projects is authentic engagement with community work outside of school walls. A strong advocate of breaking down traditional barriers between schools and communities, Human Services Program Facilitator Tom Spillings explained,

Imagine a field trip that was a service opportunity that was repeated seven or eight times or maybe in the future weekly for maybe 30 weeks. The ties you build, the understanding you have of adult working relationships... that's what you want, that's what you want your high school to do, to be a partner with your community. That's what it should be. (Spillings interview 2/15/08)

With the support of administrators like Spillings, Michaels and Patter-

son were able to secure the flexibility of their program and freedom of their students in order to remove many traditional barriers to authentic community participation. Though their experiences in the community varied, STP teachers and students made use of a myriad of community resources: social and environmental agencies and organizations, the Riverside University, and the city's public transportation system.

Because of its location neighboring the Riverside University Library, the Jefferson Center administration had negotiated a partnership with the university granting all Jefferson Center students university ID cards which allow them to use the libraries and recreational facilities at the college. Patterson and Michaels took advantage of this agreement and arranged for a formal tour and research workshop at the library and permitted students to spend class time there if arranged in advance. Students valued this open access to the university and made efforts to study there during and after school. Briana explained,

When you go over there, especially if you go to the student union, there is an area with lots of tables and college students just sitting around. We go over there in groups and we take our books and our homework and upstairs there are chairs where we sit and do our work. People walk past, especially people who used to go to school here at Jefferson Center and they say, "Oh, look at these seniors from Jefferson Center, look at them sitting over here working, being smart. This is cool that you all are sitting over here doing your work. What are you working on?" It makes me feel really smart, really smart – I love it...When we go to the university, if we take our ID cards, we get to eat at their buffet cafeteria, we get to go to their recreation center. We get to use the library, they are just open. And we get to have fun over there – especially in the library because you know everyone is there for the same purpose, and you just sit there typing, thinking "I'm just as smart as they are!" Just sitting there typing, writing my paper. It is cool. (Briana interview, 5/8/08)

Throughout the year, students were also permitted to arrange meetings with community members outside their second Tuesdays to help in their research. Once, Michaels helped three students struggling to understand the welfare system meet with a representative of the Department of Health and Human Services downtown during school hours. Michaels simply cleared the students' schedules with other Human Services faculty, let students check the public bus schedule (all Riverside Public School students use their school ID for free or reduced bus fares on the city's system), and sent them on their way.

An important factor facilitating this level of flexibility was the small school-within-a-school structure of Jefferson Center High School. Because the entire Human Services Faculty team was located on one floor in one wing of the school building and teachers knew all STP students and their schedules, it was very easy for Patterson and Michaels to change bell schedules, correct attendance, and accommodate students who were out of the building as part of their Second Tuesday Project. Michaels and Patterson could very easily modify students' academic schedules by conferring with other core Human Services faculty located just down the hallway or around the corner.

Parents and school administrators were supportive of this flexibility; after initial permission slips and explanatory handouts, students did not have to complete additional paperwork in order to leave campus. Michaels and Patterson entrusted their students with a great deal of responsibility to navigate the city bus system, find their way around town, and show up where and when they were supposed to. Although faculty checked on students by maintaining communications with agency representatives, the responsibility of attendance and participation was completely on the students' shoulders.

Students in the Human Resources Course studied community issues in the classroom with guest speakers and through curricular units on homelessness and domestic violence. But students also physically left school to work with organizations directly involved

with the Riverside community. The logistical flexibility of the Human Resources Program facilitated expansive community partnerships and learning opportunities for students. The program allowed students to easily leave Jefferson Center campus to work at the Riverside University library and meet with field mentors or other community representatives. Students like Briana valued those experiences as they helped students feel connected to the broader community, as was evidenced by her statement that "everyone is there for the same purpose... I'm just as smart as they are!" (Briana interview 5/8/08). All of these outside experiences occurred during the school day, providing students with authentic experiences of work and service in the community.

### Communication and Planning

Beyond a very basic division of labor (Michaels facilitated field placements and community partnerships, and Patterson supported the research paper planning and writing), there was very little curricular planning between the two lead teachers. When I asked teachers about their Human Services curriculum before the school year started, Patterson's response was a definitive "We don't have a curriculum" (Fieldnotes, 9/7/07). Michaels described his curricular planning as "flying by the seat of my pants" (Fieldnotes, 9/7/07). However, because he had directed similar service and community-study programs before, he was comfortable facilitating the Second Tuesday Project, helping students identify placements and make connections with community agencies, mentors and volunteers.

Michaels and Patterson organized the course around a timeline of student assignments and deadlines, including identifying a research topic and securing a volunteer placement. Initial units on domestic violence and homelessness included a mix of articles, guest speakers, discussions, and response papers. Once students had begun working in the field, there were very few coordinated efforts to plan curriculum, address project goals, assess student progress, or refine course direction. Teachers moved through the

school year with a limited curricular plan focused on field work, research, writing, and presentation deadlines.

Most communication between Michaels and Patterson regarding the Human Services course happened informally before school as they quickly discussed the day's or week's plan. As the year progressed and deadlines for papers and presentations loomed, planning and communication between Michaels and Patterson nearly disappeared. With many pressing end-of-year obligations related to their other courses and responsibilities, the STP became a footnote and their rare planning discussions focused on "How do we occupy students during the Human Services bell period?" (Fieldnotes, 4/2/08). Increasingly, students were given undirected free time to work at computers on their research, writing, and final presentations.

When they reflected on the school year in the Human Services classroom, the teachers felt that one of their key problems was a lack of communication, planning, and a clear sense of purpose. Patterson explains,

If we are able to do the STP next year, then I think Michaels and I will have a clearer focus of what we need to establish, what we need to accomplish, what things we can discuss, keeping in mind the different agencies and topics the kids are interested in... if we have these ideas from the beginning, we'll know where we are going... This year we didn't develop a language because we really didn't know quite where we were going. I know how I want my research paper to look at the end but what Michaels thought was different, that bred confusion. I think it would be better next year. This year has just been "OK, let's try it – let's see!" (Patterson interview, 2/13/08).

Patterson went on to explain that there was no "common language" to use discussing the course and program, "It wasn't like there was a vision guiding everybody and we were all on the same page..." As a result, Michaels and Patterson often had very different ideas about what needed to happen in

the classroom. As a 12<sup>th</sup> grade English teacher, Patterson prioritized the students' STP research paper because it would be a cornerstone piece in their writing portfolio, a district graduation requirement. Michaels, responsible for students' attendance, participation, and relationship with community partners, prioritized positive field experiences. Where Patterson often pushed for class time dedicated to writing and research, Michaels was more interested in facilitating additional student work in the community: small and large group field trips, additional service projects, and more guest speakers.

Students noted this lack of curricular organization and direction. Dana commented – to her peers' agreement – "Things were just thrown at us out of nowhere at the last minute" (Fieldnotes, 5/7/08). Human Services Program Facilitator Spillings observed, [The Human Service faculty] need to spend a day or two together, sharing our vision. We need to come to some agreement of what it is we want to do and how it is we want to do it...I think the primary thing we need to make this work is time and the facilitation to come up with the "how does this work, how do these pieces come together?" (Spillings interview, 2/15/08)

A lack of communication and planning was due in part to the instability of academic schedules at Jefferson Center. Neither Michaels nor Patterson knew their teaching schedules until the beginning of the school year. Because the Human Services Program was only in its second year, overall program and course goals had not been fully developed. Unclear communication and insufficient planning was observed by all participants in the STP classroom. As a result, participants were frustrated with curricular organization and experienced many unproductive and undirected days in the classroom.

### Curricular Connectivity

Although the curricular plan and communication were unclear, it was evident in scheduling that field experiences and academic research were

important aspects of the Human Services course. But as I will describe in this section, students had difficulty making connections between their personal experiences in the field and their research into community issues. Discussions in the classroom after field days did not challenge students to interpret or contextualize their experiences. In their final research papers and presentations, many students struggled to make meaningful connections between their field work, research, and chosen community issues.

Following students' service and research days in the field, Michaels and Patterson split seniors into two groups to discuss their field experiences. Discussions were limited to the 45-minute class period and were structured more as "round-robin" reports than actual discussions. Teachers and students offered very little in terms of follow-up questions to encourage careful reflection or analysis of field activities. In a typical exchange below documented in my fieldnotes (1/10/08), Chuck lamented his work at a local soup kitchen and described the exhaustion of "being on my feet all day" restocking freezers, moving crates, and doing dishes for the hungry people who came in for a free meal. Complaining about the physical labor, Chuck explained that he "only ever sat down to eat lunch."

"So what have you learned about hunger?" Michaels asked.

Chuck waited a moment before responding dryly, "...that everyone likes to eat."

The class erupted with laughter and Michaels called on the next student (Fieldnotes, 1/10/08).

Questions like Michaels' above, challenging students to contextualize their experiences in broader issues and struggles were rare. When they did occur, the questions were often sidestepped by students the way that Chuck did here, and teachers acquiesced due to time constraints.

On another occasion, students Carrie and Lynette described their experiences working at an HIV/AIDS support agency and were surprised to learn that the agency helped clients pay rent, health care, and grocery bills. Carrie and Lynette interviewed some clients

and were intrigued by and intent on sharing with the class details of clients' sexual narratives (which clients freely shared with students). The class was surprised and shocked about the financial support clients received from the agency, launching into an uproarious discussion about whether one should "choose to be gay" and HIV positive so that social service agencies could pay one's bills. Michaels attempted to sort out students' misconceptions about choice, homosexuality, and HIV, declaring, "Homosexuality is not a choice! Don't you remember anything from Psychology? Studies show that one's sexual orientation is primarily set at birth!" (Fieldnotes, 1/10/08). It took a while for his comments to temper the buzz about the "benefits" of being HIV positive but students eventually – though without closure – dropped the issue as Michaels called on another student to report.

In this case, students were so focused on the client's sexual history and agency-supported "benefits package" that they lost sight of much broader community issues. Michaels tried to connect students' field experiences with earlier studies in Psychology without much success. He also missed the opportunity to help students situate their experiences in broader contexts and issues relevant to the welfare of Riverside's citizens (i.e. the social conditions surrounding clients' experiences, reasons why such services and support are needed in the community, and the prevalence and implications of misconceptions of homosexuality, HIV, and social services).

Aside from incomplete efforts like these to encourage critical analysis of field work, follow up discussions on Wednesdays and Thursdays rarely extended beyond basic reporting. Students' experiences were not used to explore more deeply the social, environmental or economic contexts related to the issues students were researching. Beyond these discussions, students and teachers never discussed their STP work and research in class; there were no curricular opportunities for focused discussions, guided analysis, or research mentoring to help students make sense of and connect their

field work, research, and community.

The Second Tuesday Project and the Human Services Course culminated with students' final research symposium. Similar to their diverse field experiences, students' research papers and presentations varied in their clarity, coherence, and success. Some students succeeded in clearly identifying a community problem, describing its history and present status, and proposing solutions based on field experiences with related organizations. For example, in Briana's paper studying issues of abuse and neglect in the foster care system, she wrote:

I believe that abuse of foster children is something that is going to take a lot of people to permanently end, but we can start working on it today by becoming a mentor or by helping out students interested in careers in the social sciences by offering scholarships... Child advocates and case workers, like the ones I had the privilege of working with are key to solving the problem of child abuse in foster homes. (Briana's final paper, 5/8/08)

Here, Briana offered very practical solutions to the issue of abuse in the foster care system tied directly to her experiences in the field.

Kayla-Jean's final paper demonstrated the STP's potential to further students' critical understandings of their community and selves through collaborative community work. Researching issues of identity, culture, and community building, Kayla-Jean spent her second Tuesdays with the Riverside Black Theater Company. Her paper addressed antagonism between African-American teenagers and negativity in the Black community by highlighting the need for youth to embrace the vibrant history of African-American art and culture. She emphasized the role of her organization uplifting the Black community through theater and dance. Kayla-Jean described her issue this way: "...amongst Black youth I see the lack of respect we have for each other...I also see how the influence of [popular] music impacts how we behave towards others in our community..." (Kayla-Jean's final paper,

5/8/08). She argued that participation in community art and culture projects can foster a "sense of community pride by accessing our culture and history..." She suggested that this participation will "help share our sense of pride, identity and knowledge with our community" (Kayla-Jean's final paper, 5/8/08).

Through their community research and participation, both Kayla-Jean and Briana were able to make connections between their individual field experiences, community challenges, the work of agencies and organizations trying to address those challenges, and broader social and cultural contexts.

The majority of student research through the STP was not as clearly articulated. Valerie chose to work at a health clinic to study the issue of affordable health care and spent most of her time in the field filing papers and helping with office tasks. For her final paper and presentation, Valerie did not draw upon any significant field experiences at the clinic to describe patients' struggles with affordable health care. Without any connection to personal experiences or local contexts, Valerie relied upon national statistics and general statements about health care to conclude that the system "needs help." At the end of her paper and presentation she shared a religious poem about overcoming challenges in life through faith. Valerie tied the poem to issues of health care this way:

In closing, I would like to start by saying when it comes to the struggle of children being provided for, it's not their fault that they have to go through the things they do when it comes to their health... This poem talks about how hard it is on a daily basis to have such a burden on your shoulders... from child abuse to children's health care, communities need to come together and prevent the stress in order to make them better and successful in the future. (Valerie's final paper, 5/8/08)

Valerie's very general summation of her community issue and proposed solution ("communities need to come together") and her inclusion of reference material not directly relevant to her topic was typical of most of the

students' final papers and presentations. Though Michaels and Patterson had outlined in the initial introduction to the STP that students should "implement a plan to help resolve [their] issue" (Course overview hand-out, 9/7/07), many students failed to even describe the work of their agency in the context of their chosen issue or problem. If students mentioned solutions, it was most often general statements like Valerie's above or Adam's on workforce development: "the community needs to help out the unemployed" (Adam's final paper, 5/8/08).

At the close of each presentation, Michaels facilitated a few minutes of follow up questions and comments. Most comments from the audience focused on the speaker's delivery or enthusiasm ("I couldn't hear you." "You seem bored" (Fieldnotes, 5/6/08)) Questions generally did not move the speaker or the audience to more carefully consider specific issues, experiences, or conclusions but focused on details the questioner felt were left out ("How many children did you tutor?" "Which schools get the donated school supplies?" (Fieldnotes, 5/6/08)).

Faculty expressed frustration with students' struggles to make connections between field work, community issues, and broader social, cultural and economic contexts. Patterson explained:

When students are doing the research, they don't have the vocabulary to understand it, they read it and it doesn't talk to them. And sometimes they just want to talk about themselves and they don't see themselves as one of the statistics in the big picture. They just keep it at the personal level. (Patterson interview, 2/13/08)

Michaels attributed students' inability to "dig deeper" (Michaels interview, 5/13/08) to their belief that they were living the issues and research would not contribute more to their understanding of the issues. "I think there are some kids who say, 'I live this (poverty, domestic violence, homelessness) every day, I can write about this and I don't need to do much research'" (Michaels interview, 5/13/08). He described students as "removed

and unwilling" (Michaels interview, 5/13/08) to look closely at issues related to their personal experiences.

I also observed students struggling to make connections between field experiences, broader community social and environmental issues, and additional research. Their unsuccessful online research attempts, generalized research conclusions, and the absence of field experiences as data for research papers pointed to many students' inability to interpret, contextualize, or make meaning from their community experiences.

Aside from the unplanned, "last minute stroke of inspiration" Graffiti Wall, the curriculum included no activities with the direct intent of helping students clarify and discuss their interests in community issues. As students' research progressed, there were no directed opportunities to share or apply knowledge through discussions, critical response papers, or focused brainstorming, outlining, or analysis. In addition, during classroom discussions after field days, faculty missed opportunities to critically question students about their work, their agencies' role in the community, and broader social, environmental, and economic contexts surrounding their issues. As a roughly held together series of deadlines and activities, the STP curriculum did not foster a sense of cohesiveness either in its daily progression or in the capstone research of the students.

## DISCUSSION

Three key themes – logistical flexibility, communication and planning, and curricular connectivity – contributed significantly to the challenges and successes of students and teachers involved in the STP's community-based approaches. In this section, I will explore these themes more carefully, revisiting Patterson's idea of a missing "common language" among faculty as a set of underlying goals, objectives, and guiding theories for community-based practice. I will argue that a common language or grounding theory contributes significantly to the aforementioned themes of communication and planning and curricular connectivity, mak-

ing it a very essential component of community-based curriculum in the classroom. Further, I will explain how developing a common vision for community-based education in the classroom is central to addressing the pedagogical challenges community-based education presents. I will situate findings in the work and research of other community-based educators, including Knapp (2008) and Keyes & Gregg (2001), and revisit important aspects of the STP's logistical flexibility.

The Human Services classroom, though progressing through a loosely structured curricular timeline, seemed quite fractured on a day to day basis. Students and faculty were unaware of what upcoming days and weeks would look like ("things were just thrown at us...") or how various discussions, assignments, guest speakers, or deadlines related to any unifying course purpose or objective. Curriculum and objectives of Michaels and Patterson were often at odds, each teacher wanting more time for guest speakers and fieldwork or research and writing, respectively. Throughout the year, faculty missed opportunities to help students make connections between their experiences in the field and broader social issues like hunger, HIV/AIDS, and public health during post-field day discussions. The Human Services curriculum, loosely structured and poorly planned, was not organized to include discussions, activities, and guided research that would help students contextualize their experiences, research, and subsequent findings about their community's social and environmental issues. In fact, aside from introducing the STP, setting up placements, going into the field, reporting back to the class, and doing independent research, there was nothing in the curriculum to support students in pulling together their field experiences, interviews, and internet research into coherent arguments about the Riverside community and its social and environmental welfare. As a result, there was a clear disconnect between students' field experience and research as evidenced by their final papers and presentations on local issues and problems.

Patterson described that the pro-

gram lacked a “common language” (Patterson interview, 2/13/08). Spillings, the program administrator described a need for faculty to develop a “common vision” (Spillings interview, 2/15/08) for the Human Services program and the STP. I would argue both educators describe here the need for theory: a set of clearly articulated goals, objectives and assumptions about what teachers and students were doing, why they were doing it, and what students were to gain from such a learning experience. I believe the disconnect between students’ field experiences and research, the lack of curricular connectivity, and Patterson’s and Michaels’ struggles with communication and planning are all related to the program’s lack of a “common language,” “common vision,” or grounding theory.

Instead of formulating materials outlining only what students were to do physically as part of the STP (identify issues/agencies, work in the field, and present and write research papers), a guiding theory would describe students’ cognitive tasks (making connections between field work, research, and community contexts), highlighting students’ learning. By identifying goals for student learning, faculty could have facilitated students’ post-field day discussions to encourage critical analysis of field activities, organizations’ community roles, and broader social/environmental/economic issues. With a clear set of goals for learning, faculty could develop additional curriculum to facilitate the cognitive connections between field experiences and community contexts, for example, offering directed lessons on research planning, data collection, data analysis, and formal interpretations. And students, guided by an understanding that these connections were the heart of the project, supported in their research to make such connections, could have better used their field experiences and research to further their understanding of the Riverside community.

When Knapp (2008) reflects on his long history teaching about community-based pedagogies and experiential education, he argues that teaching “means extending the classroom beyond the four walls of the classroom

and two covers of books. It means immersing students in direct experiences with people and places in order to learn in the context of realistic community situations” (p. 9). Michaels and Patterson were certainly doing this work with the STP, opening the doors of Jefferson Center High School and supporting authentic student work in the community. But Knapp also explains, “Teaching involves a mandate to challenge students to think reflectively. Thinking deeply about how learning is taking place and how knowledge will be applied to life is an important path to knowledge” (p. 9). Knapp draws upon characteristics and principles of experiential education when he claims, “The educator’s primary roles include structuring suitable experiences, posing problems, setting boundaries, ensuring safety, and facilitating learning” (p. 13). In these arguments, his emphasis on teachers as *facilitators of reflective thinking* is essential; it is one of the critical components Michaels and Patterson missed.

Community-based educators and researchers emphasize the need for connectivity, theory, and purpose in community-based projects and partnerships. Keyes & Gregg (2001) explain that in the strongest school-community partnerships, people hold a common vision and care enough about their vision to be willing to share information and power to achieve it. The quality of relationships among people seems to be the critical element within schools, within communities, and between schools and communities. (p. 44)

The educators and students participating in the Second Tuesday Project did not share a common vision. Without it, faculty struggled with curricular planning and implementation and many students failed to understand the relevance of their work.

In terms of the logistical and structural challenges to community-based education efforts, the Human Services classroom took great advantage of its small school-within-a-school program and many community resources. The ability to restructure the schedule and location of a typical school day af-

forded the Human Services students an authentic involvement in community life and city services. Allowing students to be present at agencies during productive hours of the work day enabled them to participate in active, real work, further involving them in the day-to-day life of the community. Keyes and Gregg (2001) explain that flexibility like this is essential in school-community relationships:

The form of a school’s relationship to community - whether it is that of community center, school-based enterprise benefiting the community, or community as curriculum - must be determined locally and will depend on the motivating force. To be successful, all three require reconceptualizing traditional roles, protocols, and uses of school time. All three require school personnel to be flexible and to have a tolerance for risk, uncertainty, and a certain amount of messiness. (p. 45)

Gruenewald and Smith (2008) explore similar types of organizational and conceptual changes that need to be made to traditional schooling to enable vibrant community and place-based projects in the classroom. Certainly, the Second Tuesday Project demonstrated how school spatial organization, small school-within-a-school programs, and localized administration enabled students and teachers the freedom to take advantage of authentic community-based learning opportunities.

In terms of the curricular, cognitive challenges of integrating community-based learning into a traditional classroom, the Human Services program struggled. Without grounding theory, common vision and shared sense of purpose, teachers and students were unable to take full advantage of their authentic community experiences – unable to integrate valuable firsthand experiences and research into broader social and environmental contexts. Students’ work in the community became a disconnected, fractured experience, still separate from their traditional academic papers and presentations.

## IMPLICATIONS

At the outset of this study, I asked three questions in regards to community-based learning in the classroom: how do teachers and students experience community-school partnerships in the classroom? What elements of community-based curriculum make it most meaningful? And, what insight do these findings offer other educators interested in community-school partnerships and community-based education?

It seems that the teachers in the Human Services program, challenged by uncertain course schedules and last minute teaching assignments, were more focused on the logistics of getting students out into the community than on the critical curricular work that needed to happen when students came back to the classroom. In the STP, students experienced a diversity of field placements and agencies and were engaged in authentic work on a regular basis in the Riverside community. School administrators, parents, and faculty shared a belief that this work was meaningful, valuable and deserving of the logistical flexibility and freedoms those educators and parents gave to the program. But educators experienced frustration with students' inability to make connections between their field work and academic research; teachers attributed some of their struggles with the STP to a lack of common purpose, vision, and language for the project. Without these things, the teachers overlooked the need for classroom curriculum that would help students contextualize, analyze, and understand more deeply the role of their work within the Riverside community.

Clearly, for educators interested in adopting community-school partnerships and community-based pedagogies, it is essential to thoughtfully articulate a common vision, theory, goals and objectives for community-school partnerships. Importantly, administrators and educators must set aside time to do this important planning. Educators also need clear lines of communication with students, faculty, and community partners regarding their community and classroom work. Planning must be ongoing and within the

context of the course objectives in order to create cohesive and meaningful curriculum. A key component of supporting community-based classroom curriculum is implementing the support structures (discussions, activities, mentorships, individualized instruction) designed to help students make sense of their experiences in broader community contexts. Finally, educators and administrators must find ways, like the Human Services Program did, to remove the traditional barriers between schools and communities, allowing students to participate in active, authentic work outside school walls.

Missing from this study were the voices of community partners. Because of time constraints and logistical challenges, I was unable to go with students into the field or to talk formally with their mentors. Thus I did not fully describe the role community partners played in students' STP experiences. Aside from reviewing formal communications with participating community partners (introductory materials, time sheets, permission slips), observing Michaels' telephone discussions with community partners in regards to initial program logistics and, later, to attendance and student performance, I had no direct contact with community partners. Students returned from the field with a wide variety of experiences, knowledge, and insights. It seemed some mentors were very helpful explaining to students the role of their organization in broader social contexts and issues and others seemed more hands-off, setting students to task and letting them go. Though a clearer understanding of what happened in the field and the perspectives of the community partners would have been helpful in order to describe the STP more fully, the emphasis of my questions was on the curriculum, teaching and learning that happened *in the classroom* to support students through the STP. As a former educator interested in how teachers and students grapple with the integration of place-based pedagogies and community-school partnerships, I wanted to look most closely at their experiences, framed by the structures and contexts of a traditional school environment.

Program Facilitator Spillings remained a strong supporter of the Second Tuesday Project throughout the school year. He explained: Any time you get a student into a new environment it's beneficial. Probably for you, certainly for me, when we look back at high school, junior high, we remember our field trips - a lot of them, maybe not all of them. Imagine a field trip that was a service opportunity that was repeated seven or eight times or maybe in the future weekly for maybe 30 weeks. The ties you build, the understanding you have of adult working relationships... that's what you want, that's what you want your high school to do, to be a partner with your community. That's what it should be. It sort of seems strange that school is so isolated from our community - that we take kids and say, "go do that [elementary school] and then go do that [high school] and then come join us..." When the community should be saying, "let's help you do that, let's help you do that..." (Spillings interview, 2/15/08)

Even with its challenges, the Second Tuesday Project demonstrated the potential of community-based learning and school-community partnerships. Students like Briana, and Kayla-Jean had insightful and inspiring experiences that changed the way they understood their city and community. With logistical flexibility and a strong and clearly articulated sense of purpose, school-community partnerships have the potential to enrich, expand, and authenticate learning environments for students.

This study has underscored the need for research on the struggles, challenges and successes of community-based programs and partnerships in the schools. Additional research is needed examining the experiences of community partners and how their participation and experiences with school-community partnerships contribute to classroom curriculum and student learning. Importantly, I have argued in this study that community-school partnerships and community-based curric-



ulum must do much more than simply get students out into the community. Educators must plan ahead to assure logistical flexibility, establish clear lines of communication with all partners, and develop cohesive, directed curriculum based on guiding goals and shared visions of what students will do and learn through their participation in community-school partnerships. As evidenced by the struggles and successes of the novice Second Tuesday Project, there is much to be learned from community-based practices, but educators must be thoughtful, deliberate, and directed in supporting community-based learning in the classroom.

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## ENDNOTE

<sup>1</sup>All identifying references to people, places and institutions have been changed.

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# Patterns of Exclusionary Discipline by School Typology, Ethnicity, and their Interaction

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## ABSTRACT

*Although exclusionary discipline has been linked to a variety of negative student outcomes, it continues to be utilized by schools. This study investigates two critical variables as they relate to exclusionary discipline: School typology (i.e., urban, rural, suburban) and student ethnicity. Using data from 326 Ohio school districts, a MANCOVA followed by univariate ANCOVAs was used to examine the main effects of ethnicity and school typology on exclusionary discipline rates as well as their interactive effects. Results indicate that when controlling for student poverty level: (a) African American students are disproportionately represented as recipients of exclusionary discipline; (b) major urban very-high-poverty schools utilize these practices most frequently; and (c) disciplinary disproportionality was most evident in major urban districts with very-high-poverty and was least evident in rural districts with a small student population and low poverty. Implications for research and practice are discussed.*

## INTRODUCTION

Exclusionary discipline describes suspension, expulsion, and other disciplinary actions leading to a student's removal from the typical educational setting. Although frequently used in schools in an attempt to punish or to promote appropriate behavior, exclusionary discipline can result in a number of unfavorable outcomes. For example, high exclusionary discipline rates are positively associated with academic failure (Gersch & Nolan, 1994; Rausch & Skiba, 2004; Safer, Heaton & Parker, 1981; The Civil Rights Project/Advancement Project, 2000), high school dropout (Costenbader & Markson, 1998; DeRidder, 1990; Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack & Rock, 1986; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986;), involvement with the juvenile justice system (Chobot & Garibaldi, 1982; Florida State Department of Education, 1995; The Civil Rights Project/Advancement Project, 2000), grade retention (Safer, 1986), and illegal substance use (Swartz & Wirtz, 1990).

Despite these findings, the use of exclusionary discipline in schools continues to rise. As a result, researchers have increasingly become interested in identifying school-level and student-level factors that may relate to exclusionary discipline use within schools. Interestingly, rates of exclusionary discipline have been found to vary widely

based on these factors. For example, Imich (1994) found that a small number of schools accounted for a large proportion of school exclusions, and Skiba, Wu, Kohler, Chung and Simmons (2001) discovered that 1-in-6 of Indiana's school districts account for 50-75% of all exclusionary disciplinary actions. Such evidence of vast disparities in discipline practices highlights the need to identify school-level and student-level factors that may predict reliance on exclusionary discipline.

## School Factors

Many school factors have been linked to rates of exclusionary discipline. Wu (1980) found that exclusionary discipline rates are more strongly influenced by school factors than by students' challenging behaviors. For example, exclusionary discipline rates have been linked to: administrator philosophy and beliefs (Christle, Nelson, & Jolivet, 2004; Mukuria, 2002; Wu, 1980), ambiance of the physical school setting (Christle et al., 2004), per pupil spending (Christle et al., 2004), district SES (Fowler & Walberg, 1991), and public-versus-private school status (Farmer, 1999). Other school factors have been demonstrated to have no significant relationship to exclusionary discipline rates (e.g., teacher to pupil ratio, Christle et al.,

2004; school size, Fowler & Walberg, 1991, and Imich, 1994; and teacher experience, Christle et al., 2004).

In this study, school typology is the factor of paramount interest. School typology is a classification based on community and school characteristics. In Ohio, for example, schools are classified into nine typologies that were created to account for common demographic characteristics including population density, school size, geographic locale, and community income levels (See Table 1).

Several studies have aimed to explore the relationship between school typology and disciplinary practices. For example, data from the National Education Longitudinal Survey of 1988 revealed that 25% of 8<sup>th</sup> grade teachers in urban schools reported spending at least one hour per week maintaining order and discipline versus 13% of teachers in rural schools and 16% of teachers in suburban schools (Lippman, Burns, & McArthur, 1996). In addition, Brown and Payne (1992) investigated perceived changes in discipline issues from 1981 to 1991 by surveying 221 teachers on perceived changes in discipline issues. The researchers categorized the data by school typology. When asked whether the school discipline problems they encountered in 1991 were *better or worse* than they were in 1981, no signif-

Table 1 Descriptions of the School Typologies (Adapted from Ohio Department of Education, 2007)	
School Typology Number	School Typology Description
0 <sup>a</sup>	Districts that are extremely small and either geographically isolated (islands) or have special circumstances
1	Rural/agricultural – High poverty, low median income
2	Rural/agricultural – Small student population, low poverty, low to moderate median income
3	Rural/Small Town – Moderate to high median income
4	Urban – Low median income, high poverty
5	Major Urban – Very-high-poverty
6	Urban/Suburban – High median income
7	Urban/Suburban – Very high median income, very low poverty
8 <sup>a</sup>	Joint Vocational School Districts
<sup>a</sup> These districts were eliminated from the analyses.	

icant differences in responses emerged between groups. However, when asked whether they *spent more time on discipline* in their classrooms in 1991 than in 1981, urban teachers report they spend slightly or much more time on discipline with a higher frequency than their rural and suburban counterparts (67% versus 42% and 47%). Together, the results of these two studies imply that teachers in urban schools spend more time on discipline than do their suburban and rural counterparts.

In a similar study, Adams (1992) explored the use of disciplinary techniques as a function of school and community characteristics (e.g., school typology). Three hundred and sixty five Michigan school principals completed a survey designed to assess discipline procedures and school characteristics. Results suggested that schools in suburban and urban areas were more likely to use out-of-school suspension than were schools in small cities or rural farming areas. In addition, schools in suburban areas were more likely to use in-school-suspension as a disciplinary response, perhaps due

to greater available resources. Finally, urban schools were more likely to use probation as a disciplinary strategy than were the other school typologies.

Other studies, however, have demonstrated greater consistency across school typologies with regard to their exclusionary discipline practices. For example, from a survey distributed to 200 secondary school administrators in Indiana, Green and Barnes (1993) examined whether or not rural, urban, suburban, and small city schools differed on: (a) What administrators consider major and minor misconduct from a list of 61 offenses, and (b) What actions administrators take when misconduct occurs. These researchers found that significant differences existed between school typologies on only two of the 61 offenses regarding which would be considered major and which minor. In addition, the researchers found similarities across school typologies regarding the actions taken when misconduct occurs. These results suggest school typology may have little influence on disciplinary beliefs and actions.

## Student Factors

There are several student factors associated with exclusionary discipline practices. For example, males have consistently been overrepresented as recipients of disciplinary actions (Mendez & Knoff, 2003; Skiba & Peterson, 2000; Skiba, Peterson, & Williams, 1997). In fact, research has suggested that the rate of disciplinary actions for male students is up to four times higher than for female students (Imich, 1994). Mendez & Knoff (2003) report more conservative estimates, with White males being more than twice as likely as White females to be suspended, and African American males being nearly twice as likely as African American females to be suspended.

Student socioeconomic status is another student factor that has been associated with exclusionary discipline rates. Students eligible to receive free lunch and those whose fathers do not have full-time employment are more likely to be the recipients of exclusionary discipline than are their peers (Wu, Pink, Crain & Moles, 1982).

Qualitative research has further suggested the impact of socioeconomic status on discipline. Brantlinger (1991) found that both low- and high-income students believed that low-income students were unfairly targeted and received more severe disciplinary consequences than their peers.

Additionally, student grade-level is related to discipline use. For example, Mendez and Knoff (2003) found that across all ethnicities suspension rates increased significantly from elementary to middle school, although they dropped off in high school. Specifically, 3.36% of elementary school students in their sample experienced at least one suspension, compared to 24.41% of middle school students and 18.46% of high school students. Arcia (2008) describes a similar pattern, with middle school students experiencing significantly higher rates of suspensions than elementary school students across demographic categories.

Of particular interest in this study, student ethnicity also predicts exclusionary discipline rates. African American students consistently have been overrepresented as recipients of exclusionary discipline. The first large-scale study to investigate national data on school discipline revealed that African American students were two-to-three times more likely to be suspended than White students across all-grade levels (Children's Defense Fund, 1975). African American students are also more likely to receive multiple suspensions and are less likely to receive milder alternatives when referred for a discipline infraction (Children's Defense Fund). This issue — referred to as disciplinary disproportionality — repeatedly has been studied over the past few decades with overrepresentation demonstrated across a wide variety of settings and populations (e.g., Constenbader & Markston, 1998; Garibaldi, 1992; Mendez & Knoff, 2003; Skiba et al., 1997; Skiba, Michael, Nardo & Peterson, 2002; The Civil Rights Project/Advancement Project, 2000; Thornton & Trent, 1988; Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace & Bachman, 2008; Wu et al., 1982).

Recent research suggests that disciplinary disproportionality is becoming more prevalent over time (e.g.,

Wallace et al., 2008), despite legislation (e.g., Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, 2004) requiring state and local educational agencies to enact policies to prevent disproportionality.<sup>1</sup> Although the exact causes of disproportionality may be debated, the overrepresentation of African American students in exclusionary discipline is not satisfactorily explained by an increased severity of problematic behaviors engaged in by African American students, statistical artifacts, or the confound of poverty (Skiba et al., 2002; Wallace et al., 2008). For example, related to each of these potential explanations, Wallace et al. (2008) found that: (a) The degree of ethnic differences in school discipline far exceed differences in actual substance use and weapons possession; (b) disproportionality persisted despite the use of two different methods for analyzing the data; and (c) differences in socioeconomic status had little impact on ethnic disproportionality.

### Interaction of School Typology with Ethnicity

Despite initial research demonstrating the influence of both school typology and student ethnicity on exclusionary discipline practices, there has been relatively little investigation into the interaction of these two variables. One exception is a study conducted by Rausch and Skiba (2004). Using data collected from Indiana schools across four geographic locales, these researchers discovered that the discipline rate for African American students was higher than all other ethnicities in all four locales; however, *the highest rates were found in suburban schools where African American students were five times as likely to receive an out-of-school suspension than White students*. Similar results were found when considering expulsions, *with the expulsion incident rate for African American students highest in suburban schools*. More specifically, African Americans were 2.5 times as likely, and Hispanics 1.67 times as likely, to be expelled from suburban schools as White students.

### RATIONALE

This evidence base demonstrates clearly that differences in the application of exclusionary discipline by school typology do exist and that exclusionary discipline is disproportionately applied to African American students. However, further research is warranted to replicate findings and extend them to recent data over a larger non-opportunity sample. At this time, only one known study examines whether school typologies differ in the degree to which they exhibit disciplinary disproportionality (i.e., Rausch and Skiba, 2004). Given the significant negative outcomes associated with exclusionary discipline practices, coupled with recent regulatory mandates to curb disproportionality in discipline, it is important to identify factors that are associated with disproportionality practices. These factors may not be directly causative in nature, but they will lead to a better understanding of disproportionality processes and aide efforts aimed at addressing the issue.

To this end, the purpose of this study was to answer three research questions based on state-wide data from the 2007-2008 school year: (1) Do significant differences exist in rates of exclusionary discipline between White and African American students when controlling for poverty? (2) Do significant differences exist in rates of exclusionary discipline between six school typologies when controlling for poverty? (3) Is there an interaction between ethnicity and school typology when controlling for poverty?

### METHODS

#### Procedures

Data from Ohio were examined because the state is a bellwether reflecting national educational and political trends (Rubin, J., 1997). These data were accessed from the Ohio Department of Education (<http://www.ode.state.oh.us>) using the 'Power Users Report' tool. A spreadsheet of discipline incidents per 100 students during the 2007-2008 school year was created and disaggregated by school district, race, school typology, and discipline

Table 2 Abbreviated Definitions for the Three Types of Discipline Incidents (Adapted from Ohio Department of Education, 2006)	
Type of Disciplinary Incident	Abbreviated Definition
Expulsion	The involuntary removal of a student from school by the superintendent.
Out of School Suspension	The denial of attendance at school for no more than 10 days.
Other Disciplinary Actions	Includes in-school suspension, emergency removal by district personnel, in-school alternative discipline class, and removal by a hearing officer.

type (i.e., suspensions, expulsions, and ‘other’ disciplinary actions). See Table 1 for a definition of each of the school typologies and Table 2 for specific definitions for each of the discipline types. These data were then sorted to remove: (a) Data on students from other ethnicities (e.g., Asian American); (b) Charter, vocational, and geographically isolated schools (e.g., small-census island communities); and (c) Districts with an “NC” in a data field, indicating a total district population of fewer than 10 students in one or both ethnicities under investigation who were excluded from school during the period under investigation. Finally, the data were exported to SPSS (v. 14) for analysis. It is important to note that these data reflect the number of disciplinary incidents per 100 students of each ethnicity at the *school district level*; data were not analyzed at the *individual student level*.

Data on the proportion of economically disadvantaged students in each school district were also acquired using the Power Users Report tool and were integrated into the existing SPSS database. Economically disadvantaged students are defined as those who meet one or more of four criteria. Specifically, ‘economically disadvantaged students’ include those who: (a) Qualify for free or reduced priced lunch (the family must be at or below 130% of the federal poverty level to qualify for free lunch and at or below 185% to qualify for reduced price lunch); (b) Reside in a household where another member qualifies for free or reduced price

lunch; (c) Receive public assistance or live in a household where the guardians receive public assistance; or (d) Meet the family income guidelines to qualify for Title I Services (Ohio Department of Education, 2006).

### Sample

Although both school typology and disciplinary data were available for 595 school districts, only 326 districts were included in the final sample due to an insufficient sample of either White or African American students in the 2007-2008 school year in the remaining school districts (i.e., the excluded schools had an “NC” in a data field as described above in the Methods section). Thus, the final sample represented all districts with more than 10 students in one or both ethnicities under investigation who were excluded from school at some time during the academic year (approximately 55% of all school districts in the state).

Given the manner in which the data was provided, an exact number of students attending the sample schools was not readily available. However, it is estimated that the data reflected the average daily enrollment of approximately 1,300,000 students. This estimate was derived by identifying the percentage of Ohio schools represented in the sample for each typology and then identifying the same percentage of the total average daily enrollment for that typology. It is important to note that the actual number of students at-

tending the sample schools – although perhaps interesting – is not important to know for the current analysis since the dependent variable is reported in terms of *disciplinary incidents per 100 students* attending the district.

### Analysis

Researchers have proposed that studies that fail to control for SES are likely to have confounded results due to the strong correlation between disproportionality and SES (e.g., MacMillan & Reschly, 1998). As a result, the proportion of economically disadvantaged students in the district was used as a covariate for all analyses. A covariate is a continuous variable known to affect the dependent measures whose effects are not of interest (Grimm & Yarnold, 1995).

To answer the first two research questions, a MANCOVA followed by univariate ANCOVAs was used to determine whether significant differences exist in rates of exclusionary discipline between (a) White and African American students, and (b) six school typologies, when controlling for poverty. To answer the final research question, a MANCOVA followed by univariate ANOVAs was conducted and the interaction between ethnicity and school typology was examined to determine whether disciplinary disproportionality differed significantly based on school typology when controlling for poverty.

There are several assumptions of MANCOVA that are worthy of mention.

First, the sample size in each cell should be greater than the number of dependent variables (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1996). This assumption was unquestionably met, as the smallest sample size in any cell for any of the analyses was 28 and there were only three dependent variables. In addition, the assumption of independence was deemed tenable in this study given no evidence that observations are dependent on one another. Also clearly satisfied was the assumption that the design utilizes categorical independent variables and continuous dependent variables.

MANCOVA also assumes linear relationships between all dependent variables. Pearson correlations between all dependent variables pairs and dependent variable-covariate pairs suggested statistically significant linear relationships, thereby verifying the tenability of this assumption. However, unacceptably high levels of multicollinearity – which can be problematic for MANCOVA – were not present. All correlations were modest and none were close to exceeding the recommended .80 cutoff for multicollinearity.

Multivariate normality is another assumption of MANCOVA that should

be considered. Because normality on each variable is a necessary (but not sufficient) condition for multivariate normality, the Kolmogorov-Smirnoff test was used to detect violations in normality for the three dependent variables. Results from these tests suggested that each of the distributions did significantly differ from a normal distribution. Follow-up analysis of histograms and descriptive statistics suggested the presence of positively skewed distributions. Although this indicates a violation of multivariate normality, MANCOVA has been shown to be robust to violations of this assumption in certain cases. For example, a sample size of 20 in the smallest cell of the design generally ensures robustness even in the face of normality violations (Tabachnick and Fidell, 1996). This requirement was fulfilled in the current study, as the smallest cell in any analysis had a sample size of 28. Having a sample size per cell that is greater than the number of dependent variables also helps improve robustness. As previously described, this was also clearly satisfied.

Another set of assumptions is referred to as homogeneity of variance and covariance matrices. Levene’s test

of equality of variances was significant for expulsions,  $F(13, 638) = 5.556, p = .000$ , suspensions,  $F(13, 638) = 17.487, p = .000$ , and other disciplinary actions,  $F(13, 638) = 16.887, p = .000$ . This suggests a violation of the homogeneity of variance assumption; however, it is important to consider that the Levene test is quite sensitive to large sample sizes and non-normality. Box’s  $M$  test was used to assess the homogeneity of covariance matrices assumption. This test should be interpreted with caution because it is highly sensitive to violations of multivariate normality, particularly with large sample sizes. In this study, Box’s  $M$  test was significant,  $F(78, 64674.022) = 1754.987, p = .000$ .

Because of these violations regarding the variance and covariance matrices, Pillai’s criteria for statistical inference was used. Although more powerful criteria exist, Pillai’s is regarded as the most robust (Olson, 1979). Specifically, it is the criterion of choice when there are unequal cell sizes and/or the assumptions of homogeneity of variances and homogeneity of covariances are violated. Even when using Pillai’s criteria, however, it is important to consider that the  $F$  statistic may be

Effect	Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	Noncent. Parameter	Observed Power(a)
Intercept	.039	8.512(b)	3.000	635.000	.000	.039	25.536	.994
% Economically Disadvantaged	.055	12.261(b)	3.000	635.000	.000	.055	36.782	1.000
Ethnicity	.166	42.189(b)	3.000	635.000	.000	.166	126.567	1.000
Typology	.119	4.384	18.000	1911.000	.000	.040	78.909	1.000
Ethnicity * Typology	.053	1.906	18.000	1911.000	.012	.018	34.307	.976

a Computed using alpha = .05  
 b Exact statistic  
 c The statistic is an upper bound on F that yields a lower bound on the significance level.  
 d Design: Intercept+EDO607+Ethnicity+Typology+Ethnicity \* Typology

Table 4  
Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Source	DV	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	Noncent. Parameter	Observed Power(a)
Corrected Model	Expu	65.280(b)	14	4.663	5.640	.000	.110	78.956	1.000
	Susp	58310.267(c)	14	4165.019	21.340	.000	.319	298.757	1.000
	Other	67373.420(d)	14	4812.387	10.205	.000	.183	142.867	1.000
Intercept	Expu	.704	1	.704	.851	.357	.001	.851	.151
	Susp	4433.719	1	4433.719	22.717	.000	.034	22.717	.997
	Other	4797.823	1	4797.823	10.174	.001	.016	10.174	.890
% Economically Disadv.	Expu	7.624	1	7.624	9.221	.002	.014	9.221	.858
	Susp	6015.250	1	6015.250	30.820	.000	.046	30.820	1.000
	Other	6362.290	1	6362.290	13.491	.000	.021	13.491	.956
Ethnicity	Expu	12.564	1	12.564	15.196	.000	.023	15.196	.973
	Susp	22404.644	1	22404.644	114.792	.000	.153	114.792	1.000
	Other	21775.269	1	21775.269	46.175	.000	.068	46.175	1.000
Typology	Expu	26.383	6	4.397	5.318	.000	.048	31.910	.996
	Susp	10677.994	6	1779.666	9.118	.000	.079	54.710	1.000
	Other	17008.587	6	2834.765	6.011	.000	.054	36.067	.999
Ethnicity * Typology	Expu	8.421	6	1.404	1.698	.119	.016	10.186	.648
	Susp	5023.185	6	837.197	4.289	.000	.039	25.737	.982
	Other	6307.997	6	1051.333	2.229	.039	.021	13.376	.787
Error	Expu	526.668	637	.827					
	Susp	124327.163	637	195.176					
	Other	300397.502	637	471.582					
Total	Expu	657.350	652						
	Susp	325723.960	652						
	Other	530643.660	652						
Corrected Total	Expu	591.948	651						
	Susp	182637.430	651						
	Other	367770.922	651						

a Computed using alpha = .05  
 b R Squared = .110 (Adjusted R Squared = .091)  
 c R Squared = .319 (Adjusted R Squared = .304)  
 d R Squared = .183 (Adjusted R Squared = .165)

too liberal due to violations in these assumptions. However, the larger the number of dependent variables and the larger the discrepancy in cell sizes, the greater the potential for distorted alpha levels. In this study there are only three dependent variables and the discrepancy in cell size is 1:6. Another way to address these violations is to use a more conservative alpha level for de-

termining significance (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1996). Consequently, an alpha level of .01 was selected for this study rather than the traditional level of .05.

**RESULTS**

See Table 3 for a summary of MANCOVA results and Table 4 for a summary of ANCOVA results. A MANCOVA on the district-level

data revealed differences in the use of exclusionary discipline based on the six school types. Univariate ANCOVAS revealed this difference was significant when considering each of suspensions, expulsions, and other disciplinary actions. Overall, school typology accounted for 4.0% of the variability in exclusionary discipline. Pairwise comparisons revealed that the mean num-



Disciplinary Action	African American	White
Suspensions per 100 students	22.571	8.477
Expulsions per 100 students	0.539	0.205
Other disciplinary actions per 100 students	23.005	9.110

ber of expulsions per 100 students for school typology Five (**Major Urban—Very-high-poverty**;  $M= 1.058$ ) was significantly greater than that for every other school typology. In addition, the mean number of expulsions for school typologies six (**Urban/Suburban—High median income**;  $M= .430$ ) and seven (**Urban/Suburban—Very high median income, very low poverty**;  $M= .411$ ) was significantly greater than that for school typology 2 (Rural/agricultural;  $M= .060$ ). Regarding suspensions, the mean was again significantly greater for school typology 5 ( $M= 28.769$ ) than each of the other typologies. It was also significantly greater in typology 6 ( $M= 17.835$ ) than in typologies 1 ( $M= 10.911$ ), 2 ( $M= 8.734$ ), and 4 ( $M= 13.604$ ) and greater in typologies 3 ( $M= 14.389$ ), 4 ( $M= 13.604$ ), and 7 ( $M= 14.424$ ) than in typology 2 ( $M= 8.734$ ). Finally, the mean number of other disciplinary actions per 100 students was significantly greater for typologies 5 ( $M= 30.410$ ) and 6 ( $M= 21.115$ ) than typologies 1 ( $M= 10.809$ ), 2 ( $M= 8.796$ ), 3 ( $M= 12.099$ ), 4 ( $M= 14.084$ ), and 7 ( $M= 15.091$ ).

A MANCOVA also revealed significant differences in the use of exclusionary discipline based on ethnicity. These differences were also deemed to be significant for suspensions, expulsions, and other disciplinary actions. Specifically, the average rate of each of these forms of exclusionary discipline was double-to-triple the rate for African American students as it was for White students (see Table 5). Ethnicity was found to account for 16.6% of the variability in disciplinary actions.

A MANCOVA revealed a signifi-

cant interaction between ethnicity and school typology when considering exclusionary discipline. Follow-up ANCOVAS revealed this interaction was significant when considering suspensions and other disciplinary actions, but not when considering expulsions. Examination of plots of the marginal means for suspensions (see Figure 1), expulsions (see Figure 2), and other disciplinary actions (see Figure 3) suggests that disproportionality is most pronounced in school typology 5 (**Major Urban—Very-high-poverty**) across all three discipline types. In addition, school typology 2 (Rural/agricultural— Low poverty, low to moderate median income) appears to have the most limited amount of disproportionality across all three disciplinary types, with a trend opposite to disproportionality emerging in expulsions.

## DISCUSSION

Although exclusionary discipline has been linked to a variety of negative student outcomes, it continues to be utilized. Interestingly, exclusionary discipline rates vary based on a variety of school-level and student-level factors. School typology and ethnicity—two of these factors—were explored in this investigation. Specifically, data from all Ohio school districts during the 2007-2008 school year was used to examine whether: (a) Significant differences exist in rates of exclusionary discipline between White and African American students when controlling for poverty; (b) Significant differences exist in rates of exclusionary discipline between six school typologies when controlling for poverty; and (c) An interaction ex-

ists between ethnicity and school typology when controlling for poverty.

Results indicate that significant differences do exist between the school typologies regarding exclusionary discipline rates when controlling for poverty. Most notably, major urban, very-high-poverty school districts consistently demonstrated higher mean disciplinary actions per 100 students than any other school typologies. In contrast, rural/agricultural districts with small student populations and low poverty consistently demonstrated the fewest mean disciplinary actions per 100 students. These general findings are consistent with prior research, however, they also contribute a new perspective. *Whereas previous investigations and their results may have been confounded by poverty, these results suggest there is something above and beyond poverty that explains disciplinary differences between school types.*

The data also revealed disciplinary disproportionality. Specifically, the mean rate of each type of exclusionary discipline for African American students was two-to-three times the rate for White students. This is not surprising given support for this premise over the decades; however, our research confirms that disproportionality in discipline continues to exist in the face of provisions aimed to curb it (IDEIA, 2004). This factor could be due to intensified requirements for schools to be accountable for student academic outcomes (e.g., NCLB, 2001), which in turn may increase the likelihood that school officials exclude students from school who do not conform to the teacher's perception of 'typical' behav-

ior (which itself is likely based on his or her own cultural experience) or who are failing to reach academic targets.

When interpreting these two sets of results, it is important to remember that researchers have found that disciplinary disproportionality is not sufficiently explained by an increased severity of problematic behaviors engaged in by African American students. Instead, African American students are more likely to receive harsher consequences for the same types of discipline infractions (Children’s Defense Fund, 1975; Skiba et al., 2002). In addition, although poverty does contribute to disproportionality, a strong ethnicity effect remains even after controlling for poverty (e.g., Skiba et al., 2002). Consequently, it appears

that additional mechanisms are contributing to disproportionality. Although these mechanisms are still debated, they may include bias, cultural incongruence or cross-cultural miscommunication between teachers and students, and student perceptions of unfairness in discipline. It is likely that the causative factors are complex and multi-dimensional.

Finally, an interaction between school typology and ethnicity was found, with disciplinary disproportionality rates differing by school typology. *Specifically, disproportionality was most noticeable in major urban, very-high-poverty school districts across all three disciplinary types.* It was least noticeable in rural/agricultural schools with small student populations and

low poverty; in fact, there were actually more expulsions per 100 White students than there were per 100 African American students in these latter schools types. The finding that major urban, very-high-poverty schools have the greatest disproportionality in discipline is inconsistent with findings from Rausch and Skiba (2004). One might assume that holding poverty constant would result in no significant differences between urban and other schools; however, this was clearly not the case. Nonetheless, this finding is perhaps unsurprising considering previous research demonstrating that schools that have the highest rates of suspensions also have the highest rates of disproportionality (Skiba et al., 2000). In addition, urban schools may be more

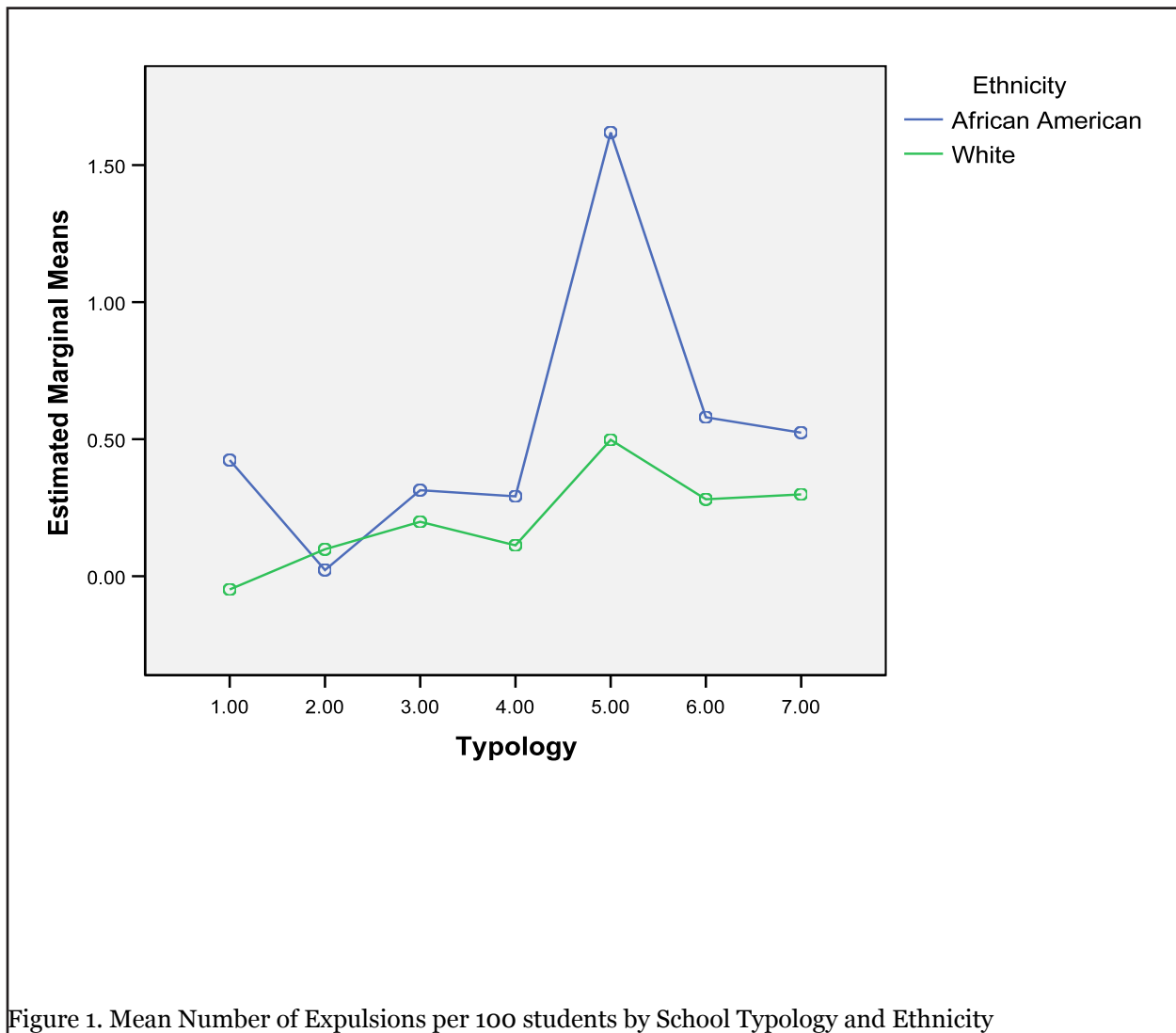
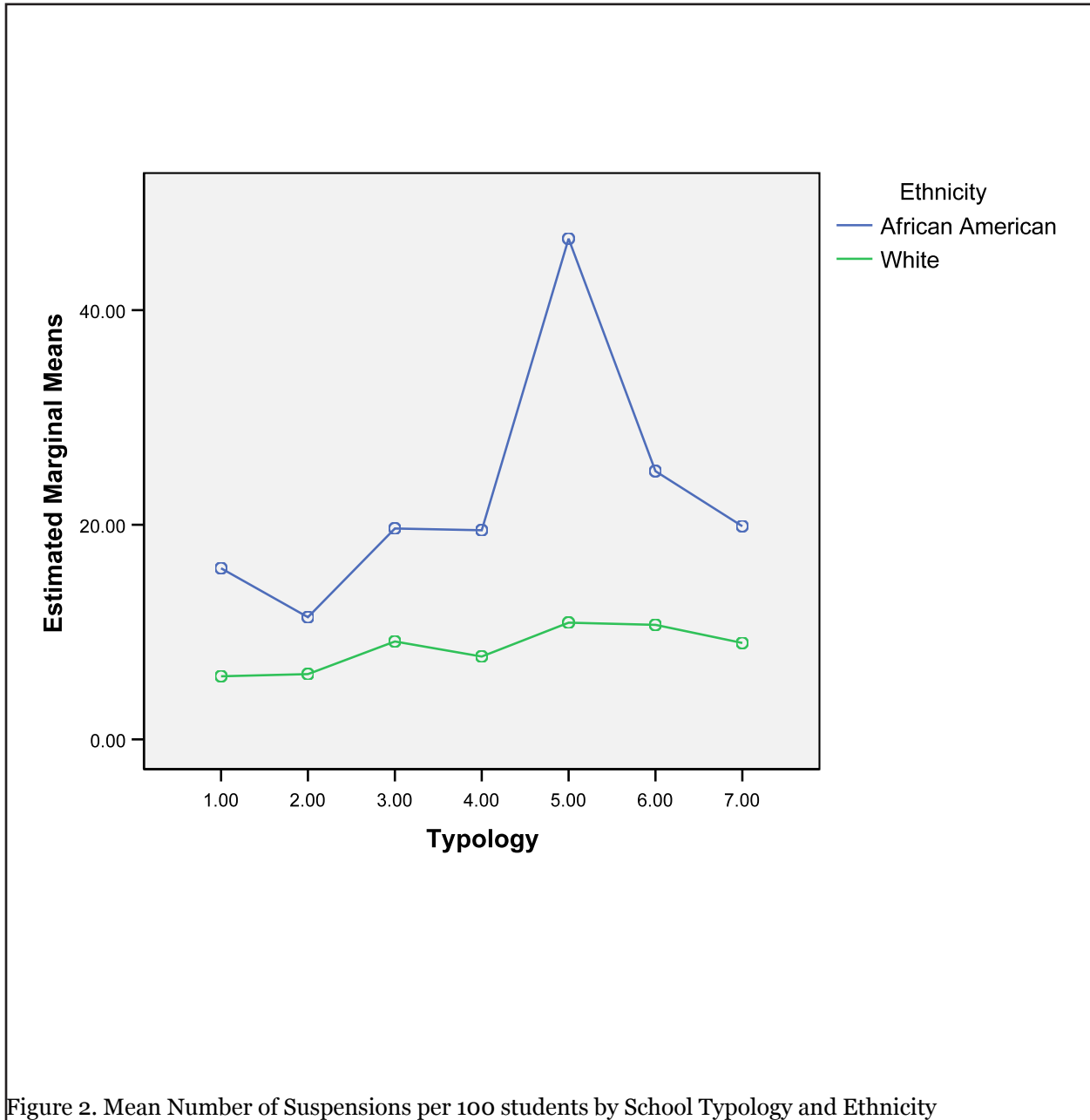
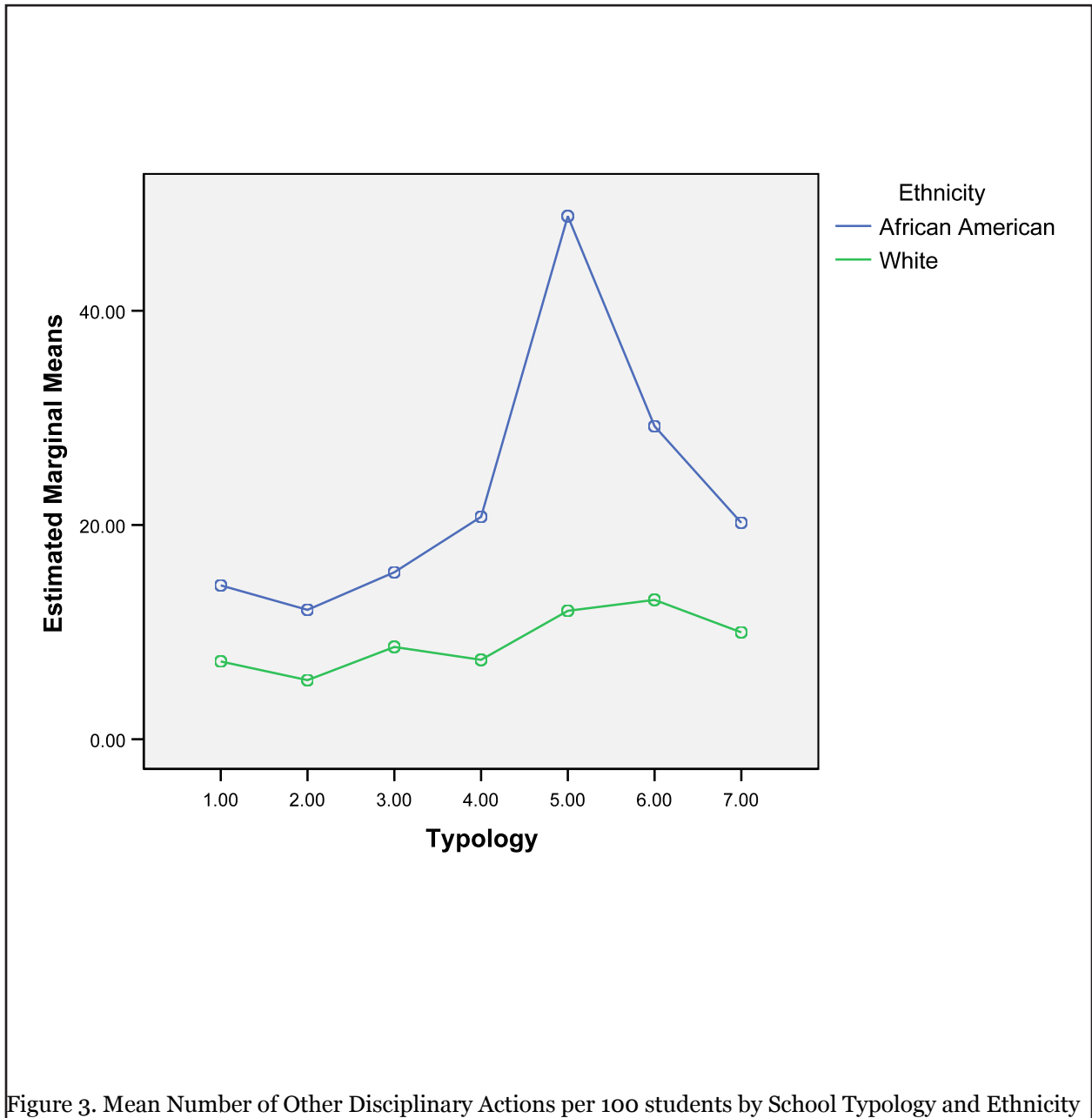


Figure 1. Mean Number of Expulsions per 100 students by School Typology and Ethnicity





likely to contend with factors less prevalent in other settings, including crime, substance abuse, and more limited resources. However, the presence of these contextual factors should not reinforce stereotypical notions that there is something unchangeable about urban schools that results in increased disproportionality. There are exceptions to the disciplinary findings just discussed. For example, some urban schools have used a Positive Behavior Support framework to substantially reduce the number of disciplinary referrals over time (e.g., Bohanon et al., 2006).

The current investigation has several limitations. The study relies on existing records and the degree to which the data was collected and recorded with fidelity is unknown. Although specific definitions for each type of disciplinary action exist, there are likely inconsistencies across districts in the application of such action. Also, because of the diversity of variables that comprise the school typology distinction (e.g., school size, population density, income, geographic locale), the relative contribution of each of these variables to the results is so far unknown. Additionally, the data were reported at the school district level rather than the student level, precluding the inclusion of additional variables (e.g., gender, student grade-level) and the use of more sophisticated analysis techniques. A failure to meet all the statistical assumptions of MANCOVA is also potentially limiting. However, a more robust test and a more stringent criterion for significance were used to minimize the impact of these violations. Finally, it is important to remember that the study examined disproportionality only as it applies to African American student populations. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to other populations (e.g., Latino students) without further research.

The results of this current investigation are important. Given the established negative outcomes and instructional time lost to exclusionary discipline, it is critical to identify factors that may be related to increased or decreased usage of these practices. Although the results support previous findings that urban schools are more

likely to use exclusionary discipline and that African American students are disproportionately represented as recipients of exclusionary discipline, they challenge previous research suggesting that suburban schools are more likely to exhibit significant disproportionality in exclusionary discipline. In light of our findings, several recommendations for schools appear warranted. We suggest that schools conduct an audit to determine the frequency and types of exclusionary discipline used for different student populations. In addition, our results suggest that some districts — most notably urban high poverty school districts — may need to consider alternative disciplinary practices, a recommendation also suggested by Brown and Payne (1992). Our results further suggest that disproportionality in discipline should not be an issue addressed at the aggregate level. While the state of Ohio evidences significant disproportionality; our results clearly suggest that some school typologies do not follow this trend, or follow the trend to a significantly lesser degree. We recommend that policies and programs to reduce disproportionality be considered at the building-level.

Several avenues for future research are warranted. Further research is needed to identify the unique contribution of each defining characteristic of Typology 5 (**Major Urban; very-high-poverty**) that make it more likely to utilize exclusionary discipline and disproportionately apply exclusionary discipline to African American students. Because there is likely variation within Typology 5, it would seem appropriate to study a random sample of urban high poverty districts to identify alterable protective factors that may decrease reliance on exclusionary discipline. These factors could then be targeted for intervention in a sample of urban schools with high reliance on exclusionary discipline and/or high disproportionality in discipline and the effects could be examined. Further research is also needed to determine the degree to which overall differences in exclusionary discipline rates explain differences in disciplinary disproportionality, and the degree to which dif-

ferences in discipline rates among the school typologies can be explained by the ethnic composition of the student population. Finally, it is important to explore other variables that are related to disproportionality using student-level data (i.e., number of disciplinary incidents per student rather than per 100 students). Access to student-level data would allow for the inclusion of more student-level variables (e.g., gender, grade-level) and sophisticated analytic techniques (e.g., Hierarchical Linear Modeling; Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002).

This study demonstrates that even after controlling for poverty, African American students are disproportionately represented as recipients of exclusionary discipline and that this occurs most frequently in major-urban, very-high-poverty schools. These data provide powerful evidence that the spirit of *equal access to education* is absent in a large sample of schools from a bellwether state. When children are removed from the educational setting, even for their seriously disruptive behavior, then they are unable to access the very forces that might prepare them to be more productive citizens.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>The policies articulated by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (2004) refer to racial/ethnic disproportionality in special education, primarily focusing on avoiding the inappropriate overidentification of minority students for special education services. However, discipline is also specifically addressed for these students in the regulations. For example, "States have a separate obligation, under 20 U.S.C. 1418(d) and 34 CFR §300.646, to collect and examine data to determine whether significant disproportionality based on race and ethnicity is occurring in the State and LEAs of the State with respect to... the incidence, duration, and type of disciplinary actions, including suspensions and expulsions. Where significant disproportionality is occurring, the State must provide for the review, and, if appropriate, revision of policies, procedures, and practices used in identification, placement, or discipline to ensure that they comply with the requirements of IDEA; require the LEA to publicly report on the revision of policies, practices, and procedures; and require the LEA to reserve 15 percent of its Part B funds to provide comprehensive coordinated early intervening services to serve children in the LEA, particularly, but not exclusively, children in those groups that were significantly over-identified."

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# Forged in the Crucibles of Difference: Building Discordant Communities

By Colette Cann, Vassar College; and Eric DeMeulenaere, Clark University

## ABSTRACT

*In this article, the authors present a narrative that illuminates alternative visions for connecting K12/college collaborations, exploring the potential for social justice work at the intersection of K12 teaching and academia. Told as a collective autoethnography in narrative form, they recount their decisions to teach in K12 spaces, while simultaneously pursuing their careers as professors. Their narrative serves as a reflexive analysis of the challenges faced as their K12 and college worlds collide. The authors find that teaching at the K12 level, alongside their college students, fosters powerful pedagogies. This autoethnography explores the possibilities and complexities at the intersections of personal, K12 teacher and academic identities.*

*Those of us who have been forged in the crucibles of difference -- those of us who are poor, who are lesbians, who are Black, who are older -- know that survival is not an academic skill. It is learning how to stand alone, unpopular and sometimes reviled, and how to make common cause with those others identified as outside the structures in order to define and seek a world in which we can all flourish. It is learning how to take our differences and make them strengths. For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change.*

—Audre Lorde (1984)

## INTRODUCTION

Audre Lorde's eloquent words pose a challenge to those of us committed to revolutionary, social change. To researchers, pedagogues and education activists, these words present the particular task of challenging entrenched assumptions of meritocracy and, instead, creating opportunities for empowering relationships, practices, and curricula in our K12 schools.

This challenge inspires us, the authors, to forge an identity for ourselves that resists the traditional academic role; instead, we take on the role of transformative intellectuals, working in our local K12 schools while conducting research and teaching at our respective colleges. Merging these two worlds, K12 classroom teaching and academia,

has implications for our identity as academics, and in turn, how our work is received and perceived. Embracing the stance of transformative intellectuals (Aronowitz and Giroux, 1985; Gramsci, 1971) presents a host of challenges working in higher education, public education, and other social organizations that resist transformations and maintain a system of rewards and consequences that maintain the status quo—including tenure which looms large for young academics (Berg, 2002; Burawoy, 2004; Pelias, 2003; Petras, 2001; Solórzano & Yosso, 2005).

Drawing on critical race theory, critical theory, Afrocentric feminist epistemology (Collins, 1991), and critical pedagogy, we present this feature article as a collective autoethnography that explores the complexities of embracing work beyond the ivory tower as central. In a dialogue set in Eric's family room, we explore the complications, challenges, successes and heartbreaks of our work as college professors and K12 teachers. While this is a narrative convention, it authentically reflects the many actual conversations that have occurred between the authors over the past two years, often times in one of our homes, in the car as we shuttle our kids to a snowy day activity or via cell phone while juggling other tasks. This rhetorical device offers a way for us to explore our identities as academics striving to be transformative. As well, it allows us to explore in a more intimate and authentic way how we work together in collaboration and solidar-

ity across our differences—Colette as a Black, single mother at a small liberal arts college and Eric as a White father and spouse, at a small university. This essay, then, also takes as its secondary charge to suggest how scholars of color might collaborate closely with White allies around issues of race in education. While Colette aligns her work with critical race theorists, together we work to develop community across our differences, building on Paulo Freire's concept of *praxis* defined as "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (1986, p. 36) Here we examine our work to build a space to theorize together about authentic K12/college collaborations that seek to center race and actively address racism in schools. Furthermore, this writing tool, more so than any other writing in which we have engaged as academics, best captures the important role of humor and love that permeates and sustains our professional relationship and friendship as we struggle in the formation of this new academic identity.

## METHODOLOGY: COLLECTIVE AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

Autoethnography operates within the interstices – and blurs the boundaries – between individual reflexivity (auto-), the transcription of collective human experience (-ethno), and writing as a form of inquiry (-graphy) that does not merely 'write up' the research but is itself the 'method of discovery.' (Denzin,

Lincoln & Rolling, 2006, p. 427)

This article is presented as an autoethnographical account of our efforts to claim an academic identity that captures the work that we feel politically and ethically compelled to accomplish. Though marginalized as a methodology, we find that autoethnography gives us license to examine this academic culture within which we are steeped. As a form of ethnography, autoethnography is appropriate to the study of cultural norms and expectations (as well as deviations). Yet, in autoethnographical work, the one written about is also the author of the ethnographic tale. Duncan (2004), in her study of her own pedagogical practice as a professor, writes about the unique location of the autoethnographer:

He or she, in fact, is the insider. The context is her or his own. Through autoethnography, those marginalized individuals who might typically have been the exotic subject of more traditional ethnographies have the chance to tell their own stories. (np)

An autoethnographic account such as the one we undertake here also serves the purpose of revealing alternatives to dominant discourses around academic identities (Okawa, 2002). Alternatively, it may unveil areas of discontent, for academics such as ourselves, where political, financial, and/or emotional support might be necessary (Stanley, 2006).

There are several forms that an autoethnography might take (Ellis, 2004). We create a personal narrative described by Ellis as follows:

Where social scientists view themselves as the phenomenon and write evocative stories specifically focused on their academic as well as their personal lives.... The primary purpose of personal narrative is to understand a self or some aspect of a life lived in a cultural context.... Readers... take a more active role as they are invited into the author's world, aroused to a feeling level about the events being described, and stimulated to use what they learn there to reflect on, understand, and cope with their own lives. (pp. 45-46)

More specifically, we conduct a "collective autoethnography," a term coined by Lapadat (2009). Lapadat, in her description of the collective autoethnographical work her graduate students conducted, writes that collective autoethnography allowed them, as a group of researchers, to analyze and interpret each other's work, while creating a space for class members to respond to that work. Here, we similarly write individual narratives based on critical moments in a narrative form that allows for response to each other. We define a critical moment as one when, in the course of our work, we feel compelled to make a decision between a traditional academic response and a critical academic response. We use these critical moments as evocative spaces to explore what it means to be a transformative intellectual.

Collective autoethnography is steeped in an Afrocentric feminist epistemology (Collins, 1991) – one that claims a research grounded in the concrete experience of those researched, engages others in sincere dialogue as a method of coming to understanding and acknowledges the moral, ethical, political and value-laden dimensions of research. This epistemological framework is consistent with our experience, guided by our political beliefs and is ethically in line with our conscience.

Collective autoethnography is also closely aligned with the narrative and counterstorytelling traditions in critical race theory. Autoethnography, as a reflective and reflexive process of telling, performing, constructing, analyzing and representing, provides a space to own one's stories and study them rigorously for what they have to offer others. An empowering methodology, autoethnography seeks to embrace experiences through a self-telling that does not use "voice-over" or ventriloquy (Fine, 1994). Indeed, it brings marginalized voices into spaces that have attempted to delegitimize them. Tierney (as cited by Holt, 2003) writes:

Autoethnography confronts dominant forms of representation and power in an attempt to reclaim, through self-reflective response, representational spaces that have marginalized those of us at the

borders. (Tierney, 1998, p. 66)

Similarly, Lawrence (1995) holds that narratives bring marginalized stories to the center, making them honored and valued in academia, and provide support to others with similar untold stories. Narrative serves the critical purpose of sustaining the souls and spirits of the writers and readers.

In this writing we incorporate a narrative counterstory into the collective autoethnography method by employing the narrative convention modeled by Solórzano and Yosso (2005) in which they use a fictional dialogue between a tenured Latino professor and his former student who is currently an untenured professor. They use this fictional dialogue to add the perspective of critical educators who like other marginalized groups may "be at the margins of higher education" (p. 72).

The use of fictional counterstories has long been valued in critical race theory going back to Derrick Bell's (1992) fictitious "Space Traders" story. Such story-telling is powerful because it is "honest and relentless" and, in its creation, enables the author to offer "the lie that tells the truth" (Dufresne, 2003, p. 14). In our case we've constructed a fictional scene in Eric's family room not to present a hypothetical scenario to discuss a point. Rather our scene serves as an analysis of those critical moments in which we felt compelled to a transformative academic response. As Dufresne goes on to say, we care little that it happened exactly that way; rather we are interested in "telling the truth, not telling the facts" (ibid).

In writing about the power of stories, Delgado (2000) asserts that stories can have both community building functions as well as destructive functions. "Stories build consensus, a common culture of shared understandings, and a deeper, more vital ethics," writes Delgado (2000), "but stories... can (also) show... when it is time to reallocate power" (pp. 60-61).

In these tentative first steps as professors, we communicated with each other regularly at these critical moments. Some stories were too painful to tell immediately and would be told nonchalantly weeks later as if unim-

portant. Other stories were so painful that they erupted before we could censor ourselves. As we began to conduct research for this paper, together we culled these critical moments – often reminding each other of moments that we had forgotten. As themes evolved from this sharing, we narrowed on specific critical and evocative moments that best captured the themes arising from these experiences.

We used a method called memory-work to conduct this research. This involved recalling these critical moments, sharing them again with each other, sharpening the details of the story and searching for their narrative truth. Each researcher had heard the stories on multiple occasions, also reading them in written, narrative form. Citing the work of Australian researcher Frigga Haug, Lapadat (2009) described memory-work as a feminist methodology with an approach that: grounds theory in collectively recollected experience, is consensual and nonhierarchical, and has an explicit aim of empowering the coresearchers.... (It) involves collectively analyzing memories written out by group members. Each coresearcher is both research subject and object. Common elements emerge during subsequent analysis and appraisal because members of the collective share a social context and appropriate from it depending on its constraints and affordances (p. 960).

Lapadat contends that memory-work, by *definition*, is causal and interpretive in the telling of stories because the storyteller begins the analytical process in even the choice of story to tell, how to tell it, and the moments and details to include in the story. Thus, we reject claims to objectivity, securely claiming a space that fits logically within the autoethnographic tradition.

### A COLLECTIVE AUTOETHNOGRAPHY: WORKING AT THE INTERSECTION

The following conversation picks up at the end of a long, but joyous day. Colette and her 3-year-old daughter are in Worcester visiting Eric's family. Her daughter, ecstatic to see Eric's

daughters, was "on 10" all day – trying to keep up with the older girls. They'd played Guitar Hero in the morning (a contentious way to start the day with two guitars and three superstars in the making) and visited the Children's Museum in the afternoon. Colette's daughter had been too excited to nap and so, finally, at 7 o'clock, fell asleep.

All of the girls had now been in bed for an hour and the cleaning of the house was almost complete. Eric's partner of almost a decade had headed upstairs to do some work with the warning, "Don't stay up too late talking. You two aren't as young as you used to be. There isn't enough caffeine in the world to get you through a day with three girls under 10."

Colette is now half in the freezer looking for the vanilla ice cream she knows will be there. "You want some ice cream?" she asks over her shoulder to Eric.

"No, no, no. Some of us have to worry about the middle age stomach coming on," replies Eric lifting his feet up onto the coffee table and patting his stomach.

"Ha! I gave up on chasing the flat belly. My daughter gave me the wondrous gift of an excusable pooch," grins Colette.

"Yet another reason to wish that men could have babies."

"A secret desire of men that I don't know about?"

"Hurry and get your ice cream so we can chat before we start to nod off," Eric replies, ignoring her comment. Colette grabs a spoon out of the drawer and starts eating her ice cream as she heads into the den.

"Oh, but can you bring me a beer?" Eric asks.

"You have seriously lost your mind! You can get your own beer! I asked you if you wanted something while I was in the kitchen. Now, it'd be like me serving you if I went back into the kitchen to get the beer," argues Colette as she plops down onto the couch with a bowl of ice cream.

"You know I'd get you one if the situation were reversed!" Eric unfolds his tall 6 foot 3 inch frame off the couch knowing that, regardless of his sighs, Colette isn't about to get up again to get him a beer. "You're wrong and

you know it." He grabs a beer out of the fridge and comes back to the couch saying, "When I've finished this beer, that's it. We've got to get to bed."

"I hear you," replies Colette. "We've been talking all day in snippets between the giggles and tantrums of the girls. I know I shouldn't be surprised, but we have really figured out how to double task an academic conversation and load three kids into carseats with snacks. We've actually covered a lot of ground already in our thinking about what it means to be a transformative intellectual.<sup>1</sup> I really want to get to the core of the work that we're both doing this year – the work that defines what I think it means to be a transformative academic doing activist work."

"Ah, yes, our choice to teach simultaneously at the K12 and college levels!"

"Right! I don't want to belittle or underestimate the power of educational research to address racial injustice and to create social change in schools," Colette continues. "And I obviously think the teaching we do at the college level has this same potential. But I think the most important aspect of our work as transformative academics is our engagement in activist work in public schools as educators. In this work we are confronting race- and class-based inequities directly, and this work informs our research and college teaching. Building on Freire's work, this is the *praxis* of transformative intellectuals or a transformative praxis."

"Delgado & Stefancic (2000) ask of legal scholars: 'Should a lawyer advocating on behalf of a particular community live there? Or learn another language if it is the dominant one in that community...? How much energy should one devote to litigation and how much to street marches, political organizing, and other forms of non-legal work' (p. 591)? These are profound questions not only for lawyers working for social justice, but for academics working for change in the educational realities of youth of color."

"Burawoy (2004) asks the same questions," responds Eric. "What should be our involvement in the world beyond the academy? Recognizing we are part of the world we study, we must take some stance with respect to

that world. To fail to do so is to take a stance by default' (p 1606)."

"Dixson and Rousseau (2006) conclude the introduction to their edited work by emphasizing one of the key tenets of critical race theory – a call to action toward a more racially just world. They argue that many theorists in education using a critical race theory framework have translated this into policy recommendations whose impact isn't always measurable and clear."

"Yes, this praxis is hugely important in our work. We cannot simply advocate for racial and social justice from the podium or the computer, we must be out in the streets fighting for it," reflects Eric.

"Exactly. And this activist work not only legitimates what we say at the podium or computer, it also grounds and informs it. This is the praxis of a transformative intellectual. In thinking about praxis, it helps us to rethink the traditional academic identity. For example, Stovall (2006) taught as both a professor at the college level and a teacher of high school students in a program that prepares recent college admits for their first year in college. In this program, he taught a course that used critical race theory as a framework for their analysis of contemporary media. He engaged in a transformative praxis with the act of teaching youth to dismantle dominant narratives about race, equity and justice. But it is also a transformative praxis as we're defining it now in that he is teaching at the K12 level to change opportunities for youth of color while he remains a researcher and professor at the college level pursuing the same goal."

"So you want to frame our work that transgresses the boundaries of the academy into activist work in schools as transformative praxis?"

Colette thinks for a moment. "Well, I think I want to at least use it as a starting point. What is difficult about doing this work is that there isn't a whole lot written about professors who take this path. And it is difficult work to take on anew without the guidance of those who have been doing it for awhile."

"Agreed! This has not been an easy year for me. My life partner wonders why I'm taking on this extra respon-

sibility teaching a high school course, when it's not going to help with getting tenure."

"Well, I think there are very real challenges with time – the time to teach at the K12 level comes from somewhere. And if our colleges are not going to recognize this work as valuable, then the time comes from our research, writing or occasionally, our family time. And I know, for both of us, we're unlikely to take it from our family time!"

"I think we'd both like to think we aren't taking it from family time. But I know that those nights when we were working to get out that last grant last fall, we were working late into the night after my girls had gone to bed. And while I was around the next day for my family, I was tired. And that, most definitely, takes a toll from the *quality* of my time with my family.

"Staying organized and healthy in this process is also difficult." Wincing, Eric continues, "Once I forgot to bring my lesson plans for my high school class as I was hurrying out of the office at my University. I got to the high school, realized that I'd left them and had to 'wing it'. Not something that you want to do ever—and something I preach to my pre-service teachers to *never* do. And here I am, not walking my talk. *And* on a day when some of my pre-service teachers came to observe me teaching."

"Ouch! I remember you telling me about that. Your pre-service teachers were still impressed with the job you did!"

"Or so they said. But you and I both know how mediocrity passes for greatness in so many urban schools." Eric sits up, removes his feet from the coffee table and places his now empty bottle on a coaster. Previous promises to head to bed after finishing his beer are long forgotten. Sighing, he leans back again, "Either way, I was exhausted by the end of the day and wasn't even sure my efforts had been worthwhile."

"For me, teaching in this after school program has been exhausting – there's no two ways about it. On top of my other 'sanctioned' roles as a first year professor – teaching, holding office hours, going to meetings, answering emails – I also have to try to grab some food. My

time is so short; I don't even have time to eat fast food in the car. I eat as I run into the school building, nodding to security, weaving in and out of students heading the other direction."

"You love the excuse to eat fast food – I've seen you eat it twice this trip and you've only been here three days," says Eric smiling. "Seriously, though, despite the challenges to time that we both seem to face, there's another challenge that came up for me repeatedly last year. Feeling always vulnerable and visible. Pre-service teachers coming to observe me teach at the high school level and my high school students watching me interact with the pre-service teachers."

"Yes! Constantly and everywhere vulnerable and visible. You know as well as I do that there are days in the classroom that don't go as well as you'd hope. In part, that's what makes K12 classrooms such a dynamic and exciting place to work. I leave the classroom everyday thinking about how I can become better at my vocation. I'm constantly challenged by how to improve my practice so as to increase learning opportunities for youth. The reality of this work, though, is that you make mistakes."

"Yes, but that's why reflection is such important part of this work," Eric reminds her.

Mildly acknowledging Eric's interruption, Colette continues, "Yes, yes, yes. But when my college students see me make a mistake in the classroom, they don't always get to witness the reflection. I can't take time out of our college class to constantly reflect on what happened at the middle school that day. The logistics are complicated. Here's an example. I missed a week of the after school program because I needed to present a paper at a conference. In some ways, it was a much needed break escaping *to* academia. I flew to sunny California to this conference. I was well-rested, eating healthier, spending time with my family and engaging in deep conversations with colleagues interested in similar topics."

"Sounds nice," Eric muses, "that's how I felt when I left full-time teaching for graduate school."

"But when I returned," Colette says,

shaking her head, “I felt disoriented. The program had run for a week in my absence while I had been otherwise engaged in academia. Indeed, when I returned, I felt off my game.”

“Alright, but you had to know it would be like that. You’ve been doing this long enough to know that it’s hard coming back from an absence.”

“I know. I know. That’s why when I was teaching high school math, I never missed a day of school. But now, balancing two responsibilities, I cannot always control my schedule in a way that allows me to be present all the time.

“Anyway, when I got back, I couldn’t quite get back into the K12 space. We open the after school program with a community circle that often requires that I occupy a central space for a brief period of time. It is a very visible stage with the eyes of the middle school students and tutors on you. I had been gone for awhile and the middle school students had been acting out a bit – pushing the limits in predictable ways. I struggled to acknowledge this, re-set high expectations and move on.”

“We all struggle in the classroom as events in our personal lives sometimes seep into our ability to fully inhabit our teaching identities. Here, your responsibilities to academia caused you to struggle a bit. Why is this stressing you out?” asks Eric.

“But my college students don’t expect me to struggle. They don’t want to see me struggle. Yet, I did struggle. Had it not been so public, had I not been so visible, I might have been able to transition back into the role smoothly. What increased my visibility was the fact that many of the college tutors had been or presently were students in my educational course that semester. Thus, my pedagogy was on stage, just as much as my teaching identity. How would I re-establish ‘classroom discipline’? They were viewing my actions through the lenses of educational theory and their own ‘failed’ attempts to establish respectful relationships with students.

“Anyway, I was anxious; tutors had complained that while I was gone, the students were less ‘on point’ – a prevalent problem when the program had been run in years prior by college stu-

dents. Racism inserted itself into the rationalization of behavior in ways that were implied and coded. So I was struggling to re-enter my K12 teacher identity and struggling against racialized perceptions of our youth – all on the stage of our community circle.” She pauses, seemingly to collect another thought, but remains in silence. Eric waits, wary of interrupting again.

After a moment, he cautiously picks up the thread of the conversation, “This work of living in the Borderlands is difficult. Not without precedent, likely – but surely, not shared often. You are finding your way through a new space where your worlds collide, sometimes catastrophically and other times, I assure you, creatively. You were telling me the other day how excited you were about a new research project that will result from your work at both the college and the middle school – a creative collision!”

“Yeah,” notes Colette quietly. “I hear what you’re saying. I think I’m still too involved to be able to step back. But, yes, I am excited about the research – just tired right now.”

Changing gears and shaking her head slightly, she continues, “Tell me how your year at the high school is going. I have been inspired by your decision to co-teach a high school course this year. You’re teaching with your former credential students, right?”

“Well not exactly. I am co-teaching with two teachers who were in a critical inquiry group with me the year before. So I had worked with and mentored them. We explored what it means to be White teachers engaging in critical pedagogy in the classroom. After a year of difficult conversations and struggles in the classroom, they were like, ‘Let’s do this for real. Let’s create a class based on critical pedagogy that we all co-teach.’ They challenged me to live my words and co-teach with them. With a bit of reservation, I don’t mind admitting, I accepted this challenge to re-enter the K12 space authentically as a classroom teacher.

“Talk about visibility,” Eric continues. “I also have my current teaching credential students coming in to do their student-teaching and observations in our classroom. It is really hard

to try to wear so many hats—teaching and learning together with college students, high school youth, and my co-teachers. But it has also been powerful for me. I have been so frustrated teaching at a predominantly White college because so many of my ‘liberal’ White students really don’t get it; while I believe that it is my responsibility to speak to whiteness, without the voices of students of color challenging White students in class, our conversations move slowly and, sometimes, without passion. They resist in ways that I understand but cannot always access. The quality of their learning is hurt by the fact that our conversations on race and racism, not to mention class, are devoid of the voices of the oppressed. One of the most powerful things I am involved with this year is co-teaching that high school class. I set up a structure where the high school students stay after school once a week to collaborate with undergraduate students in a first year seminar to develop an art exhibition about voice and agency in the community. The goal is to get them to interact around art and see how different folks think about things.”

“That sounds amazing! It sort of builds on the work you were doing in your teaching years ago as a graduate student – having your undergraduates do collaborative work with K12 students. So how did you structure it specifically?” Colette asks over her shoulder as she walked to the kitchen to grab a pen and some paper to jot down notes.

“The first couple of meetings we placed them in groups of three to four and sent them out into the community with cameras.”

“In these groups, were high school students matched with college students?”

“Absolutely – so they could get different views on the neighborhood that the University resides in and the high schools students live in. You see, their task was to capture images that, for them, best represent the terms self, home, community and dreams. Some crazy stuff jumped off right from the beginning. One of the first groups that went out had a high school student who had been involved in a local gang. The

two college students, when they started out, wanted to go across the street from the college to a little market to get something to drink. That meant crossing a gang boundary for the high school kid. He sort of hesitated and said that he didn't think that would be a good idea—but he never told them why. It was the middle of the day and the college kids were confused and were like, 'Don't sweat it, nothing's gonna happen.' My high school student still was hesitant, but he allowed them to convince him to go across the street to buy some sodas. Well, as soon as they crossed the street and began to approach the store, a large group of kids from the rival gang began to approach them.

"What?!"

"Yeah, it was crazy. The high school student was ready to stay and fight even though he was heavily outnumbered. The college students were terrified. They convinced him to cut out and they all went into a nearby campus building. The kids from the rival gang ended up surrounding the building and called more folks in. The high school student called my co-teacher who somehow was able to drive up to a back door of the building to get him away safely."

"So I want to know what your college students thought! How did they handle that? To my way of thinking, they were responsible for what went down, more so than anyone else involved. Their smugness resulted from a sense of safety which, to me, was rooted in White privilege. Their failure to acknowledge someone else's reality and really try to understand why your high school student was hesitating almost cost him his life."

"I am not sure I agree with that. I mean, I think it is too simplistic to simply lay the blame on them simply as individuals. Sure they were totally clueless. They had just arrived on Clark's campus from their safe suburban homes a month earlier. They were pretty freaked out. But I think there are larger systems of white supremacy at play here that structure inequality and shape the discourse on what knowledge and whose knowledge is valued. For example, I have been fighting behind closed doors, where white

privilege thrives, to have our university financially support folks of color from the local community who would like to pursue a teaching credential at our University. We currently pay for credentials for recent graduates (primarily White, middle and upper income kids). They get a full scholarship to train as a teacher. But no one wants to recognize this as privileging whiteness. Until the institutional structures change – and I do continue to fight this battle – we will continue to reproduce the same White teachers in Black and Brown educational spaces. This is just one example of what I believe is a structurally racist policy.

"At another level there is my high school student who knew better than to cross the street. He had not been on that side of Main Street in almost four years. He clearly had the knowledge and insight that everyone should have been listening to. I mean, the college students walk across the gang turf boundaries all the time oblivious to the existence of those boundaries; it's a continuing manifestation of white privilege. Yet my high school student was somehow intimidated by these college kids who were only a year older and had no real 'street smarts' at all. I mean, he is a leader in the school, was a leader in his gang at one point, and here he was intimidated by a couple of college students he had just met because he didn't feel comfortable explaining the reasons behind his hesitations.

"Maybe there were things stated or insinuated that made him feel intimidated to use his knowledge. But I think it is bigger than this single social interaction. There is a larger discourse that is tied to dominant structures of white supremacy and capitalism that determines what knowledges and whose knowledges are valuable in our society that led not only the college students to think their perspective was more important than his, but it also led my high school student to think this. It somehow made him willing to cross a road he had not crossed in four years. There is something powerful going on here that is both tied to this moment, but also bigger than that moment."

"It was a powerful crossing of borders in more ways than one."

"You could say that. Yet, despite this experience, I could not get my high school students to see that they had something to add to our weekly meetings. They remained relatively silent in their interactions with the college students. It really taught me a lot about how much work is needed to get my high school students to believe in themselves and the importance of their voice. I am sure I could have done a lot more—I know I made a lot of mistakes."

"The naïve thing to say and, perhaps what your White college students thought," suggests Colette, "is that they didn't have anything to say."

"No, not at all. After almost every weekly meeting with the college students at least one of the high school students would be pissed off about something one of the college students had said at the meeting. I'd be like, 'Why didn't you say anything?' One time we all watched a documentary called, 'A.K.A Don Bonus' in which a Cambodian immigrant student basically videotaped his senior year. It shows him cheating on a high school exam, cutting class, interacting with his family, and dealing with violence in his project apartment. In the end, he barely graduates from high school, his mom can't come to his graduation because it is on the same day as his brother's sentencing hearing in juvenile hall for gun possession. The kid, Sokly 'Don Bonus' Ny, is revealed to be this smart, sweet and deeply sensitive kid and his story is very captivating and compelling."

"I think I have seen that—was the film set in San Francisco?"

"Yeah," replies Eric, "he lived in Sunnydale Projects at the beginning and then moved to a tiny apartment with his whole family into the Tenderloin. He went to one of the better high schools in San Francisco. Anyway, after the class, my co-teacher asks the group of college and high school students, 'So is Don Bonus smart? Should he be admitted to Clark?' The high school students stayed quiet, but the college students dutifully responded, 'Maybe he wouldn't have wanted to go to college.' 'I am not sure he would like college.' 'I don't think he would have the discipline needed to go to college.'

I mean it would suck for him to be admitted and then fail out.”

“A great question for your co-teacher to ask!” Colette jumps in. “It really forces your college students to think about whether Don Bonus is as smart as they are or, at the very least, deserving of the type of education they have. Their responses are typical attempts to rationalize away the opportunities of other youth. Reminds me a bit of Bell’s Space Traders – this sympathizing away of other folks’ opportunities as if you have the right to do so. ‘For the sake of the planet, for the sake of the majority or for the sake of the Black and Brown youth themselves, we’re not going to let them have the same opportunities as we do,’ seems to be their sentiment. How did your high school students respond?”

“They didn’t offer many responses to this question, but the next day before class, one of the high school students was upset with the Clark students. Actually, he became upset at the entire college system. He identified strongly with Sokly Ny and he was angry because he felt that the college students dismissed *his* own college ambitions. I remember him being like, ‘I think everyone should get a chance to go to college and try to make it there. This system is so screwed up.’ He had pretty much messed up through high school, getting horrible grades. Now as a result of this course, he was really re-thinking his future and wanted to go to college. He was smart and knew he could go and do well in Clark, but he also knew his past grades would prevent him from being accepted. He was so filled with rage. I was like, ‘Why didn’t you say anything yesterday to the group?’ ‘I don’t know, I didn’t know what to say...’

“I kept sensing this rage building in my high school students. I didn’t have a lot of interaction with the college students – they were not in my class, but rather being taught by a colleague who was cooperating with us– but my sense was that the college students didn’t have a sense of how many of the high school students were feeling.”

“Was there any space for them to enjoy the collaboration?” asks Colette. “Were the high school students angry all the time?”

“No, there was a lot of fun and laughing. I guess I am only sharing one side of the story. There were many really creative and touching moments. The rage really came at times when my high school students felt that they didn’t have the words or the right to challenge the ‘more educated’ college students. This led them to silence themselves. In part it was directed towards some of the things the college students would innocently say, but it was also a result of their own frustrations with themselves for remaining silent, I think. But, I kept pushing them to speak up.”

“Did you try to diminish some of the status difference between the two groups? I mean, it’s clear that part of the issue was that the college students were framed as smarter than the high school students simply because they had already gotten into college. Did you create opportunities for them to have authentic conversations around something academic where the college students weren’t the experts?”

“Hmmm? See this is why we need to figure out a way to work on the same campus—I need you to push my thinking in these ways. We did have the high school students share their memoirs and the college students share their college statements. The high school memoirs were an assignment from class that resulted from their reading of Jimmy Santiago Baca’s *A Place to Stand* about a young Latino who is silenced by his own illiteracy. After landing in jail, he finally gets his voice and becomes a poet and articulate writer. These were beautifully written and powerful pieces; so I had them share these memoirs with the college students in exchange for reading the college student statements.”

“Kind of a way for them to get to know each other through their written pieces?”

“Exactly! Well, at least that was what I was attempting to do. But, even then, I inadvertently set the high school students up to be marginalized. The college student statements were polished pieces, already submitted and considered successful writing pieces (since they’d been admitted to college already). The high school students’

memoirs were ‘pieces in progress’ and so were presented as drafts. The college students were asked to give feedback on the memoirs which led to the college students being seen as helpers for the high school students.”

“Oh! Reinforcing that status difference. You do need my help!”

“Anyway,” Eric pauses to roll his eyes, “in one pairing, one of the college students began to read one of the high school student’s memoir. Half-way into it, the college-student remarked something like, ‘Wow, this is much better than I expected.’ The high school student didn’t say anything at the time, but the next day she came up to me upset because she was like, ‘She is so ignorant, expecting that I don’t know how to write.’”

“This is so much for your high school youth to take on alone. How are you facilitating, providing support for them and challenging the White college students? Where are you in this?”

“In this instance, I stepped in to facilitate a conversation between the high school and college student. I was constantly looking for ‘teachable moments’ like this when we could use a moment of conflict to get at deeper issues of race and racism at play.”

“Was this the only time you stepped in?”

“No, as I got more sure in the role I would play, I interrupted more, but I probably should have taken a stronger facilitator role. However, eventually the tension rose to one of those critical moments when all was laid bare and there was no turning back to that ‘polite’ space of minimal confrontation.”

“Wait, wait, wait – I’m going to need more ice cream for this. This sounds like it’s going to blow-up,” Colette says as she runs to the kitchen to scoop out more ice cream. “Do you want another beer while I’m in here? Oh wait. You said that was your last one for the night. When you finished the beer, we’d finish our conversation... at least for tonight.”

Eric pushes himself out of the couch he’d been deeply embedded in and joins Colette in the kitchen. Looking at the clock on the oven, Eric is surprised at the late hour. “Oh, man! Look what time it is! We have to rise and shine tomorrow to take the kids out to the park

as promised.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about – I promised to get up early to make pancakes with the girls while you two sleep in. Our girls will be waking me up before the sun rises! But I’ve got to hear the rest of your story. One more beer and that’s the last story for the night.”

“Okay, Okay. It was about a month before the end of the semester. We were planning an art exhibit to display the masks, artist books and the photographs as a collaboration between the high school and college students. For the photographs we had taken about 500 pictures. The plan was that a group made up of some of the college students and some of the high school students would work with a professional photographer to select about a hundred photos that capture our sense of community and home. Of these hundred, the entire group would narrow it down to fifty for the photograph exhibition. However, due to some drama at the high school, all after school activities were canceled the Wednesday when we were going to form the initial selection team. So, only the college students went with the photographer to select photos. The deadline we had to get them printed meant we couldn’t delay it another week. The next week, then, we met as a large group to select 50 photographs from the 100 chosen by only the group of college students.”

With her eyes and nose scrunched in anticipation of what was coming, Colette exclaims, “Oh no! What a setup—I can see where this is going.”

“Yeah, so a few of the college students got up at the meeting along with the professional photographer and started to talk about each photograph one at a time as they flashed the photograph across a large projection screen. The college students from the selection group would share why they liked a photo. The professional photographer and his assistant talked about the composition of the photographs. It begins initially with everyone being asked to raise their hand if they want the image in the show or not. Initially, there is only limited and rather pleasant discussion before the vote on any particular photograph.”

“Initially,” sighs Colette while sitting forward on the couch, absent-mindedly eating her ice cream.

“Well, a small group of the high school students got more and more vocal with each passing slide. Finally, one of them said, ‘These photos are too nice of the neighborhood. That’s not the Main South I know!’ Another exclaimed, ‘We have two different visions. You all,’ meaning the college students, ‘see the neighborhood different than us.’ Some of the high school students kept asking who took each picture. The discussion began to devolve and it was hard to reach any real conclusion about what to do.”

“Ha!” cries Colette as she slams her ice cream mug on the coffee table in her enthusiasm, then picks it up to see if she left a water ring on the coffee table. She rubs the place where the mug had sat briefly and then runs to put the mug in the sink. From the kitchen, she shouts, “They finally found their voices! It sounds like on the surface it seemed like a debate about the photographs. But really, it was about something that had been simmering all semester!”

“The real, albeit unspoken issue, was who really has the authority to say what best represents the community—the high school students who lived their entire lives in Main South or the college students who are recent, seasonal visitors? In the end it was about the politics of representation. Some of the high school students who finally unleashed their voices said some things that were hurtful.”

“Ah! Thus, silencing the college students in return?”

“Well, many of the college students felt that their perspectives were being dismissed. But the high school students asserted that since they had grown up and struggled to survive in this community that they knew it in a way that was more authentic than the college students who had just arrived and were not really ‘of’ the community.”

“Well said! Indeed, their voice has more legitimacy than the college kids!”

“One high school student said that they should be the ones who choose the photos and the college students could offer their perspective or feedback to

try to sway the decision. In defense, several of the college students articulated a position that indicated that, although they had a different perspective on the community, that it was just as legitimate. They also argued that the point of this art exhibition was to showcase the collaboration across differences and excluding from the choosing was not collaborative.”

Colette points out, “But selecting the photographs had not been collaborative. Yet, they went forward with that. For reasons connected to age, race, and location, the high school students had been unable to participate in the empowering act of choosing the initial set of photographs.”

“Good point. I wonder how it would have all went down if the high school students selected the hundred and then they collaboratively selected the fifty. I think that is what the one student was advocating—I am sure the college students would have felt that was unfair, yet the de facto reality was unfair and no one really conceded that. It was merely viewed as circumstantial. The debate raged on for a while and we were clearly not completing the task at hand to choose fifty pictures. The conflict was eventually ended when one of the high school students said that everyone should just pick one photo and explain why they chose it. People left frustrated and hurt. The whole debate seemed to divide the high school students from the college students. In the end the high school students continued to assert their voice by formally naming the exhibition, ‘Us and Them.’”

“I love it!” exclaims Colette.

“I did too – they were willing to name the actual underlying issue. They looked at it directly and called it by name. The college students, of course, were not there yet and the title itself became hotly debated and contentious. A lot of people were saddened by the conflict. I was probably the only one that felt good about it. I was like, ‘Yes, finally!’ It was the first time that there was intense passion in the conversation in which people were really trying to speak their truth to each other across the differences. The college students had felt that the collaboration had been going smoothly throughout the semes-



ter and were taken aback and saddened by the hostility and conflict that occurred which they felt had undermined the progress. I felt like it was really the beginning of progress, the beginning of authentic dialogue. The prior pleasantness of the interactions and lack of conflict really hid the underlying frustrations that had been hidden by the general silence of the high school students. Now they were struggling with what the community really was and how it should be represented. This is messy and contentious stuff. Finally, college students could see what the high school students, who had been silenced for so long, really thought, and the high school students began to find their voices. I felt the learning had really begun."

Colette sits back, smiling, feeling like she had just finished a ten-course meal. "I feel inexplicably content by that outcome. It perfectly captures both the challenges and potential for transformative praxis. The K12 and college students act as both learners and teachers in a way that they could not gain from textbooks or lectures alone. And your role of facilitating all this was indispensable. As their high school teacher, you knew the high school students well. You were already doing this work of teaching at the K12 and college levels simultaneously. Yet, you add this other layer, connecting your work with K12 students, college student and pre-service teachers together. Layer upon layer upon layer."

"It was really a powerful exchange for me, and I hope for my students.."

Colette smiles as she thinks about Eric's work this semester. A yawn catches her off guard and she stands up to stretch. As she begins to say something in response, she looks over to Eric who is now once again deep in the couch staring off – no doubt thinking back to the photography show. So, instead, Colette leans over to grab his empty beer bottle off the coffee table and says, "I'll get this for you before I head up to bed." She knows he's going to climb the stairs to his office to grade "just a few more papers" before turning in for the night.

Looking back over her shoulder as she leaves the kitchen, she sees him lean forward, head in his hands, shak-

ing his head. She turns to head upstairs, her thoughts already turned to a morning of giggling girls and Mickey Mouse shaped pancakes...

### DISCUSSION: DISMANTLING THE MASTER'S HOUSE THROUGH DISCORDANT COMMUNITIES

In this section, we engage with this narrative to explore the challenges and opportunities such border-crossing offers. The private colleges where we teach and the nearby urban schools in which we work present contrasting racialized (and socio-economic) contexts. Our work with our students at the K12 and college levels is similarly about developing what we term "a discordant community"<sup>2</sup> – a community based on difference that serves to challenge assumptions and raise critical (racial) consciousness so that individuals can work together across differences for greater social justice. It is, thus, a theory that views critique as a form of engagement that promotes individual and community growth, albeit often painful growth, so that we can achieve better social, psychological and material outcomes for us all. How do the youths' identities and backgrounds, both the high school and the college students, affect these border crossings? How do our personal and professional identities affect our work in each of these contexts? How can our own relationship marked by difference, yet held together by love for each other and focus on our social justice work in schools, embrace conflict, critique, and challenge as well as solidarity, support, and celebration? In this narrative form that is new to us, we have attempted to analyze our data – those concrete, critical moments when we made choices to act as transformative intellectuals, moving between and within racialized classroom spaces. Here, we seek to build theory that can conceptualize this work across difference: across student communities, across work sites, and across race.

Given the nature of white supremacy, we must first recognize that most of the benefits of developing discordant communities accrue to the White people engaged in the process. People

of color in the US, particularly in US schools, routinely experience and are affected by racism. They have little choice but to develop a "double consciousness" as they progress through this landscape – both critiquing and embracing institutions of possibility in society, both seeing the world through the eyes of White folks and people of color (DuBois, 1969; Matsuda, 1995).

White folks, by contrast, are rarely forced to recognize the world from the perspective of people of color. Delgado (1996), in his eleventh chronicle, argues that there is no basis for empathic action across race for White folks as the experiences of a people historically subjugated run counter to the experiences of the racially dominant group. He notes, "persons of radically different background and race cannot be made vicariously to identify with [people of color] to any significant extent..." (pp. 514-615).

### Across Campuses: The Work of High School and College Students in Discordant Communities

In our narrative, one of the high school students working with Eric was encouraged to cross a street, a gang boundary line, that he had not crossed in four years. This student was also very clear that for the college students this boundary was invisible. When the high school student tried to persuade his group to not go across the street, he was asking the college students to empathize and view the world through the eyes. However, the college students resisted his warning and placed the high school student in danger. Barbara Flagg (1997) refers to this as "transparency," which is the striking aspect of whiteness in which White people usually lack awareness of their whiteness. Transparency, Flagg notes, "affords substantial advantages to whites over blacks even when decision-makers intend to effect substantive racial justice" (p. 629). Indeed, it is remarkable that the college youth, who are often of a similar age, are rarely implicated in the events that consume lives of the college-aged youth "from" these communities; in fact, the college youth are typically al-

lowed free passage – their pass embodied in their racial and class privilege.

In this case, the high school student's entrance into this discordant community put his own life at risk. Although the college students were also placed at risk for failing to heed his warning, they also were afforded an education about his world and the worlds of social youth in the surrounding community. Being with the student, rather than observing his experiences, moved them beyond empathy (or false empathy, as Delgado argues) to truly create an opportunity to begin the journey to examine and dismantle their own privilege. However, through conversation and reflection, the high school student also grew. As a result of this instance and his own lack of voice and power in the discordant community even when he had the best and most valuable knowledge, he was able to begin to understand the importance of the knowledge he possessed. He also came to realize that his double consciousness gave him an important perspective, and he quickly emerged as a leader with a stronger voice who began to embrace his societal marginalization as a space of radical insight (hooks, 1990).

Similar challenges/dangers and opportunities occurred in bringing the high school youth and college students together into a discordant community to create the art exhibition. While there were moments of sharing and collaboration across divides in important ways, the high school students frequently returned to class on the following day with frustrations at some comment or statement made by one of the college students. These silenced tensions eventually came out in a large conflict around the photographs in which the arguments had more to do with the feelings than with what was said. The discord that occurred resulted in pain but also growth. The college students came face to face with a group of high school students who, after a semester of collaboration, still wanted to call the exhibition "Us and Them." Again, through these meaningful relationships and conflict, the college students were moved beyond false empathy to engage in a dialogue often silenced (Delpit, 1988). They were directly

challenged in their racist world views.

Meanwhile the high school students also found their voices. It was emotional and full of "attitude," but without this conflict they probably would not have felt compelled to stand up to the college students. A further benefit accrued to the high school students. They expanded their social capital with college students and learned about college life. They were able to read the college statements of successful college students. They visited dorm rooms to see what life is like inside what they perceived to be the hallowed halls of academia. These connections demystified college. The high school students began the semester intimidated by the status of the college students. But as they developed their own voices and recognized their own knowledges, they realized that they were as intelligent and capable and deserving of attending college as the college students with whom they were partnered.

It is in the messiness, the conflict, and the pain where much of the growth occurs. And this, we believe, is the value of discordant communities. It is in moving into and through the conflict where honest conversations can occur. This is the power of forging communities across difference; our own efforts to cross borders created opportunities for our high school and college students to cross borders. The work of discordant communities is a space to wrestle with ourselves and our positionality in relation to others so that we can move forward together in the struggle against oppression. It is similar to what Zeus Leonardo (2009) writes about race theory: "At its best race theory is the move to remember our racialization, to reclaim the racial meanings of our lives not in order to further to divide people from each other but to educate one another for mutual benefit" (p. 3). This is what engagement in discordant communities does for people.

### **Across School Communities: The Construction of a Transformative Intellectual Identity**

Following the work of Hall (1992) and Wenger (1998), we argue that

identity – specifically our professional identity – is continually negotiated as we traverse and inhabit both the K12 and university school communities; each community shapes this identity differently. As Wenger (1998) explains, "Identity is thus more than just a single trajectory; instead, it should be viewed as a nexus of multimembership" (p. 159). This is not to say that we have multiple identities (a K12 teacher identity and a college professor identity); rather our identity is informed by our memberships in multiple communities of practice. Wenger continues, "(C)onsidering a person as having multiple identities would miss all the subtle ways in which our various forms of participation (in different communities of practice), no matter how distinct, can interact, influence each other, and require coordination" (p. 159).

An identity at the nexus of multimembership is not an uncontested identity. We argue that this identity itself is a discordant site. That is, it is an identity marked by useful conflict – conflicts of time and allegiances. bell hooks (1990) problematizes "multimembership", raising the complexities of inhabiting, negotiating, transitioning and transcending different social geographies. hooks offers a view of multimembership as charged, painful, politicized, but (potentially) empowering. She argues, for example, that the cost of full academic membership is often not a layered identity, but an assimilated identity. The offered alternative is a marginalized membership, an academic presence as an outsider "involved with" but never quite "of" the different academic social geographies. Quoting hooks, Thomas and Hollenshed (2001) write, "I am located in the margin. I make a definite distinction between that marginality which is imposed by oppressive structures and that marginality one chooses as site of resistance – as location of racial openness and possibility" (p. 166).

Our efforts to construct professional identities as transformative intellectuals affect our choices to do this work, crossing borders daily. Our commitment to directly interrupt the construction of Black and Brown youth as academic "failures," working in schools

as teachers to affect how students experience schools, is attributable to our decision to claim this identity.

Similarly, while this paper attends, in part, to the negotiation of this academic identity, we acknowledge the importance of our personal racial, gendered and class identities on our academic work. Our focus on our academic identities does not diminish the role that our personal identities play in how we experience this border crossing. Class, race, gender, language and sexuality (for example) remain dominant narratives that shape the social worlds in which we exist. We recognize that in the negotiation of our academic identities, we simultaneously construct personal identities that interact with our academic identities. These personal identities respond to dominant and essentialist discourses in this continual process of identity construction. Thus, while our narrative does not seem to focus intentionally on the construction of our personal identities, it necessarily tells the story of our own efforts to challenge dominant discourses of race, class, gender, sexuality, etc.

Delgado Bernal (2002) contends that our identities, raced and gendered, matter to our identities as teachers. As well, they matter to the identities of those with whom we work. Far from essentializing race and gender, Delgado Bernal argues that there are “core values” to which folks of color, for example, subscribe (“education, self-determination, resistance, family and freedom” [p. 119]); these core values are central to our multiple, intersecting identities born out of experiences with and in the world. Bringing our personal identities to bear on our academic identities promises rich experiences for our K12 and college students. It is not without dilemma, though, for in so doing we take risks in our careers as we challenge dominant narratives about what it means to be a professor.

### Across Difference: Theorizing Collaboration Across Race and Gender

Lastly, the power and pain of discordant communities is enacted in our relationship with each other. Late night conversations in each others’

homes or on the phone, and even the process of writing collaboratively is an on-going act of forging such discordant communities. It is an act of friendship that confronts each other on both our ideas and our practice even when (especially when) the two seem in contradiction. It requires open and honest communication and sometimes quite lengthy conversations when we realize we have been talking past each other.

While our own relationship shares many similarities with other forms of community, we characterize our relationship as a discordant community because it is a relationship built across differences and conflict. Many communities come into being because they offer safe spaces for people to share in their commonalities. Thus, the basis for such communities is commonality. While we affirm such spaces and such communities, we are reminded of the need for discordant communities in which people come together to discuss not the spaces of commonality, but the spaces of difference. In fact, we discuss our commonalities around being junior academics and secondary teachers; but our most profound learning occurs around conversations of race, class and gender – where our experiences in the world differ. These are not easy conversations – they force us each to learn (returning to Audre Lorde’s [1984] words), “how to take our differences and make them strengths” (p. 112). Such discordant spaces enable us to step beyond our own realities and connect with others across borders. For Eric, this has meant embracing the role of White ally who challenges racism and white supremacy and continually works to raise his own and other White people’s consciousness of a US racialized hierarchy that masks racial injustice in a veil of meritocratic ideology.

### CONCLUSION

In addition to affirming the need for discordant communities, we have sought to foster and model it through the writing and presentation of this article. We write in the hope that this narrative offers a lens through which others can continue to theorize about the possibilities of this border-cross-

ing work in which we, as academics in the field of education, engage. The development of discordant communities is inherently conflict-laden. But discordant communities also present the opportunity for powerful learning for their members and a means to dismantle the master’s house.

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### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>This is one of a series of articles under review. Elsewhere (under review), we explore the work of a transformative intellectual and the implications of this work for research, community building, mentoring and teaching in the college classroom.

<sup>2</sup>We theorize a discordant commu-

nity in contrast to literature that defines the purpose of communities as “to nurture and protect the individual” (Ginwright paraphrasing Somé, 2010). While we don’t deny the need for such a community, here we make the claim that communities can also serve the purpose of creating dialogue marked by useful conflict – conflict that increases awareness of racial and social injustice.

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# Authoring New Narratives with Youth at the Intersection of the Arts and Justice

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## ABSTRACT

*A theater project situated within an Alternative to Incarceration Program (ATIP), the Insight Project provided a venue for youth to engage in storytelling and dramatic performance, and allowed for those stories to find diverse and interested audiences. For the young men and women involved, authoring occurred at multiple instances and in multiple ways, and through the engagement of multiple cultural artifacts. Traditional scripts about youth, justice, and education were rewritten, not only through the writing of two plays, but also within the various types of authoring that were ongoing, performed, and embodied throughout the Insight Project. In this article, we discuss the various types of authoring that occurred within the theater project and we embed multimedia performance excerpts in order to elucidate six sites of authoring enacted by the participants at critical moments of the process: improvisation; focused storytelling sessions; composing scripts; rehearsals; performances; and talk-backs.*

## INTRODUCTION

Narratives are well-documented, cross-cultural phenomena and are means through which human beings make sense of the world, themselves, and each other (Ochs & Capps, 1996). Beyond merely the verbal telling of tales, we author ourselves through the engagement of cultural artifacts, both objects and symbols, which have been collectively ascribed with meaning (Holland, et al., 1998): a grandmother's shawl that covers a nightstand and serves as a constant reminder of the stories she shared with a curious grandchild; the intricate handshake that two young men share when they greet one another; a symbol emblazoned on a tee shirt that evokes nods of familiarity amongst strangers. For the youth involved with the Insight Project (Figure 1), a theater project situated within the Alternative to Incarceration Program (ATIP)<sup>1</sup>, authoring occurred at multiple instances and in multiple ways and through the engagement of multiple cultural artifacts. Participation in the project entailed the exploration of new communicative terrain—the stage, as well as the life histories of familiar and unfamiliar characters—and new communicative practices, such as public performance and improvisation. As a result of this multidimensional authoring experience, the participants formed

new social bonds with each other and performed new cultural identities. Traditional scripts about youth, justice, and education were rewritten, not only through the writing of two plays, but also within the various types of authoring that were ongoing, performed, and embodied throughout the Insight Project.

In this article, we explore the ways in which, through participation in a theater project and the use of dramatic devices, the young men and women in this project authored themselves. To do so, we conceptualize authoring in several ways. First, we explore the ways in which storytelling allowed participants to perform different characters as they shared narrative accounts throughout the project. Secondly, we look at the ways in which participants took on different roles in the project, both official (e.g., actors, interns) and unofficial (e.g., piano player). And thirdly, we draw on the lens of authoring to look across the various spaces in which and modalities through which meaning was made (Vasudevan, 2006, 2008). For the young men and women who participated in this project, authoring occurred not only during structured activities and interactions, but was also embedded in their involvement in this space. Throughout this article, we will discuss the various types of authoring that occurred within the theater project

— e.g., characters that were developed, identities and roles that were assumed, texts that were written, and stories that were performed. In addition, we embed performance excerpts into our article in order to elucidate six sites of authoring enacted by the participants at critical moments of the process: improvisation; focused storytelling sessions; composing scripts; rehearsals; performances; and talk-backs.

## ARTS AND EDUCATION

The arts have the ability to inspire the as yet uninspired or render visible the unseen. Consider the following examples of art-full, multimodal possibility: a story that is crafted out of an unexpected verbal exchange; a landscape painted to visually represent the feeling of home; or a photo essay of a quiet life that is made loud through image. As Maxine Greene (2000) has suggested, expression through the arts opens up spaces of possibility, particularly for youth, to engage and nurture the work of the imagination and enact their “deliberative agency” in the ways in which they (re) write themselves (Dimitriadis & Weis, 2001). Within the spaces of education, the arts can foreground creativity and cultivate a more complex understanding of relationships between learners



Figure 1. Covers of the two Insight Project productions

and their environments than currently evident in schools and even after-school programs (Gadsden, 2008).

The arts – such as painting, photography, theater, musical performance – provide spaces for students to push beyond normal classroom competencies and expectations, and to demonstrate their expertise using talents and knowledge gained through personal experience. For students whose schooling experiences have been fraught with challenges, arts programs have the potential to recast problematic labels such as “academic deficiencies” through the lenses of dignity, self worth, and confidence (Leard & Lashua, 2006). Given the invitation for creative engagement, youth develop “a sense that they are controlling their own representation, that they are in control of their own cultural identity, and are creatively shaping and molding language, style, and self into something new” (Dimitriadis & Carlson, 2003, p. 21). The educative benefits of participation in the arts are not solely localized to students or youth, and when approached pedagogically through a lens of collegi-

ality and collaboration can transform the experiences of the adults in the setting as well (Soep & Chavez, 2005).

Incorporating arts in education gives students the opportunity to discuss issues that may be ignored or silenced in other conversations (that often privilege verbal modes of communication) as well as new venues in which to be heard. Leard and Lashua (2006) stress the importance of listening to young people and providing them with space for discussion. By swapping characters, situations, goals, and personalities, theater projects in particular have the ability to “provided real life contexts for learning as the outcome of diverse struggles rather than as the passive reception of information” (Giroux, 2000, p. 127). The collaborative nature of a theater project allows teachers, researchers, and students to enter into new relationships, support and challenge existing power dynamics, and explore new spaces of identity formation (Fisher, 2008; Gallagher, 2007; Leard & Lashua, 2006). Along with the dialogue that develops out of an educational engagement with

the arts, the dialogues that develop between and about characters “helps these young playwrights consider the multiple voices and perspectives of the people in the stories they share” (Fisher, 2008, p.97). Theater projects can enable hesitant and less verbally inclined participants to engage in sophisticated social analysis that moves beyond the constraints of solely written or spoken modes of communication, and in doing so provide opportunities for youth to assume new roles, rewrite their narratives, and be seen as competent narrators of their lives as we witnessed in the project discussed here.

## RESEARCH CONTEXT AND METHODS

Masks hung on nails along the walls of the hallway, and gently placed on wide bookshelves... images of adolescents grinning at baseball games... rules about clothing and accessories written in marker on a sheet of white paper, taped to the window of the computer lab... brightly painted canvases with images that reach out and grab your attention...



Figure 2. Images of artifacts that line the main hallway of ATIP

A painting by a teacher at ATIP (left); a display indicating three levels of educational class (Literacy Lab, Pre-GED, GED), and student work (right)

These and other artifacts (Figure 2) filled the main hallway of the main suite of ATIP, which is located on the sixth floor of a multi-story building filled with legal offices, social service organizations, and courtrooms; offices and classrooms open into this main channel of interaction and activity. Two metal detectors and matching x-ray machines mark the visitor entrance, which the youth participants use to enter the building and make their way, via elevator, to the sixth floor. It is not uncommon to see young men re-adjusting their belts once they are within the program walls. It is within the concrete walls and surveillance-laden environs that ATIP exists.

ATIP is one of several incarceration alternatives available for court-involved youth in the New York City, ages 17 to 23, and has a legacy of youth advocacy and innovation reaching back over 40 years. The youth population at ATIP mimics the trends of overrepresentation of minority youth in jails and detention facilities around the country. Approximately 55% of the youth are identified as African American, 40% are identified as Latino, and the remaining 5% are identified as having other ethnic and racial backgrounds. The program uses a case management

approach to orchestrate its wide array of services. The Insight Project is one of several programs that are available for youth participants at ATIP, including an employment and internship program, academically-focused GED and college preparatory classes, drug and alcohol treatment, counseling, and arts and media electives. The latter is a program strand that has enjoyed an organizational presence in a variety of ways throughout ATIP's history in the form of dramatic performances and painting and mixed media classes.

The Insight Project was born out of a collaborative desire between two teachers, Dan and Gabriel, to provide a venue for youth to engage in storytelling and dramatic performance, and also for those stories to find diverse and interested audiences. With financial support garnered from an external grant and internal institutional funds, these two teachers piloted this theater initiative in the spring of 2008. In that initial cycle, twenty participants were recruited for auditions with the help of case managers and other staff. Interested youth were asked to prepare a piece to perform for a panel of three to four staff members, including the project facilitators. Some recited poems or performed song lyrics, and several oth-

ers who had not prepared something in advance were asked by the panel to dramatically retell a story in response to one of a few prompts. In addition, each person who auditioned was also asked to perform a dramatic and interpretive reading of a short piece of text selected by Dan. After each audition, the panel offered praise and critical feedback about the performance. Following the audition process, the Insight Project was launched with sixteen participants, five of whom completed both phases of the project. All of the youth who participated in all cycles of Insight self-identified as Black, African American, Hispanic, or Latino.

During the first phase, participants learned basic acting techniques, such as short and long-form improvisation, and the use of masks and other artifacts. They incorporated these techniques into skits they performed at a showcase scheduled at the end of the first three weeks. For many of the young men in this cycle of Insight, the showcase was their first public performance. In the audience for this performance were many of the program staff members, including case managers and teachers, as well as a number of ATIP participants. From this first phase, six participants moved onto the second phase of the project during which they collaborated with their teachers and Todd Pate<sup>2</sup>, a playwright to devise and compose a full-length script that evolved out of the improvised skits. At the end of the ten weeks of the second phase, five remaining participants performed a co-authored play, *Bird's Eye View*, for three nights at a professional theater located in New York City's theater district in front of a packed audience each night. Following each performance, the actors participated in a "talk back" with the audience, for which they sat on stage and engaged in reflective dialogue in response to audience questions and feedback. Shortly after this inaugural offering of Insight, a second cycle was initiated. Thirteen youth participated in the second cycle, and again five completed the process and performed the play on stage; one of the remaining five participants (which included two young women), Eric (one of the authors of this piece), had also



participated in the first cycle and assumed an additional role as intern in the second cycle. We discuss his augmented role in the methods section below. For a period of fourteen months during 2008-2009, thirty ATIP participants were involved with the Insight Project, during which time they produced two plays, held a total of twelve performances, and shared their stories with over 500 audience members.

*Bird's Eye View* is a story that focuses on the character of David, a young man whose family circumstances have put him in an unfortunate predicament, because of which he must make a difficult decision that comes with significant consequences. This play is characterized by family ties, social allegiances, cultural assumptions, humor, and the proverbial fork-in-the-road decisions that we all confront. The story follows a linear progression through David's life after he returns from serving a one-year sentence in a state prison and learns that his girlfriend is pregnant. *Brazil* is a pastiche of imagery and narrative in which multiple stories of desire converge through dialogue, monologues, and musings, similar to the popular film *Crash*. This play contrasts with *Bird's Eye View* in content as well as structure; however, the interconnected narratives retained the tenor of family bonds, difficult personal decisions, and the desire to re-imagine new possibilities for the future.

These productions and the lived experience of the theater project posed a series of compelling stories for us to document. We approached this research as a participatory project that involved teachers, youth, and researchers whose roles – in the project as well as the documentation of the project – evolved over time. In this way, the living and documentation of the project shared a dialectic relationship.

### Methods of Documentation

The documentation of this project was informed by standard ethnographic methods (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995), and by principles of performance ethnography (Denzin, 2003), in order to effectively document the authoring that was embodied by the In-

sight participants in a variety of ways. The principal researcher (Lalitha) and two graduate research assistants (Kristine and Melissa Reburiano) participated in various stages of documentation, and whenever possible each assumed a role within the project—e.g., as a critical audience member during rehearsals, helping to produce programs for the performances, etc. The following data were collected: participant observation field notes, multiple audio recorded interviews with project participants, participant surveys (for the first cycle), audience surveys, audio recordings of the talk-backs, and a variety of artifacts including video of unscripted moments of group singing and audio recordings of group dinner conversations. The interviews and talk-backs were transcribed and coded for emerging patterns and then analyzed for themes. We deductively identified instances of authoring based on our theoretical framing of the concept; we also explored the data inductively to attend to the emic concepts surrounding the participants' sense-making about Insight. Field notes and surveys were similarly coded for emergent patterns and the team of researchers and teachers met together regularly to reflect on the process and to iteratively analyze and discuss emerging themes, as well. Together, these data were used to develop portraits of Insight participants and to craft a narrative about the broader impact of the project on ATIP, and the various audiences. Collectively, these accounts comprise a set of narratives about the types of authoring that emerged within the project space.

This documentation continued in the second cycle and, in addition, involved one of the initial project participants (Eric) as a project intern and research assistant. Both he and the remaining teacher (Dan) along with the researcher (Lalitha), contributed to a project blog where reflective notes about each session were posted on a regular basis. A similar process of identifying patterns and thematic strands was applied to the research blog, with one notable difference: Eric was also involved in this cycle of analysis. In this article, we draw on these sources of data and our multilayered narratives

to explore instances of authoring that occurred across key moments of the Insight Project trajectory. We have identified six interrelated dimensions of the Insight Project. The experiences of improvisation, focused storytelling, composing scenes and scripts, rehearsals, performing for multiple audiences, and talkbacks comprise the interrelated nature of the Insight Project. We focus on each key moment of Insight through the lens of authoring, and consider the multiple ways in which authoring occurred across these dimensions.

We framed our inquiry along the following questions: What are the sites of authoring within Insight? How do Insight participants author themselves into and within this storytelling space? What narrative practices do they engage when authoring themselves? What narratives are authored and produced? Here, we address the first two questions as we present and perform a multi-faceted account of authoring within the Insight Project.

### MULTIPLE SITES OF AUTHORING

There are six interrelated dimensions to the Insight Project, and within each are opportunities for authoring. Our framing of authoring builds on an understanding of the self as a site of authoring (Holland, Lachiotte Jr., Skinner, & Cain, 1998), to include a perspective of the self as both the canvas for and the instrument of authoring. In what follows, we look across the six dimensions to present instances of authoring and narrative production within improvisation, storytelling, the composing of scenes and scripts, rehearsals, performances, and talkbacks. We present our perspectives through a collection of coauthored voices, artifacts, and (recorded) performances.

### Improvisation

Improvisation was the core tool of the Insight Project's work. In this article, we use this term interchangeably with the term "improv," which was the preferred colloquialism within the Insight Project. The improv was both a noun and a verb; that is, improv functioned as spaces and also as practices of authoring that served

multiple purposes. The engagement of improvisers in the project discussed here was framed theoretically by the work of Boal (2002) and Johnstone (1981), both of whom encourage the use of improvisation as a technique to foster spontaneity and creativity toward meaningful dramatic performance.

Initially, improvisers were important for allowing participants to enter into the realm of theater in relatively non-threatening ways. Participants are familiarized with a number of improvisational forms in the initial three weeks of classes that begin each Insight cycle, with considerable time dedicated to what we have come to call 'long form' improv. 'Long form' improv is characterized by a realistic scenario in which two or more protagonists work to solve a problem – essentially, to achieve their individual goals within a situation of conflict. They can be humorous, dramatic, or equal parts of each. They can, at times, be intolerably boring. This form is the primary method of collective composition that participants utilize during the 'devising' segment of the project cycle, which occurs during the second phase of each cycle.

Thus, 'long form' improvisations are essential to the Insight Project not simply for their creative value, but also as simulations of real life problem solving and decision-making, and the potential for discovering new modes of conflict resolution. Both in this respect, and as entertainment, long form improvisers either work or they don't. We have identified a set of parameters for improvisations that work which are useful, engaging, entertaining, that produce that unique frisson in the audience that can only come from watching actors discover something new and finding joy in it. These parameters, however, cannot be set down in advance of an improv session as predetermined rules; rather, they must be built in to the content of each improvisation on an individual basis.

1. *Set relationships that preclude easy recourse to violence.* While this is a useful parameter when facilitating improvisations with any group, it is especially important for ATIP clients, many of whom are

deeply invested in 'the code of the street,' (Anderson, 1999) which prescribes violence as the ultimate solution to intractable conflicts between rivals or strangers. Setting an improvisation in a public space, with protagonists who have little or no established previous relationship, will often lead to an improv that is brief, the action consisting of surface-level posturing that leads one character or another to employ simulated violence, or even walk offstage announcing his intention to "go to my car and grab the ratchet [gun]." While such resolutions will occasionally draw laughs from the audience, and produce some moments of physical comedy, they require little creative thinking, and rarely reach the depth and complexity that long form improvisers seek. As such, setting improvisations in intimate spaces (a shared home, for instance) and with protagonists who are intimates (siblings, best friends, 'homies' [members of the same 'set,' or local subdivision of a gang]) generally precludes violence, increasing the likelihood that the problem solving will take place through dialogue and negotiation.

2. *Assign the protagonists goals that initially seem mutually exclusive.* This precludes the easy solution, an improvisational pitfall that is in many respects the opposite of the violent resolution, but produces largely the same effect: a brief improv, with predictable, surface-level dialogue that leads to a quick agreement and leaves the protagonists with nowhere to go but offstage. While perhaps not as visibly negative as the violent ending, it is rarely a useful learning experience for the participants or entertaining for the audience. If, on the other hand, the facilitator presents the protagonists with a problem that is seemingly intractable (or nearly so), they are forced to dig deep

to find the tools to help them reach their goals, to create new dimensions for their relationships, to 'feel each other out,' and discover where 'give and take' are possible. Given the intimate spaces and relationships discussed above, a problem regarding living arrangements can often accomplish this goal: the sister, who owns the apartment, is getting married, and her fiancé is moving in. She needs her brother, who recently lost his job and home and is sleeping on her couch, to move out. The brother, of course, has nowhere else to go, but brother and fiancé do not get along. Often, as a facilitator, one can serve the improvisation by momentarily halting the action and adding new layers to the conflict as the scene develops.

3. *Give the protagonists the opportunity to subvert obvious status/power dynamics.* Power and status are levers of conflict resolution. It is not uncommon for young people to have fairly simplistic notions about the nature of power and status. Among the youth at ATIP, this simplified view sometimes was seen at extreme levels. Many ATIP participants have served significant sentences in juvenile institutions; most entered the program directly from a pre-trial stay (of varying length) at Rikers Island (New York's single, mammoth city jail). In many of these facilities, the social reality (often reinforced by institutional culture) is an intensely stratified hierarchy based on individual physical prowess, verbal combativeness, posturing, and frequent recourse to violence. ATIP is widely seen by new participants as an extension of this environment, and while an individual's view will likely evolve throughout the six months of his sentence, even after the threat of violence has been removed, he still has to move through pub-

lic spaces where the constant influx of new clients can necessitate ongoing posturing. This posturing does not disappear when a client takes the stage. Because of the explicit presence of an audience of peers, a familiar swagger in both physicality and language was still somewhat evident when the young men initially joined the theater project. The process for productively subverting this posturing (and preventing an improv from becoming the proverbial ‘pissing contest’) can be accomplished by presenting one protagonist with some variety of visible weakness (illness, injury, penury are all viable), but access to one or more ‘invisible’ tools of power (guilt, pity, moral right, etc.). Successful use of these tools will surprise participants and audience alike – and it is this surprise that is the hallmark of a successful, engaging, educational, and entertaining improvisation.

While none of these parameters guarantees productive improv work, they certainly make it much more like-

ly. They are also far less specific to the needs of a young offender population than they might seem initially. The nervousness and excitement of taking the stage and the pressures of an audience tend to have a similar effect on individuals from diverse backgrounds and with varied life experiences: an overreliance on physical comedy or clowning; a hesitance to take onstage actions and decisions beyond a surface depth; a reliance on stereotypical posturing and simplistic notions of power or status. Applying these parameters can turn what might otherwise be an entertaining diversion into a learning experience and an indispensable creative tool.

During the Ethnography in Education Research Forum (2009), two Insight Participants, Eric and Chris performed the following scenes, which were guided by varying parameters given to the actors by Dan. These improvs illustrate the parameters laid out above. We include the audio from these scenes, and accompanying transcripts, below.

[Click here for the transcript and audio for Improv 1: Short Form](#)

[Click here for transcript and audio for Improv 2: Long Form](#)

As these examples suggest, improv functioned as spaces that provide multiple opportunities for authoring in different ways. The long-form improv afforded time and space to tease out relationships between emergent characters, and, perhaps more importantly, the potential narratives that the scenarios presented. The first scenario, in which two alpha males are vying to get into a club, more easily lends itself to a physical altercation, with little room to maneuver further. In the second improv, featuring two brothers and their tensions around money, there is more energy and possibility for how the story can proceed as opposed to the first scenario. Such authoring situations were not only illustrative of powerful teaching moments, but also laid the groundwork for more complex relationships and narrative building that was necessary to compose scenes and scripts.

## Storytelling

In addition to building from improv to develop characters and storylines, each cycle of Insight included a focused storytelling session, which gave rise to many of the scenes that appeared in the final scripts. The theme for the first cycle emerged as “honor” and included an activity where Dan asked participants to think about “codes/rules you live by.” Those initial codes evolved into a story about David, a young man who, when he learns that his girlfriend is pregnant and that he and his increasingly mentally unstable uncle may be evicted unless they pay back due rent, resorts to dealing drugs. The story does not follow an obvious trajectory, but rather illustrates a tale of negotiation, difficult choices, and family.

The theme for the second cycle was “desire” and was explored through collective visualization of that word. To illustrate this authoring site, we describe the threads of stories that emerged within a single storytelling session focused on “desire,” in which participants were seated in a circle in one of the classrooms at ATIP, shared personal stories, and practiced active listening, which, for some, led to self-revelations. During this focused storytelling session, Dan asked par-

### Performance Interlude 1

**Bird’s Eye View – Scene 4: Developing the character arc for Slim Bag and Big Baby, who show David the ropes of hustling on their corner.**

[Click here for Bird’s Eye View, Scene 4](#)

**Brazil, Scene 6: In this scene between T and C-Roc, we see that C-Roc has alienated himself to the extent that he doesn’t receive any family visitors; only those who want something from him. With T, there also exists genuine friendship; however, the “inmate culture” leads C-Roc to be skeptical of T’s motives. Yet they are friends.**

(Note: The audio differs slightly from the printed script, as actors regularly improvised lines, while still staying true to the spirit of scene and maintaining storyline authenticity. The audio clip inserted here is from one of the two scenes from *Brazil* that were performed during the presentation at the Ethnography Forum 2009, and which feature Eric and Chris. In this scene, Chris plays C-Roc, Eric plays T, and Gabriel plays Marcus.)

[Click here for transcript and audio of Brazil, Scene 6](#)

ticipants to visualize a magical box that contained whatever they desired most in the world. The process began with each person describing what they ‘saw’ in the box. Dan pressed their initial descriptions by asking them questions in order to broaden the inquiry. As participants shared their visualizations, the others in the group also responded and engaged the objects in the imagined box through additional questions and comments. Participants’ responses to this visualization prompt ultimately became the core ideas in *Brazil*.

For Kareem, the box held Brazil, the country, where he imagined a life free from his current sources of stress and instead focused on enjoyment and partying. Kareem portrayed the character Kez the Don in *Brazil* and as Kez he delivers a monologue about being a gang leader who desires a life of solitude that was free from the pressures he felt from various parts of his life; much of Kareem’s dialogue in this scene was directly influenced by his narration during the visualization session. After Kareem shared, Dan probed his response by asking what it would take for Brazil to become a reality. Before he could answer, Terrence, another participant, expressed a desire for “quiet,” and wanting to wake up to a peaceful setting one morning. Todd, in his role as the playwright and active participant and co-facilitator of the Insight Project, connected this desire for quiet with Kareem’s description of an idealized life in Brazil, and extended an initially social purpose (e.g., partying) to include a more internal desire for escape. For Ted, in the box was his mother who abandoned him in infancy. He was told by his father that she was dead, and only recently did he learn that she might possibly still be alive. This relationship and personal experience gave rise to the character of Shelley in *Brazil*, a recovering drug addict who was searching for her son, Max, after many years of being apart from him. Unlike *Birds Eye View*, which drew more on the improvis and contained several moments of humor throughout the narrative, *Brazil* was full of stories that were deeply connected to the participants’ identities and histories were not as generative

of humorous interpretation. Out of these initial visualizations and collective storytelling moments emerged the main ideas that would serve as the connective tissue across each play. In the next section, we describe the process of moving from a session like this to how scenes and eventually a script were composed in this project.

### Composing Scenes and Scripts

The Insight Project writing process was collaborative and iterative in nature, and was initiated during the initial improvis and focused storytelling session in which characters and the broad strokes of a storyline began to develop. The movement from improvising ideas and dialogue to drafting lines to acting out scenes to composing pieces of the script remained fluid for most of the process. Todd shared drafts of the in-progress scripts with the actors and other facilitators and incorporated their feedback as they “tried on” the lines in character in order to revise the script. At several points along the way, Eric, Jay, Clarence, and the other participants inserted opinions, crafted storylines, suggested and created characters, and assessed the authenticity of the stories that the group was striving to communicate.

For most of the Insight participants, acting was an unfamiliar terrain. To ease the transition into public perfor-

mance, Dan and Gabriel employed a variety of dramatic techniques and pedagogical scaffolds throughout the process. During improvisations and character play, participants’ home and community lives and interests were engaged through the framing of prompts that invited them to draw on personal experiences, make connections with one another, and display expertise about their own lived narratives. These improves continued into the second phase of the Insight process and also included props such as masks (Figure 3) that allowed some youth to feel more comfortable when performing in front of others for the first time.

When asked about this performance device during one of the talkbacks, Clarence, one of the participants, who played a “masked” character in *Bird’s Eye View*, said that the masks “helped [the actors] to hide the person on the inside and bring out more the character” they were playing (Talkback, 07.29.08).

This same young man also benefited from having a space to showcase some of his playful talents. In *Bird’s Eye View*, he played Slim Bag, a drug dealer who has staked territory with his partner in the drug selling game, Big Baby. Clarence displayed great comedic facility and humor during the initial *Birds Eye View* improves. He did not merely read lines that were drafted on the printed page; he *became* Slim Bag and



Figure 3. Insight participants served as the models for the mask molds, which they also helped to craft out of modeling clay.

crafted a character with great physical agility, enviable comic timing, and emotional depth. These proclivities were incorporated into the character he began to cultivate during improvises and ultimately performed on stage. Thus, Clarence's character, Slim Bag/Lawrence, was the one to flip around on the ground, occasionally break out into dance, and provide much of the comic relief for a play laden with heavy tropes.

Another outcome of this dynamic composing space was the addition of a musical dimension to the character of Big Baby/Maurice, developed and portrayed by Eric, who had performed and written songs for a hip hop group with whom he had performed in years past. As Big Baby, Eric has a rhyming scene with Jay, another participant

who wrote and performed music and who shared this background with the facilitators during his musical audition for *Insight*. This exchange received loud applause each time the scene was performed, and gave the actors a chance to demonstrate their expertise in the practices of rhyming and rapping. In addition, by incorporating artistic performances into the dramatic repertoires of these characters, the script added depth to characters who might otherwise be dismissed as one-dimensional archetypes (e.g., "mid-level hustler" or "newly paroled").

Both of these scenes include salient elements that the participants were aiming to convey about their own lived experiences to the audience. Slim Bag, Big Baby, and Kez

each express doubt and reflexivity as they consider past actions and future decisions. The crafting of the script and individual characters' decisions were the subject of ongoing discussion, which included questions about how closely they reflected the lived experiences and choices of the *Insight* participants. As we describe next, it was during the rehearsals that these scenes and identities became further refined through critical and collective dialogue.

## Rehearsals

Rehearsals were an integral part of the authoring that occurred within *Insight*. Beginning with the first phase, where the larger group of participants learned acting techniques, the concept of rehearsal opened up opportunities for collective and critical reflection on the acting form as well as the content being storied. Participants, with guidance from their facilitators, used this space to bring characters to life. They tried on voices and postures, and explored motivations by reacting to one another or in response to questions by Dan, Gabriel, or Eric (in his capacity as co-facilitator in the second and third cycle) who sometimes interrupted rehearsal performances to ask questions intended to evoke reflections, "What are you [as your character] thinking right now? What has your character just experienced?"

Rehearsals were also spaces where teaching artists became more involved with the project, and offered feedback about the delivery of lines and blocking scenes. These interactions were not solely about dramatic performance and techniques. Todd Pate, a playwright and actor, was a teaching artist who was intimately involved in the crafting of the script. He attended every devising session and participated as an actor, audience, and critical listener who would return to subsequent rehearsals with pages of dialogue written down. These scenes would be based on the improvises and character discussions that had occurred previously. The young men and women, whose words and stories were depicted in the pages Todd scripted, assumed new ownership over these characters in the re-

## Performance Interlude 2

**Bird's Eye View, Scene 6.** In this scene, near the end of the play, Slim Bag and Big Baby (more specifically, their alter egos Lawrence and Maurice) face a difficult decision: whether or not to carry out direct orders from J-Dub. The MC provides some additional framing in the middle of the scene.



[Click here for Bird's Eye View, Scene 6.](#)

**Brazil, Scene 10.** In the monologue that Kez delivers near the end of the play, he reflects on recent events and a desire for the future. **Note:** This performance was recorded during the presentation at the *Ethnography Forum 2009*. In it, Eric plays the role of Kez, a character he played during the opening performance on December 16, 2008. During that debut performance of *Brazil*, Eric played three different characters to fill in for a missing cast member. Of the experience, Eric noted the following on the research blog: The first night I got the chance to play the three separate roles of Max, T, and Kez the Don. What a rush!! I had a bunch of running around to do. Transitioning from scene to scene. I was running up and down stairs, in and out of doors, and from costume to costume. BUT I LOVED IT!! (Blog entry, 12.18.2008)

[Click here for transcript and audio for Brazil, Scene 10.](#)

hearsal space. As they read their words in printed form, the youth considered realities different from their own. They questioned whether their characters would use certain language or make certain decisions—whether or not to retaliate after an attack, how to handle unexpected family changes, etc. Using critical dialogue while blocking (staging) scenes, Dan would push the actors to consider their characters' histories, kinship networks, intentions, and allegiances. Rehearsals, therefore, became spaces for the youth to re-imagine the script they would perform on stage, as well as spaces within which to rehearse and re-script their own life narratives.

In his research blog, Eric described the rehearsals and the devising process as the key experiences that helped “to secure a connection” between the participants and the process. Listening and being heard, and subsequently, having the opportunity to try on and critically perform various roles were consistent dimensions of the rehearsal space. Chris, for example, had a visceral reaction to his costume during an early dress rehearsal for *Brazil*. The character he was portraying, C-Roc, was facing life in prison and although Chris, himself, had not been incarcerated in a state prison, the bright orange jumpsuit evoked feelings of disgust and a renewed conviction to “stay out of there!” Chris’s portrayal of C-Roc—the hesitant timbre of his voice, hunched posture—was filled with solemnity, which mirrored the Chris’s own ambivalence about his past and the future he faced. This somber attitude contrasted significantly with the playful side of Chris that emerged during rehearsals as he and several of the other participants would break into song together. Like Chris, other participants also used rehearsals to experiment with the characters they had scripted. And, in explicit and also in subtle ways, the young men and women of Insight revealed various aspects of their multiple selves within this collectively constructed space.

### Performances

Whereas the rehearsal space provided opportunities for youth to write themselves into the script and the In-

sight project in different ways, the engagement with audiences at various performances presented youth with the opportunities of becoming known to multiple publics. In this section, we focus on the performances that followed the initial showcase at the end of the first three weeks of each cycle. Thus, we understand performances metaphorically—as embodied enactments of identities acts of learning (Hubard, 2007) that are constantly occurring and shifting—and also as situated events that involve known and unknown audiences. Throughout the Insight Project, the notion of “audience” was a consistent presence to which, both, facilitators and participants, alike, continued to refer. During early devising stages of improvisation or composing scenes and scripts, the upcoming performances and accompanying (possible) audiences were considered as ideas and imaginings moved into drafts of the script.

For most of the Insight participants, performing in front of an audience of strangers posed both a possibility and a threat. The possibility lay in developing and succeeding at a new craft, and being seen as competent and successful. Reflecting on his performance as C-Roc in *Brazil*, Chris described his state of mind this way, “I felt like I really, I could do it, like if that was something that I really wanted to do and I put my mind to it and I could do it” (Interview, 1.29.09). Chris was initially reluctant to participate in the Insight Project, and had to be convinced to audition by his case manager. Although he liked to “try new things,” he was skeptical of joining a venture with which he was not entirely familiar. Ultimately, Chris viewed his involvement in Insight through the prism of possibility, a feeling that was mediated in large part by the accolades he received about his performance across multiple venues. However, his early hesitations about joining the group were characteristic of participants’ reactions to feeling vulnerable in unfamiliar contexts and situations. While the stories that anchor *Bird’s Eye View* and *Brazil* were not unfamiliar to the youth, the medium of performance – orchestrated delivery versus a lived enactment – caused some initial concerns. In the

days and hours leading up to the public performances, their questions and concerns ranged from the practical to epistemological: Would they remember their lines? How would their peers and family members receive them as actors? Had they established all of the necessary scene transitions and blocking? What did it mean to share these stories with a diverse audience? Could they do this? What could they gain by performing? What would they lose? Were they the storytellers? The storied? The translators? And what (actions) would come of this storytelling?

There were several public performances embedded within each cycle of the Insight Project and they varied in audience make-up and purpose. Some performances were scheduled for the Insight participants to get feedback during the script writing process. The ongoing development of the script and many of the other sites of authoring focused on the experiences and contributions of Insight participants, and thus were relatively free from the input of people outside of the Insight process. In addition to the showcases that concluded the first phase of each cycle, the group held open rehearsals for select audiences including ATIP staff and younger adolescents (ages 9-16) from nearby alternative to detention (ATD) programs. These performances were opportunities for actors and facilitators to share their in-process script, try out ideas and solicit feedback (in the form of an audience survey and talk-backs) in order to refine storylines and script for subsequent performances. For the ATIP staff members, the open rehearsal afforded an opportunity to see the youth, who usually occupy classrooms or offices in their assigned roles as “student” or “client,” cast in a different light. The open rehearsal for *Bird’s Eye View*, for instance, took place on stage at the same building where the final performances were held later. Framed by a professional stage in a downtown setting, and performing scenes with passion and commitment, the youth began to be seen by the adults with whom they interacted daily as actors and as *engaged* participants. This kind of re-authoring by the youth also gave teachers and case man-

agers a better appreciation for the impact of the Insight Project on the lives of participants. One of the key modes of engagement with audiences was the talkback, which is described next.

## Talkbacks

The process of performing for multiple audiences was routinely followed up with a semi-structured talkback in which the entire cast (and occasionally the facilitators and teaching artists) sat on stage and responded to questions from the audience. This process builds on the ongoing forms of call and response that were embedded throughout the improv, during which some audience were always present. Talkbacks, however, added an important element to the overall Insight experience: that of interacting with not only known, but also unknown audiences. As sites of authoring, talkbacks allowed interaction between Insight participants and audiences; allowed the participants/actors to assume authority over the broader process as they engaged the questions and feedback from the audience; and offered a space where the young could author identities as actors and writers.

The talkback was a unique space where participants interacted with predominantly unknown audiences not as characters, but as themselves. This was especially significant for youth who previously had little experience with this type of performance, and whose lives continue to be storied by others. In the space of the talkbacks they were able to portray themselves outside of the stereotypes and familiar expectations of posturing that followed them across contexts. In addition to reflecting on their experience and responding to the questions offered by the audience, participants continued to share stories and explore a variety of themes.

During one talkback, the participants collectively explored a question about knowing the “difference between right and wrong,” by pushing each other to consider in greater depth “what it means to be soft” (Talkback, 7.29.2008). Both instances surrounding the concept of “soft” focused on the role of the masks and the characters of Slim Bag and Big Baby, par-

ticularly in the scene where they decide to run away instead of shooting their childhood friend, David. What did the mask allow these characters to be? What happened when they removed their masks and connected with each other and David using their given names? In this interpretive role, the participants guided the audience through an interactive dialogue that offered a re-reading and situated understanding of the stories and characters that they had just performed.

Questions from the audience varied. The following is a sampling of the questions, which are included here to suggest the diversity of positionalities that Insight participants were called upon to assume: Would you feel comfortable doing this play in front of your friends or your peers in your neighborhood? What was [the writing process] like for you? How do you plan to use your experience here in your real life? Where did the masks’ personalities come from? How did you guys like working together? Considering the things you [have gone] through in your lifetime before you reached this point, would you ever have thought you would be up on this stage right now? The questions from the audiences also allowed the youth to understand how their performances were being “read” and which aspects of the story and characters resonated with the audiences. In these ways, talkbacks were a manifestation of the original desire Dan and Gabriel had for this work: to make the stories of youth at ATIP accessible to audiences who may be either unfamiliar with or have a glossed understanding of court-involved youth. As they sat together on the stage and engaged in dialogue with known and unknown faces in the crowds facing them, facilitators and youth participants wove a new tale of justice that was made possible through the arts.

## CREATING SOCIALLY JUST SPACES THROUGH THE ARTS

The arts in education are not, nor should they be approached as a panacea for the many challenges faced by schools. Urban schools, in particular, must contend with highly overcrowded classrooms, under-resourced build-

ings, teacher shortages, and the persistent presence of high-stakes testing culture that threatens to extinguish the creative fire of too many teachers. As schools and other educational institutions continue to experience fiscal constraints and are forced to make tough choices about what kind of educational programming to keep or eliminate, too often the arts are marginalized as secondary (Gadsden, 2008), whereas, the possibilities for critical dialogue, self reflection, and discursive freedom that arts allow are perhaps most urgent in what Gallagher (2007) calls “dangerous times” in which measurable outcomes are privileged in educational discourses. The Insight Project was more than an arts-based initiative which allowed participants to compose and perform stories for audiences. Insight was a space of profound reflection, ongoing critical dialogue, and collaboration. These qualities are not unique to Insight or to arts-inspired spaces, alone. What appears more possible within such spaces, however, are opportunities to foreground the “critical capacities” (Kinloch, 2009, p. 334) of youth that may be overlooked, dismissed, or squeezed out of routine curricular planning in schools.

Clay masks that were handcrafted and used to support character development, spontaneous musical performances, and an article of clothing that evoked broader commitments to one’s personal journey—were all artifacts that aided the multifaceted performances described above. The young men and women of Insight, whose institutional labels framed them within the problematic discourses of risk and remediation, were invited to author themselves in ways that may not have been welcome in other social spaces through which they moved, including schools, homes, and community contexts. Through their storytelling, they claimed identities beyond familiar dyads—“urban” and “youth”, “black” and “latino”, “incarcerated” and “drop-out”—while simultaneously complicating the meanings about these terms. They invited the audience members with whom they engaged to appreciate them and their storied performances as nuanced, critical, intentional,

and worthy of thoughtful reflection.

Whereas institutions of education and justice are often characterized as sites of oppression, there are hopeful and generative possibilities for imaginative education within the institutional walls (c.f., Medina & Campano, 2006; Wissman, 2009). For some youth, like Eric and Chris, ATIP and Insight presented a chance to re-author themselves outside of the (sometimes limiting) expectations of their home and community affiliations, as well as those of schools and the criminal justice system. "Playmaking" (Fisher, 2008) and performance with youth is work that is simultaneously delicate and robust, as spaces of vulnerability give way to re-imagined and possible selves. Fisher, Purcell, and May (2009) underscore the collaborative nature of such endeavors and argue that "creating free spaces and fostering a discourse of 'second chances' in the context of institutions focused on discipline and oftentimes rigidity requires many voices" (p. 340). Similarly, our experience with the Insight Project leads us to advocate for a practice of education that sees value in the arts, is grounded in an ethos of collectivity, and motivated by the goal of seeking and creating socially just spaces where the multiple selves that youth embody can be expressed, represented, and performed in meaningful ways.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>All names of participants and organizations, with the exception of the authors, are pseudonyms.

<sup>2</sup>Not a pseudonym.



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## NOTES FROM THE FIELD

# Project Coach: A Case Study of a College-Community Partnerships as a Venture in Social Entrepreneurship

By Sam M. Intrator and Donald Siegel, Smith College and Project Coach

*Sixteen year-old Ismael walks into an energetic and bustling group of elementary-school aged boys and girls, puts his whistle to his mouth and gives one short, but decisive tweet. "OK, gather around for the huddle." Twelve boys and girls promptly scamper over and sit in a circle and are joined by Ismael and another teenager also wearing a neat blue tennis shirt emblazoned with "Coach." "Coach DeWayne and I are happy to see you today. Before we begin playing, I have a question for you. What does being a good sport mean to you?" Coach Ismael and Coach DeWayne listen intently as each of the players shares an idea. They ask follow-up questions like, 'How do you think it feels if your opponent celebrates too much after scoring a basket?' Off to the side and listening intently to the conversation is a red-shirted graduate student from Smith College. Coach Greg—who is a former college basketball player from Haverford College – nods enthusiastically and gives DeWayne a thumbs-up signal as DeWayne skillfully elicits responses. After each of the elementary-aged players offers a thought, Coach DeWayne claps his hands, points to a 30' square demarcated by orange cones and says, "OK—everybody grab a basketball. There is the ocean. You are fishies—Coach Ismael and I are sharks. You know the game—LET'S GO!" In an instant the elementary-aged students are tearing around the court chased by their teenage coaches.*

DeWayne, Ismael, and Greg work in Project Coach – an after school program developed and directed by the authors. The program, which is set in a high-need urban community in Springfield, Massachusetts, teaches high school and middle school students to be sport coaches and then to run youth sport leagues for elementary-aged youth in underserved neighborhoods in their own community. The program's premise is that sport coaches must employ a complex repertoire of skills, behaviors, and aptitudes that are associated with high achievement and success across a range of domains including school. Project Coach utilizes coaching as the vehicle to teach and practice key achievement skills such as communications, initiative taking, perseverance, conflict resolution, and other leadership capacities.

This paper describes the story of how eight years ago we began with an academic-based research question about the achievement gap and now find ourselves running a medium-sized youth program that has three significant goals. First, we are a

multi-layered and busy program that operates four afternoons a week with almost eight adult staff, 25 teenagers, and nearly 100 elementary aged youth. Second, we are a Smith College community outreach initiative that provides community service learning placements and other opportunities for numerous college students and research opportunities for other faculty. Third, we serve as a 'laboratory program' for developing curriculum, conducting research, and preparing future educators with the skills and understandings that are applicable to working in the emerging field of out-of-school time. Our experience developing the model and establishing Project Coach as a successful outreach program that is supported by the college and the community offers one lens into the process of designing sustainable partnerships between higher education and local communities. What is instructive and perhaps generalizable about our story to other faculty involved in the development of community partnerships is that we emerged not as a component

of a formalized college initiative, but as an enterprise that grew out of a series of academic and theoretical questions. In reflecting on this journey, we believe that the lens of social entrepreneurship helps explain our development.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: INITIATIVES OF SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Historically, most colleges and universities have a charter that articulates a mission to serve national and community purposes through the production of scholarship and outreach. This mission for service is rooted in the establishment of the land-grant colleges, which were designated by the Morrill Act of 1862 as service universities designed to fill a national purpose focused on conducting applied research and experimental work aimed at improving the conditions of the larger society (Ross, 2002). Despite these values, for most of the last century, the primacy of doing research and publishing scholarly work has subordinated the value of outreach and community engagement (Cuban, 1999). There is evidence that

this is changing. Over the last twenty years, there has been a robust movement in higher education to become more connected to local communities.

Championed by Ernest Boyer in his *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professorate* (1990), this approach called for faculty to rethink their notion of scholarship so universities could become more focused on meeting the needs and solving the challenges facing communities. Boyer's agenda coincided with other initiatives such as the National and Community Service Act of 1990, which provided Federal funds to develop and implement service-learning curriculum. Numerous programs and initiatives were developed to establish what Boyer coined the "scholarship of engagement." These initiatives are often enacted through the establishment of Centers on campus that intend to oversee and nurture comprehensive and systemic partnerships. Smith, like most of our peer schools, also has a center for community engagement.

Despite the energy to develop large-scale and complex institutionalized partnerships, Project Coach began outside formal channels within our college. Martin and Osberg (2007) describe the entrepreneurial process as beginning when an individual or as is often the case, a pair of individuals discern what they call "suboptimal equilibrium" (p. 35) and see embedded in it an opportunity to provide a new service or process. Once inspired by an idea, entrepreneurs take "direct action, which entails developing small, flexible, and agile solutions. The essence of social entrepreneurship is focused on what Dees (2009) calls "value-creating innovation" that offers a learning laboratory for the development and testing of "innovative solutions to social problems" (p. 12). Martin and Osberg (2007) define social entrepreneurship as mission-driven work where the prime outcome is social benefit. The process of mounting a project consists of three stages:

(1) identifying a stable but inherently unjust equilibrium that causes the exclusion, marginalization, or suffering of a segment of humanity that lacks the financial means or political clout to achieve any transformative benefit on its own; (2)

identifying an opportunity in this unjust equilibrium, developing a social value proposition, and bringing to bear inspiration, creativity, direct action, courage, and fortitude, thereby challenging the stable state's hegemony; and (3) forging a new, stable equilibrium that releases trapped potential or alleviates the suffering of the targeted group, and through imitation and the creation of a stable ecosystem around the new equilibrium ensuring a better future for the targeted group and even society at large (p. 35).

In other words, the process of social entrepreneurship begins with the identification of a social need, followed by the creative design of an invention or program, which leads to the program becoming embedded in the ecology of the community and, ultimately, becoming a model for others to emulate. We believe this conceptual framework is useful for explaining how Project Coach developed and why colleges that seek more expansive and sustainable partnerships in the community might look to stimulate small homegrown projects.

### WORKING WITH IDEAS: HOW DOES PROJECT COACH BEGIN?

As with many initiatives, the genesis of Project Coach can be traced back to a series of circuitious conversations and meetings. A pivotal encounter unfolds in the spring of 2002 when one of the authors of this article, received a call from the executive director of a major foundation in the northeast. The director indicated that her foundation had been engaged in various educational endeavors whose prime objective was to support initiatives that could decrease the academic achievement gap of Black and Hispanic children with their white counterparts. She went on to convey that their commissioned research showed that children in their target population were being dismissed from school as early as 1:30 in the afternoon, and that many of them were participating in a variety of after school programs, with sports based activities being among the most heavily enrolled. Her question

was whether a child's sport involvement could be leveraged to enhance their academic achievement? This, of course, was a version of "the sport question" that faculty and administrators have been asking for many years. Where is the "education" in sports and how does student involvement in them enhance or detract from what they are expected to do in the classroom?

Clearly, answers to «the sport question» have remained elusive over the years, with many people weighing in on it by conveying anecdotes from their own personal experiences and beliefs. For example, the Duke of Wellington allegedly stated that "The battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton" and sociologist David Reisman claimed that "the way to the board room leads through the locker-room." But there have also been those who argued against, such as Robert Hutchins, the former President of the University of Chicago who in 1939, abolished its prestigious football program, claiming that students needed to focus their attention on academics rather than athletics, and decried that it was possible for players "to win twelve letters without learning how to write one" (Mayer, 1993, p.138).

The question posed by the foundation officer was fascinating in that it brought together an array of variables crucial to youth and community development. Our default response as academics in a liberal arts college was to assemble an informal group comprised of professors, undergraduate, and graduate students to study the questions. We brought divergent perspectives to the question from those interested in disparities in literacy among different groups of children, others were interested in youth development and leadership, while still others were more interested in self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) and how it could be deployed to develop resiliency skills in "at risk" adolescents.

In retrospect, this study group was critical to the development of Project Coach, not only because it helped us to sharpen our understanding of the research and the many gaps that exist between the groups of kids that the foundation supporting this work

was interested in helping, but it also built institutional credibility for this evolving project that became a college-community program and partnership. This was due to the work being seen as having academic viability, a body of knowledge based on research, faculty and students from different fields being interested in the various problems, and the potential for fulfilling a component of our institution's mission which connotes not only the education of women within its walls but also doing good in the country and in the world (Smith Tradition, 2010).

From our study group readings and discussions we learned a great deal about the various battles being fought over education in the political realm, what futuristic economists were forecasting with regard to our global competitiveness in light of the education that youth in China and India were getting, and how a narrowing of the public school curriculum in the United States was obscuring the development of skills, problem solving capacities, and dispositions toward work that were deemed critical for success in a 21st century world. These included the ability to "...to think critically and solve problems, work in teams and lead by influence, be agile and adaptable, take initiative and be entrepreneurial, communicate clearly and concisely, access and analyze information effectively, and be curious and imaginative" (Wagner, 2008, pps. 256-257). Such work dovetailed with other theorists whom we were studying in hopes of getting a better handle on the "sport question". Among these scholars was Richard Rothstein whose influential *Class and Schools* (2004) also made the case that much of what has become known as the academic achievement gap was attributable to other sorts of gaps that existed among kids from different socioeconomic strata such as health, housing, employment, and an array of what he labeled as «non-cognitive skills (p. 86).» Rothstein identified such things as: communication skills, interpersonal skills, motivation and initiative, work ethic, and adaptability to change. He along with other prominent theorists such as Robert Halpern (2006) and Reed Larson (2000), con-

tended that the above attributes are best developed in out of school programs in which youth development is a primary focus. This conceptual framework then became the basis for our understanding of the "sport question" and the subsequent design of Project Coach.

### EXPANDING THE CONVERSATION: CONNECTING WITH COMMUNITY

In conjunction with our study group, we embarked on a series of conversations with local educators, coaches, and community members. We had no overarching conceptual method or approach to arranging these conversations other than to meet individuals working at the interesection of education, athletics, health, and community. In the course of these discussions, two key learnings emerged: first, no matter how grim the 'statistics' were involving poverty, academic achievement, or health in a particular community or neighborhood—people were proud of their community and believed that positive momentum was occurring. Second, community members were deeply suspicious of our academic affiliation. College and community partnership may mean one thing in a faculty committee, but to community members accustomed to academic researchers who arrive, extract their data, and vanish—there is rampant skepticism about the motives and commitment of representatives from the academy.

After months of study and conversations, our plans for operationalizing a program eluded us. The breakthrough moment came during one of our conversations with a local principal who suggested that we speak to the neighborhood parks and recreation director – who he described as a "legend in the community." We met the parks and recreation director in an office covered with pictures of youth playing sport and he took us on a tour of the neighborhood complex, which includes an elementary school, a middle school, a library and a health center. When we walked over to the middle school, he said, "Let me show our pride and joy." He took us out and showed us three well-greened soccer fields. "We are so proud of these fields. Five years ago

these fields were abandoned and overgrown. They had all kinds of junk on them and car wrecks and it was a favorite hangout for all sorts of dangerous characters including drug dealers. This was no place parents wanted their kids around, but we received a federal grant and transformed them." We responded by saying, "You must be so thrilled to see your youth playing on those fields now." He paused and then replied, "Actually—these fields get used more often by the elite soccer teams from the suburbs. The kids from the neighborhood don't usually use them." Surprised, we asked, "Why not?"

"I have interest from the kids," he said. But I can't find coaches. I just can't find a core of parent volunteers to serve as coaches. If I could find enough coaches, I could use the fields." His response triggered a set of ideas and connections and conversation from which our program developed. We asked, "Do you think you could find high school students who would want to get paid to be coaches." He responded by saying, "Absolutely. I know so many kids who would love to."

### AFTERSCHOOL CONTEXTS: A NATURAL PARTNERSHIPS WITH COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

Out of this conversation the idea for Project Coach emerged. Martin and Osberg (2007) describe the quality of 'alertness' as being a crucial quality possessed by entrepreneurs. In this case, we were alert to the need, but also we quickly ascertained that the after school world was a setting where we could make an impact. From the college perspective, becoming involved in after school programming is attractive for several reasons. First, and not insignificantly, for partnerships to work effectively between a college and a community there needs to be an authentic need within the community. Over the last few decades, the social ecology surrounding children has changed in ways that affect the development of youth (Riggs and Greenberg, 2004). High rates of family mobility, changing patterns of adult employment, media themes of violence and sexuality,

higher rates of technology usage including online and video gaming, and the deterioration of neighborhoods and schools have weakened the formal and informal supports available to families (Eccles and Gootman, 2002; Riggs and Greenberg, 2004). The hours immediately after school have been identified as the most risky for children due to the lack of adult supervision.

As a result of these changing demographic and societal trends and awareness of how vulnerable children are during out-of-school time, after school programs have been proposed to provide youth with supervised and constructive activities. Despite the fact that there is overwhelming support on the part of parents and educators for after school opportunities, there continues to be substantial shortages in programs. More than a quarter of the nation's schoolchildren are on their own in the afternoons, and the parents of 18 million children say they would enroll their kids in afterschool programs if programs were available, a number that is rising because of the economic downturn (Afterschool Alliance, 2009). In the community of Springfield, MA the number of children enrolled in after school programs is somewhere around 25%. In other words, our program addresses an acute need in our local community.

As Project Coach evolved both conceptually and structurally over the years we also learned a great deal about the alliance of service learning initiatives for college students and the rapidly developing sector of out of school education. First, in contrast to times when college students and faculty are more heavily scheduled for classes and laboratories, after school hours are a better match for faculty and college student schedules. Most college students at our residential liberal arts college have classes that end mid-afternoon, and they can flex their schedules to work with us in Project Coach. Thus, afterschool hours provide us with an opportunity to staff our program with undergraduate and graduate students. A second reason that higher education is compatible with the after school world is the flexibility of the latter to offer diverse programming. This

flexibility stands in contrast to schools – particularly schools that serve low income children—where explicit curricular constraints and testing expectations drive academic programming. In contrast, the after school world, has diverse and broad outcome aspirations and it is not, as Halpern notes, a “mass institution.” Instead it serves to complement the primary institutions of school and family by providing a broad array of developmental experiences in a “range of domains that schools lack time for and that low-and moderate-income families may lack resources to purchase in the marketplace. These include, of course, the visual and performing arts, humanities, civics, physical activities and sports” (Halpern, p. 129). The flexibility for creative programming provides college faculty and students opportunity to design, develop, and experiment with an array of approaches, foci, and methods.

### LAUNCHING PROJECT COACH: FROM CONCEPT TO LIVE PROGRAMMING

The second stage of development according to the theory of social entrepreneurship encompasses the design and execution of a program. It entails doing something rather “than waiting for someone else to intervene or trying to convince somebody else to solve the problem, the entrepreneur takes direct action by creating a new product or service and the venture to advance it” (Martin & Osberg, 2007, p. 33). Using the initial funds from the foundation, we launched a program in which we trained local adolescents as coaches of elementary aged children, who would, in turn, run sports leagues during the after school hours for these kids. Importantly, our initial overtures to have the college support the initiative and integrate our fledgling program into the established outreach system was rebuffed. We were told that funds were limited. At the time we were discouraged, but in retrospect our independence provided us with enormous autonomy, which resulted in our being able to be extremely flexible and adaptive during the startup phase.

Our guiding principle flowed from our conclusion that there was really

nothing magical about sports that promoted youth development, but that it was what transpired within it that had the potential to foster or inhibit growth (Orlick, 1974). From our perspective, the job of a coach is to teach others to achieve, and that a program with an explicit and deliberate curriculum to do this would help adolescents to internalize the lessons that they were teaching their players. For example, communications' skills have been identified as being critical for succeeding in school and work environments. But, it is also a fundamental skill required in coaching. Coaches need to think clearly and concisely, and to be able to inspire and instruct their players in an array of practice and competitive settings. They also need to set and fulfill goals, problem solve, show initiative, focus attention, control emotions, and manage time effectively. Consequently, our hypothetical answer to the “sport question” became that of using coaching as a means to teach a cluster of achievement attributes that had great transferable value to academic work, citizenship and family life.

To contemplate and theorize about how to run such a program is one thing, but to actually operationalize it is quite another. From our experiences, colleges do not typically make decisions about allocating resources and running programs in their local communities from the top down; the major focus has always been to provide intellectual development to their students. But, now, Smith College could accomplish its primary mission through Project Coach, as well as fulfill its more ethereal mission of supporting development in neighboring under-resourced local communities. Project Coach had the potential to be a stimulus and laboratory for college students and faculty interested in urban education, sociology, psychology, economics, and public health. It also had the potential of providing opportunities for adolescents, who were often perceived to be problematic, to develop capacities that not only benefitted them, but could also be used to teach physical activity and healthy lifestyles to younger children in their communities. Seemingly, this envisioned partnership was a “win-win” en-

tity. Nonetheless, a critical point in the unfolding of this college-community partnership is that it did not germinate from a directive from above (e.g., from a college administration or a funding agency), but from grass-roots efforts of faculty engaged in an intellectual problem along with local community leaders. Clearly, the relationships that were built at this level became stronger and more trusting as faculty and community members realized that the partnership was mutual, and that each constituency was more interested in giving than taking. Simultaneously, we built support inside the college by doing academic presentations to colleagues, involving students, and publishing research. Additionally, we received several grants from philanthropic foundations that served to validate the program's value. Lastly, several media stories were written and filmed about our program, all of which portrayed Project Coach as program of Smith College. While we may have begun as an initiative outside the 'system' at Smith we had become publicly recognized as a primary example of Smith's commitment to community enrichment and social justice.

### ESTABLISHING A MODEL: SERVING AS A LAB PROGRAM FOR THE AFTER-SCHOOL WORLD

The third component of social entrepreneurship involves developing a proposed solution that is viable, cost-effective, scalable, and represents an improvement in the status quo for local constituencies and for what Martin and Osberg (2007) call the "society at large." We believe this describes the development of our work from a small direct service project staffed by two faculty members, which we describe as a lab project within the emerging field of after school programming that not only provides direct service to the children and families of the Springfield community, but also serves as a training and demonstration site.

University/college lab schools trace their origins to John Dewey's tenure at the University of Chicago where faculty could develop educational ideas and practices in a school

context. As Dewey proposed to the President of the University of Chicago:

The conduct of a school demonstration, observation and experiment in connection with the theoretical instruction is the nerve of the whole scheme. Without this no pedagogical department can command the confidence of the educational public it is seeking to lay hold of and direct; the mere profession of principles without their practical exhibition and testing will not engage the respect of the education profession (1967, p. 434).

Our mission at Project Coach has evolved from attempting to answer «the sport question» to include testing approaches of practice in the after school world, training of graduate students and undergraduates, serving as a research site, and being a demonstration site where other practitioners come to observe and participate in professional development. We take seriously, Dewey's belief that lab schools need to be models of what good education should be, based upon educational research and practical experience.

### HOW PROJECT COACH BENEFITS FROM OUR ASSOCIATION WITH SMITH COLLEGE

In any urban community, there is a multitude of small, enterprising community-based programs that have similar mission and commitment as Project Coach. One of the core and enduring challenges facing small community-based programs is sustaining funding and staffing. Over the years we have come to believe that our association with the college provides us with a range of unique benefits that differentiate us from other community-based agencies. First, we derive a financial benefit being associated with Smith. While the College does not provide us with funds for our operating budget, we have received gifts from alumnae who have learned about the work through the development office or by being featured on the college website or other media. Second, our scholarly work has focused on Project Coach. We have taught classes on top-

ics associated with our work in Project Coach and published and presented it in journals and at conferences. Third, the in-kind contributions to the project are substantial. The college provides us with vans, classroom space, connections with college admissions officers, and other formidable resources that have strengthened our work. Lastly, and most importantly, the college is a source of human capital and talent. Graduate and undergraduate students serve as staff, mentors, tutors, and program leaders. The quality of our staff is superb because of this ongoing addition of new people.

### SUMMARY

What started with a relatively innocuous question about the possible connection between sports involvement and academic achievement, became «the sport question," which in turn stimulated a study team that evolved into a program group that formed a relationship with several community members that wished to address common theoretical and applied problems. Clearly, in the beginning, we had no preconceived notion about where the "sport question" would lead us. As our project unfolded it seemed as if we were peeling away the layers of an onion through which we continued to see and understand different aspects of the problems faced by underserved youth in their schools and in their communities.

It is evident that having a conceptual framework for what we are doing is critical for success, but our direct experiences working in an underserved community that faces daily challenges has also helped us to better understand the limits of theory. We are also learning that the challenges of working in a real world setting that has real world problems is not only humbling, but tremendously edifying and fulfilling to us, our students, our coaches, and our community partners. There is little doubt that we have made significant progress on "the sport question", but we also realize that the complexity of what we are learning will keep us engaged for many years. Dees (2009) contends that the contribution of social entrepreneurs is to offer the world

a 'learning laboratory' to develop, test, and revise innovative solutions to social problems. As we go forward this is how we see and plan our work.

**Sam Intrator** has a Ph.D. from Stanford University. He became a professor of Education and Child Study at Smith in 1999 after more than a decade of teaching and administrative service in public schools in New York City and California. He founded the Smith College Urban Education Initiative—an educational outreach program that engages students in intensive service-learning experience by placing them in urban school settings during their

winter term. He is the author of five books, including *Tuned in and Fired Up: How Teaching Can Inspire Real Learning in the Classroom* (Yale University Press), which was a finalist for the Grawemeyer Award in Education. He is the co-founder of Project Coach, a model youth sport after school program that teaches high school students to be youth sport coaches.

**Don Siegel** has an Ed.D. from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. He is in his 35th year as a professor of Exercise and Sport Studies (ESS). He helped develop and also served as the director of Smith's ESS graduate program that specializes in training

college coaches, the only program in the country accredited at Level IV by the National Council for Accreditation of Coaching Education. He has also been an urban youth sports program consultant for the Barr Foundation and was instrumental in developing several youth sports initiatives in Boston and Northampton. He has published widely in the areas of sport psychology, motor learning, exercise physiology, sport sociology, computing, and professional aspects of sport and physical education. He is the co-founder of Project Coach, a model youth sport after school program that teaches high school students to be youth sport coaches.

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## NOTES FROM THE FIELD

# The Measure of Our Success

By Kami M. Patrizio, Towson University

Being in Barbara's<sup>1</sup> office reminded me of being in my Grandmother's kitchen. It was pleasant, small and warm. There was enough room for three people to sit comfortably, four if someone squeezed into the seat at the computer behind Barbara's desk. Every surface had files, pictures, or office equipment on it. For some reason, which I ascribed to Barbara's general ethos of clear-headed calm, it never felt crowded.

"The delivery man wanted to leave the new stove outside. OUTSIDE. In this neighborhood? I told him, 'I don't think so...'"

My stomach hurt from laughing so hard. Her incredulity and voice were both sincere and hilarious.

"Can't you just see what would happen?" Barbara continued. "There it would be, 10 o'clock tonight, two junkies with a cart, rolling the new church stove down the street after-hours. Puh-lease. So I told him to come back when he had someone to help him move the stove into the building."

I wiped tears from my cheeks and gasped for breath.

"So then, I..."

Here, the desk phone rang. While Barbara was talking, her wireless phone buzzed and she began to respond to a text, pausing only to pull a folder from her desk labeled, "Phone bill assistance".

"We can only help with the last \$50 of the bill. How much do you owe?" She finished texting as she listened, eyebrows furrowed. The tone of her voice was rich, assured, and

direct. I settled into my chair and gestured, as if to say, "Do you want me to leave?" She waved me to stay seated.

"Oh." Her eyebrows lifted, then furrowed, "I'm sorry. We can't help. Try contacting..."

The intercom that connected to the main door of the rectory buzzed and I took the liberty of opening it. Barbara finished her sentence and hung up the phone.

"We have a bill assistance program," she explained to me, "But we can only help with the last \$50 of the bill. People call us with \$700 balances. We just can't do all of that."

A man walked up to the office door. He was young, maybe in his early twenties, and tall. His khaki pants were streaked with dirt, his braids frayed. The line of his jaw was chiseled and shadowed with stubble. He looked hollow. "Is Father here?"

The young man's voice was quiet and steady, but teetering on the cusp of desperate. Barbara looked at him.

"I'm sorry; he's not here today. Can I help you?"

"I need him to pray with me. Is there someone that can pray with me?" He slumped his shoulders slightly. "I just need someone to pray with me right now." His use of the words "right now" held no imperative demand, but rather intoned a need, an immediate need, for comfort. Barbara directed him to another local church. He turned and we heard the door click locked behind him.

"He came in here once before, asked for a sandwich. So, I made him a sandwich and he sat and ate it." Barbara looked at the empty space in her doorway where he had been a few moments before. She didn't say anything else about him. I didn't ask any questions. We were both able to infer that he was troubled and in some sort of dire need. He had required help and she had done the best she could to provide it. It felt like vestiges of his despair lingered where he had been standing. We were quiet for a moment, until the phone rang again. She answered it.

"You need the check?" Barbara shuffled through a pile of manila folders on her desk. "I've got it right here. Come on over when you're ready to pick it up." (Researcher journal, April 2008)<sup>2</sup>

## SUPPOSITONS, SUSPICIONS, AND SUSTENANCE

Narratives are more than a sequence of happenings; they illustrate a point, usually one that revolves around some type of dissonance (Ryfe, 2006). There are many "points" one might discern from this snapshot of Barbara's office. As an observer, I am unsure of Barbara's place in this setting. Barbara is always busy, dealing constantly with many demands. She is a resource. People seek her out to provide answers, solace and support. Barbara facilitates the practical and the spiritual for others, with varying degrees of success.

The narrative alludes, too, to the myriad of dilemmas that present themselves in the daily series of events that define Barbara's life as a community leader. Humor, pain, poverty, and resilience wend through the experiential parameters that render her a reliable, grounded constant for mem-

bers of the Prima Valley Community (PVC). It can be inferred, and rightfully so, that Barbara's office was a place where hope grew in the midst of the dire needs of the community.

It became apparent to me early on in my experiences with the PVC that any space Barbara occupied, literally or metaphorically, was infused with the lived realities of PVC residents. She represented these neighborhood voices at each meeting that she attended. When she was not in attendance at a meeting, her name and activities were referenced as almost the default proxy voice for the needs and desires of community members. Indeed, her experiences justified her role: she had grown up in Prima Valley, had given up a lucrative career to combat the crime that had sprung up amidst it during her adulthood. She was active in many community boards and organizations. Her work with one of the neighborhood churches connected her with the spiritual lives of PV's residents, her activism in community trusts, boards and organizations put her in touch with the activities, schools, and politics of the community, city and state.

Barbara was a leader, and a passionate advocate for PVC in the context of the formal community-school-university partnership through which I came to know her. I was conducting research on leadership development in school-community partnerships, and realized that my research methods required sustained contact with the community in a more intimate way that my interviews and surveys did not allow. I instantly felt comfortable around Barbara, and our interactions evolved over time. What began as a collaboration to develop an afterschool program became an intimate dialogue about the history, happenings, dreams, and vision for PV and for us. Our dyad became a safe research space, of the type that has been described as growing:

from the passions and concerns of community members; they are rarely structured from "above"...They can be designed to restore identities devastated by the larger culture or they may be opportunities to try on identities and community rejected by both mainstream culture and

local ethnic groups. These spaces hold rich and revealing data about the resilience of young adults, without denying the oppression which threatens the borders and interiors of community life amidst urban poverty. (Weis & Fine, 2000, p. 58)

We identified the influences that fueled, challenged and influenced our work in the community through our conversations over time. It was from this dialogical space that I was able to dialectically question my "participatory responsibility to research with and for a more progressive community life" (Weis & Fine, 2000, p. 59). This safe space became one of the key frames through which I began to address many of my own questions about conducting research in the context of community partnerships. What are the dimensions of ethical research design and implementation in community-school-university research? What are the phenomenological dimensions of attending to agency in this context?

This paper addresses these questions by exploring the process of problem framing (Nespor & Groenke, 2009) in research, and considering the ethics of the framing in the context of my dual role as a researcher and educator seeking to engender learning amongst partnership stakeholders. In doing so, I attend to issues of agency in partnership research by providing the situational context of my research and work in the community. I also include excerpts from my research journal. These excerpts describe incidents that raised questions for me about the subtle nuances of research, agency, and common understanding in a community-university partnership.

## AGENCY, ETHICS, AND PROBLEM FRAMING

Nespor & Groenke (2009) describe agency as "a product of the way people define or appropriate identities, craft associations and networks, and mobilize other people and resources to participate in and influence processes that begin and end outside their immediate settings" (p. 998). Agency is the result of many facets of community life. All

of these facets, including identity, networks, processes and resources must be taken into consideration throughout the course of research. Attending to these facets requires ethical consideration of participants, as those directly involved in the research and as those connected to the networks that defined the parameters of the research and distribution networks (Nespor & Groenke, 2009). Hence, ethically conducting research with an eye towards agency was inextricably linked to my use, as a researcher, of "cultural tools, artifacts, organizations, and communication systems" (Nespor & Groenke, 2009, p. 998) in community, school and university contexts. The notion of agency-as-product resonated as appropriate for my research, particularly, given my focus on the research process and its relationship to learning in partnership networks.

I attempted to address these questions by consistently revisiting my research problem, and by holding myself to "ethical stances in as much as they shape the implications of the research for the agency of its participants" (Nespor & Groenke, p. 997). The above led to another stream of questions. How did I decide what to study about leadership development? How was I asking my research questions? What were the geographic and temporal parameters of my considerations? Where was I allocating the locus of agency in the research process: with community, school, or university participants?

Conceptualizing the link between research and agency through this heuristic of problem framing made me sensitive to the idea of maintaining "responsibility at a distance" (Nespor & Groenke, 2009, p. 998), which surfaced a number of additional questions throughout the research process. Elements of these considerations, as the following journal excerpts demonstrate, were centered in the safe space that I had created with Barbara. Did my research methods adequately attend to the manner in which the experiences of the people in Prima Valley were "constitutive of lives and events elsewhere" (Nespor & Groenke, 2009, p.998)? Would my research help those in Prima Valley and beyond to criti-

cally consider and reform the learning processes in their community? Was I incorporating enough participants into my considerations to allow for agency by demystifying the power dynamics inherent in collaborative partnerships? Was I, “dishonest or disruptive”, favoring “some participants over others” or infringing on “the privacy of the people depicted?” (Nespor & Groenke, 2009, p. 999) All of these questions helped to improve my understanding of the relationship between research and agency in community partnerships. In the next section of the paper, I describe the manner in which the history, demographics and participants of PVC informed my investigation.

### THE PRIMA VALLEY INITIATIVE: PARTNERSHIP AND SELF CONTEXT

Prima Valley is adjacent to a large city on east coast. The community sat on the southern edge of the city limits and was bordered by green spaces and waterfront. Major companies and a well known, international real estate developer had expressed interest in developing Prima Valley. Barbara advocated for the rights of community members in her role as the Executive Director of the Prima Valley Trust. Her efforts resulted in some financial resources being brought back to the neighborhood in the form of community programs.

#### The Prima Valley Partnership

As the introductory narrative suggests, Prima Valley was in need of resources. Almost 70% of the households in the community were families and the median household income for the community was about \$18,000 (Prima Valley Master Plan, 2007). Prima Valley was a small community of approximately 7,500 residents, approximately 96% of whom were Black. Four of the five K-8 schools in the neighborhood were in corrective action for failing test scores just around the time the Prima Valley partnership began to take root in 2005. High turnover among teachers and administrative personnel plagued the schools, as did the effects of poverty, violence and drug use that pervaded the community.

Prima Valley had been taken advantage of by previous partnerships, and as a result, community members were now leery of such relationships. Many community residents were afraid that the university was only interested in working in Prima Valley because big name developers wanted to gentrify the community and change its racial and socio-economic profile. The Prima Valley community members inferred that the university only cared about their schools because “rich” children, potentially, would soon be attending them. It was for these reasons that it took two years of relational work to gain community support for the partnership.

The purpose for the Prima Valley Initiative (PVI), according to its website, is “to build upon the strengths of Prima Valley to meet its needs and nurture its potential in areas related to economic, community and educational development.” (PVI website, retrieved February 12, 2010<sup>3</sup>). The manner of this development remains unarticulated in PVI. Over the course of the initiative, “development” has happened in the form of grant acquisition, professional development for schools and community organizations, the formation of advisory boards, and the delivery of programs for children and residents.

#### Multiple Roles, Intersecting Identities

I have had many roles in the PVI since I was first introduced to the community more than two years ago. My work began as a university faculty consultant for a middle school renewal initiative. As part of this project, I became a member of the PVI Principal’s group, acted as a professional developer for school parent groups, and became a member of the PVI decision-making body, the Community Advisory Board. Working with teachers, parents and principals from each of the PVI schools helped me to understand the rich and complex history, relationships, challenges, and political issues that impacted the PVC. I came to know people during meetings, classrooms, after-school football games, community celebrations and their homes. My participation in each of these groups has continued to this day.

During the second year of my work, I began to connect with other faculty from the university who were interested in providing programs and services through the PVI. This presented me with occasion to consider the manner in which my university colleagues approached collaborative work with urban communities, reinforcing my beliefs in the value and potential of university-community partnerships. I began to work on two research projects in the PVC during this second year. The first was a participatory community health initiative that sought to address issues of adolescent pregnancy in the community. The second project investigated the development of leadership in community-university partnerships.

My understanding changed over time, and much of this was influenced by my involvement in community-based health and economic development activities in PVI. It became apparent that developing agency through research meant considering agency through the lens of all community residents, and not just residents involved in PVI’s schools. It also meant considering how university faculty and administrators approached partnership learning through programs and research processes. I had to reframe my problems once again to include an extended network of participants as I considered leadership development through the lens of interdisciplinary partnership networks. Engaging in two research projects, one focused on leadership development and one focused on community health issues, ultimately enriched my understanding of framing research problems and nurturing learning in partnerships.

#### RESEARCH PROCESS

The following three journal excerpts illustrate the manner in which my experiences with PVI participants influenced my attempts to engage in agency oriented research. The entries are taken from the journal that I have maintained since becoming involved with PVI more than two years ago. The selected entries focus primarily on university and community relations, one interaction occurring in the context

of a PVI school, and highlight issues related to understanding communities that were germane to my evolving understanding of ethical community research and the complex nuances of partnerships that are grounded in school and community development. These reflections connect my experiences to theoretical and practical understandings that I have come to consider in the course of my work in PVI, and raise important questions about the nature of research and partnerships.

### Research Journal Excerpt One: Who Said Anything About Research?

I was in a meeting of the Community Health Advisory Board today in Prima Valley. These meetings feel different to me than the first middle school meetings that I attended; there are more members of the university present now than two years ago. I have mixed feelings about this. University faculty members bring so much needed expertise to the table, but they don't know the people in this community. My experience has been that my colleagues at the university differ substantially from the people that I have met in here in Prima Valley. Race, social class, and even gender aside (as if you can ever put those things aside), the culture of this specific area has a rich history that is unique. I worry about how faculty members' personal assumptions and prior experiences with urban research will impact their words and actions in these meetings, and find myself hoping that they will focus on the things that connect all of us. I'm unsure about what these 'things' may be.

Near the end of the meeting, one of my senior colleagues mentioned that faculty would be using their work on this community health project for research. I felt myself blanch. No one has ever mentioned the word "research" in this setting, or any other setting in the context of PVI community meetings, so far as I knew...and I had been involved in many, if not most of the PVI meetings since the early days

of partnership activities. I watched the eyebrows of one of the community members raise slightly. No one else really said anything. I responded, suggesting that research was an important thing for us to consider, but that we as a partnership had yet to engage in any dialogue with community members about the processes of research in PVI. This dialogue, I suggested, needed to happen before we could talk about conducting any research.

The university faculty members that were present stayed after the meeting to discuss this interchange. Three of us were pre-tenure and one was tenured. The senior faculty member was, no doubt, advocating for our best interests as junior faculty members...after all, publication is an important part of being a faculty member. As such, research is a need of the university as an organizational partner. I am working towards tenure and I understand all of this pointedly. What I am wrestling with is the assumption that research should be put on the table so blithely, as a foregone conclusion, in the context of a partnership that required two years of relational work and negotiations to establish. Ideally, a process for research would have been outlined at the outset of the partnership. Let's be honest, though: partnerships are often not so clean cut. In many ways they involve "building the airplane as it flies." This is not ideal. But it is real. (Research journal excerpt, April, 2009).

### The False Dichotomy of Sovereign Research Traditions

This experience raised a number of questions for me about research in partnerships. How should university faculty introduce the idea of research to community members? What about the community's needs and rights? Is it ethical for faculty to assume that research is a foregone conclusion in community partnerships? The manner in which my colleague introduced research into the dialogue reified the academic tradi-

tion of sovereign research, wherein researchers autonomously control the research process in its entirety (Nespor & Groenke, 2009). I found this tradition problematic in our context because it established a false dichotomy in the locus of agency in research, simply by virtue of the collaborative essence of the partnership. University faculty and community members had consistently worked together to identify, explore, and determine PVI activities. Why should research have been approached any differently? The raised eyebrows and silence that followed my colleague's statement were troublesome. We had sought to engage and empower community voices over the past three years of the partnership. Introducing research as a "given" instead of a topic for discussion silenced those voices and simultaneously glanced over an opportunity to explore the respective mores, cultural values, politics and knowledge that are so crucial to framing and conducting research. We had had acted as if research was something to be done "on" instead of "with" the community.

### Research Journal Excerpt Two: Who Has the Rights to our Research Design?

We've completed the IRB for the focus group research. I feel good about the design of the study; we worked with the Community Health Advisory Group to establish the questions and the language for our consent forms...it feels good to know that in spite of the somewhat shocking way that research was introduced into the partnership dialogue at that Community Health Advisory Group months ago, we've learned and are involving community voice in our research process. I sent one of the key community leaders a draft of the IRB in the spirit of collaboration, along with a request that the draft be kept within the group. A couple of days ago I was cc'd in an email from another agency that is doing similar research to ours in another part of the state. The email thanked the PVC leader for passing along our IRB materials. After a brief moment of panic, I thought to myself, "Is this what it

means to do research with the community?” Do community members now have the rights to share our study design and research instruments with other researchers? I’ve not done enough collaborative research to know if this is a common practice prior to IRB approval. I feel uncomfortable, regardless. I do not know this organization. I do not know their researchers’ level of training. I do not know the purpose of their organization’s research or any agendas that may sit behind it. And ultimately, there’s nothing that I can do about it now (Research journal excerpt, June, 2009).

### Agency, Expertise, and Action

In this entry, I reflect on one community member’s decision to send a draft IRB proposal to another agency that has not been involved with our collaborative research project. The community member, part of this research development team and a research participant, acts independently and consults no one about his decision in spite of the collaborative and participatory nature of the research. Sharing the IRB without consulting the team repositions the locus of agency in the research to the community, but the locus is still individual in its orientation. The action speaks to the need to create safe spaces for talking about research as an ethical process; while the community had been involved in the research design, there had been no dialogue about the ethics of research or the research process as a whole.

It is possible that this participant’s actions were fueled by political or financial motives. Indeed, this event hearkened to mind the flip side of involving community in agency-oriented research. Weis and Fine (2000) describe these phenomena, speaking of how participants in their ethnographic research have “welcomed us into their spaces to exploit our capacity – our class and professional positions and networks” (p. 59). Had this community participant done exactly that? I was aware that those who received the IRB were associated with a funding opportunity for PVI. In spite of PVI’s

dire economic needs, the act of sharing the IRB co-opted the agency of the community members who had participated in the research design process, as well as our agency as faculty members. One community member had made this decision and the locus of agency was once again framed by a positional bound conceptualization of leadership. This action did not infringe on our privacy as partnership participants; however, it tested the boundaries of our rights to intellectual property.

The ethics of this community member’s action are complicated. Does the right to act in community research belong to individuals, or collaborative groups? Who, if anyone, should have the final word? Should it be community members or those trained in research? Do the community’s needs for money and political support outweigh university research parameters? Murell (2001) addresses these questions in the context of teacher education, calling for discursive practices that allow for “the deliberate and systematic articulation of foundational difference among participants contemplating a research project” (p. 155). Opting to engage in research processes with an individual orientation encourages false dichotomies that overlook the importance of and the need for collaborative spaces where multiple narratives are taken into account during the research process.

### Research Journal Excerpt Three: Best Intentions and Faculty Engagement

I was privy to a flurry of disturbing emails today. The correspondence began with a letter from a university faculty member to his Dean. The Dean had forwarded the letter to PVI leadership. The faculty member had been delivering a classroom program in of one of the Prima Valley Schools as part of the PVI. The faculty member expressed extraordinary frustration with students, the classroom Teacher, and the Principal of the school. The letter was then forwarded to the Principal and, subsequently, the Teacher. The Principal and the teacher were incensed; the faculty member had never spoken to either of them about the con-

cerns that had been expressed in the letter. Moreover, the Principal and teacher felt that the language of the letter revealed the faculty member’s lack of understanding about what it means to work with children in an urban setting, like the PVC.

I was heartbroken: for the students, who had been unjustly characterized; for the teacher, who I knew well to be an outstanding educator; for the Principal, who had made great academic strides with his school and was deeply committed to PVI; and for the faculty member, who had not been adequately prepared or supported at the university end to work in the Prima Valley community (Research journal excerpt, May, 2009).

### Learning from our experiences

Journal Entry 3 also addresses learning and the creation of safe spaces in partnership networks, but in the context of program delivery. The incident described in Journal Entry 3 speaks to the importance of deliberately creating safe spaces for learning that span the organizational, temporal and geographic boundaries of participants. The manner in which the faculty member confronted his problem suggested that he did not feel like he was a member of the network. He did not approach the teacher or school principal as colleagues who might help him to solve this problem. He did not consult fellow researchers who were involved in the partnership. Instead, he went directly to his Dean, who was only tangentially involved in the problem, and resorted to blaming the very people who could have helped him to be successful with his work in the middle school. As I read the email correspondence, I wondered: “What could we have done to draw on the significant knowledge of those in PVI schools to orient him appropriately to their culture? How could we have made this into a learning experience?” Here again, the incident depicts someone acting as an individual agent on behalf of the university, not as a member of a multiple stakeholder partnership. This Journal Entry also speaks to the connection between agency-

oriented research and agency-oriented program delivery. As agency-oriented researchers, we must question, "Does our presence affect or interrupt the music of life within free spaces? Does our social scientific voyeurism shatter the sanctity of that which is presumably (although recognizably not) free" (Weiss & Fine, 2000, p. 58). So too must partnership participants critically examine their own identity, assumptions, and communication patterns within partnership networks in the course of program delivery.

Additionally, partners must be willing to sit down to listen and learn from each other. This holds true for members of all stakeholder groups and is essential if partnerships are to engender learning that ultimately contributes to the capacity of all partnership stakeholders to act in a manner that might strengthen the partnership's collective agency.

What might have been a safe space where even children from the community were allocated agency in their own right became a site of relational contention. Though we have addressed this by holding a community orientation for faculty interested in participating in the PVI, I still wonder: how could we have done a better job of supporting this faculty member? And are we doing enough now? Education was not his area of expertise or interest. He was from an entirely different academic discipline. I had heard him speak. His heart was in the right place; he wanted to share his culturally relevant knowledge with children. The school and community had trusted this goodwill and content expertise, and opened their doors to him, allowing him access to their most precious resource: their children. Did he learn anything from what happened? I wonder, too, what we might do in the future to draw on the significant knowledge of those in PVI schools to orient faculty to the PVC culture? And to what end? Children have always been the heart of the PVI initiative, the goal to help them reach their full potential as learners. Sustainance of the partnership, however, requires support mechanisms for faculty learning too. The act of working in a socioeconomically disadvantaged urban community and the equally vis-

ceral experience of teaching children are complex when taken as isolated endeavors. Combining the two makes it intense. How could we have prepared him? Supported him along the way? Involved classroom teachers and school leaders in the dialogue? There is so much talk about learning communities in schools, and to a lesser extent, universities. This incident speaks to a need to create learning communities, as safe spaces, for faculty working in complex partnerships like the PVI. Indeed, it seems central to engendering sustainable partnerships.

### RESEARCH, AGENCY, AND OTHERNESS

I allude to the matter of identity in the context of this writing and feel I must acknowledge: this work largely leaves the matter of my own identity unexplored as it intersects with partnerships and the research process. In choosing to focus on the manner through which I came to understand agency and problem framing in an applied context, I have opted to adopt a lens that is bound to my role of being a university faculty member. As such, I have, for the most part, eliminated matters related to my own race, class and gender. This may be seen as a deficit in my approach. Indeed, there were many times when my own assumptions and beliefs, partially explored herein, rendered me an "other" in the eyes of community members and university colleagues. Examining my "ecology of practice...at multiple levels of expertise, experience, and activity" (Murrell, 2001, p. 7) through the lenses of otherness remain areas ripe for insight. They merit additional consideration in the context of my own work as well as the larger body of scholarship about research, teacher education, faculty development and partnership learning (Orr, 2008; Wilson, 2006). This boundary between self and other is, after all, "the hyphen at which self-other join in the politics of everyday life, that is, the hyphen that both separates and merges personal identities with our inventions of others" (Fine, 1994, p. 70). It is with gratitude and humility that I acknowledge the manner in which research participants allowed me to nego-

tiate this hyphen as I, too, endeavored to learn about the nature of research, agency, partnerships, and learning...as a researcher and an educator.

### What Have We Learned?

This research has implications for agency-oriented partnership research in the PVI context and beyond. In my research, I came to understand how extending my conception of research participants across disciplinary boundaries in the partnership provided me with a richer understanding of the influences on leadership development in the partnership context. Working with colleagues and community members compelled me to revisit my ideas about the locus of agency in different situations, as well as the manner in which I framed problems for consideration, particularly during the course of analysis.

The Journal Entries demonstrate the centrality of creating organizational learning structures that will act as safe spaces for dialogue about research and program delivery for members of the partnership. Sustaining partnership learning requires opportunities to surface and mediate perceptions, values, beliefs, information, and assumptions through continuing conversations; to inquire about and generate ideas together; to seek to reflect upon and make sense of work in the light of shared beliefs and new information; and to create actions that grow out of these new understandings. Such is the core of leadership (Lambert, 1998, p. 6).

Paradoxes, conundrums, and dissonance will inevitably arise in the course of partnership events and often, there will be no easy answers. The capacity for agency lies in the ability of partnership processes to turn these questions into learning experiences. The framework and research experiences presented are compelling incidents that suggest the true measure of partnership success is the extent to which agency oriented research supports safe spaces for partnership learning.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>All names of people and places used in this article are pseudonyms.

<sup>2</sup>All names of people, organizations and locations used in this research are pseudonyms.

<sup>3</sup>The website is not included in order to maintain the confidentiality parameters of the research.

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## NOTES FROM THE FIELD

# Preparing Teachers for Urban Schools: Evaluation of a Community-Based Model

By Susan Catapano, University of North Carolina-Wilmington; and Sarah Huisman, Fontbonne University

Can a teacher education program committed to the surrounding community help prepare preservice teachers to work in the most challenging urban schools? Preservice teachers spend significant time in schools, observing, tutoring children, and learning to teach. On-site field experiences introduce aspiring teachers to life in schools, and are especially important for teachers who take their first teaching positions in urban schools (Adams, Bondy, & Kuhel, 2005). However, most preservice teachers spend little time in the community surrounding the school to understand the background and experiences of the children they will be serving (Koerner & Abdul-Tawwab, 2006). Teacher education programs do not always bring the aspect of the community into their programs. For purposes of this discussion, the term community is defined as the neighborhood, with all of its agencies, cultural organizations, assets, and challenges that are located outside of the school building but have impact on the lives and academic success of the children. The authors of this article are guided by the beliefs that to meet the needs of the individual child, the teacher must see and appreciate the community where the child lives.

## DEVELOPING A NEW MODEL OF TEACHER PREPARATION

Many models of teacher education are used to prepare new teachers. Recent discussions on teacher education reform call for models that provide school-university collaborations, especially when preparing new teachers for urban schools (Duncan, 2010; Glazer & Hannifan, 2006; Zeichner, 1996). Recent trends in teacher preparation programs include courses that are located

in the community, in either a school or a nearby setting (Glazer & Hannifan, 2006; Hoffman, Reed, & Rosenbluth, 1997; Hollins & Guzman, 2005; Leland & Harste, 2005). Placing students, university faculty, and courses in neighborhood schools helps connect the reality of working in a school with the pedagogy and content covered in university courses. However, the preservice teachers and university faculty are present at schools without really engaging with the community of the school and the community surrounding the school. This does not provide them with the understandings needed to help prepare and retain new teachers for high-need, urban schools (Koerner & Abdul-Tawwab, 2006; Zeichner & Miller, 1997). Currently, the majority of new teachers graduating from teacher preparation programs are middle-income, White, and female (Banks, Cochran-Smith, Moll, Richert, Zeichner, LePage, Darling-Hammond, Duffy, & McDonald, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2006; National Center for Educational Statistics, 1992). They rarely reflect the culture of the children where they will be teaching and are not familiar with the community that surrounds the school and often find the community is different from where they grew up (Koerner & Abdul-Tawwab, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2006).

### School-University Partnership

As part of the faculty at a large, urban university located in the Mid-West, we collaborated for many years with the local, urban, school district, to provide preservice teachers authentic field-based experiences. This usually occurred toward the end of the teacher preparation program as students com-

pleted a traditional student teaching semester. When this model of community-based teacher preparation was developed, the school district had over 33,000 K-12 students, with approximately 100 schools, and 85% of students receiving free or reduced lunch. Based on 2007 state distributed performance test data, 75% of the children scored below grade level in communication arts in third grade (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2008). As of 2007, the high-need, urban district struggled each year to hire enough teachers with appropriate teacher certification.

The partnership between the university and school district provided the district with a substantial number of new teachers each year. The university reports that as many as 40% of the graduates from the teacher education program accepted jobs in the district (personal communication, Teacher Education Office, 2007). Unfortunately, approximately 50% of all newly hired teachers left the district within the first two years of employment (personal communication, School District Recruitment and Retention Office, 2006). Based on the above, we recognized the need to expand the model of teacher preparation to provide additional support to new teachers who were accepting positions in this high-need, urban district.

**Professional development schools.** A Teacher Quality Enhancement Grant from the U.S. Department of Education, 2004-2008, (\$3.2 million) provided resources to assist in expanding the partnership between the university, the school district, and other community partners. The purpose of the grant was to develop highly qualified teachers in partnership



with the urban school district. As we worked to meet the goals of the grant, we developed a community-based model of teacher preparation that merged several models. In the Professional Development School (PDS) model, successful partnerships between schools and universities work to create a new institution that is characterized by a long-term relationship that leading to improved student learning (Dempsey, 1997; Dickens, 2000; Lawrence & Dubetz, 2002; Levine, 1997).

In PDS literature, the school becomes the learning setting for the preservice teachers, university faculty, and classroom teachers (Boles & Troen, 1997; Enciso, Kirschner, Rogers, & Seidl, 2000). Important formal and informal mentoring activities are part of the reciprocal learning experiences that form the partnership (Beasley, Corbin, Feiman-Nemser, & Shank, 1997). PDS development also includes family engagement in the activities that support student learning by drawing on community resources described as special services (Sykes, 1997). Extant literature often does not mention the physical community surrounding the school or the need to help preservice teachers connect to the community outside of the school (Koerner & Abdul-Tawwab, 2006). Without this piece, can preservice teachers really develop a shared cultural perspective with the children in their classroom (Barab & Duffy, 2000)?

**Communities of practice.** It is not surprising that the preservice teachers, and recent teacher education graduates, do not share the same communities and cultural backgrounds as the children they will be teaching. Hodgkinson (1991) that the numbers of teachers of color continue to decrease as the numbers of school-aged children of color continue to increase (as cited in Gomez, 1996).

One way to develop new teachers to work in culturally diverse schools is to form communities of practice. Barab and Duffy (2000) identified a shared common cultural and historical heritage as a crucial component of developing supportive communities of practice. A community of practice extends the traditional teacher preparation model by supporting teacher

education that reproduces a nurturing atmosphere for preservice, new, and classroom teachers as they work with university faculty (Murrell, 2001).

The lack of a shared common cultural and historical heritage is the biggest obstacle for preservice teachers preparing to work in urban schools. As researchers, we asked how does a preservice teacher enter a community that is not reflective of his or her own culture or historical heritage? In addition, how does he or she engage in a meaningful and effective collaboration with teachers and families? Teacher education programs have modified individual courses and field experiences to give preservice teachers opportunities to connect with the cultures of children in urban schools (Adams, et al., 2005; Gomez, 1996; Lenski, S.D., Crumpler, T.P., Stallworth, C. & Crawford, K.M., 2005). Some of these experiences are isolated at the university or follow individual faculty members' interests. Some new teachers spend their entire teacher preparation program without experiencing a school setting beyond the ones that they are familiar with from their own K-12 experiences.

Habermann and Popkewitz (as cited in Gomez, 1996), dismiss the notion that young, White girls, from middle-income, suburban backgrounds are capable of becoming highly qualified teachers for poor, minority, under-achieving children in urban schools. The underlying basis of their argument was the time and experiences of teacher education programs is not enough to change the perspectives and values of young adults from what they have learned growing up, to what they witness in urban classrooms. This conception made us wonder if we are caught in a situation that cannot be resolved. Is it possible that needs of urban schools for highly qualified teachers may never be successful?

This new model of teacher education furthered the idea that if new teachers are comfortable in the community that surrounded and supported the school, he or she would be more likely to feel comfortable as a part of the school community (Koerner & Abdul-Tawwab, 2006). As part of the community, new teachers

would accept positions in the schools and remain committed to the district. Rather than staying isolated within the individual classroom or within the walls of the school, we felt it was important for preservice teachers to learn that he or she must make authentic connections with other classroom teachers, the families and children in their classroom, and the community.

### Community Agencies' Roles in Teacher Preparation

As part of new teachers' preparation, community-based field experiences, are not new ideas (Adams, et al., 2005; Cristol & Gimberty, 2002; Zeichner & Melnick, 1996). Some programs require preservice teachers to complete a community-based project or engage in service-learning activities. Both kinds of engagements place the preservice teacher in the community doing something other than working in a school. Community agencies either accept teachers as volunteers or work with the university to develop specific projects (Shirley, Hersi, MacDonald, Sanchez, Scandone, Skidmore, & Tutwiler, 2006; Zeichner & Melnick, 1996). Many of these experiences are situated early in the teacher preparation program as part of the series of foundational courses required in most teacher education programs (Szente, J., 2008/2009; Weber, 1998). However, early on, preservice teachers do not have well developed connection with the pedagogy of learning to teach or understanding culturally diverse learners (Culp, Chepyator-Thomson, & Hsu, 2009). Other teacher preparation programs use the service learning model, "plan, act, and reflect design" in preparing teachers for urban schools (Andrews, 2009; Edwards & Kuhlman, 2007, p. 45). In these programs, community-based field experiences are an integral part of the pedagogy of preparing highly qualified teachers for urban schools.

Community-based field experiences provide evidence suggesting preservice teachers gain better understanding of diverse populations and learn how to communicate with people from diverse cultures (Adams, et al., 2005; Hollins &

Guzman, 2005, Koerner & Abdul-Tawwab, 2006; Lenski, et al., 2005). However, the studies are limited in making a clear link between the activities experienced by preservice teachers and the goals of the teacher education programs.

Few teacher education programs challenge preservice teachers to see the assets which are available in the urban community (Alkins, Banks-Santilli, Elliott, Guttenberg, & Kamii, 2006). Intensive coaching by experienced university faculty and classroom teachers helped preservice teachers build a bridge between their own home culture and those at the children's homes (Lenski, et al., 2005).

## A COMMUNITY-BASED MODEL OF TEACHER PREPARATION

Figure 1 is a visual representation of the model of teacher education that we have developed to demonstrate the experiences of preservice teachers in the neighboring community. It represents the fusion of coursework, field experiences, and community experiences incorporated into the teacher education program. It emerged as a result of working with students and teachers in a PDS partnership that supported the development of communities of practice. This model differs from other models of teacher education that list community as an important part of the preparation of new teachers. In Murrell's *Circles of Practice* (2001), the community is listed as one of the influences, or circles, that connect to the preservice teacher as a support in learning to teach in schools, especially those in urban settings. The circles that Murrell identifies are separate entities that connect to preservice teachers as part of the overall program of teacher preparation. In the Community-Based Model (CBM), pictured in Figure 1, the community is the foundation upon which other pieces of the program rest; it becomes the crucial piece of the development of the new teacher. New teachers have a strong context as they apply what they are learning about the culture and history of the children in their classrooms with what they are learning about how to teach.

The CBM includes three aspects of

communities of practice: opportunities for preservice teachers to develop an understanding of and begin to share the history and cultural perspective of the community of the children, situational learning, and reflective practice (Barab & Duffy, 2000; Catapano, Huisman, & Song, 2008; Murrell, 2001). Community-based activities and resources helped preservice teachers learn about the history and culture of the children in the classroom. Preservice teachers developed and implemented curriculum based on the community surrounding the school. This experienced, provided situational learning for preservice teachers as they tried out the ideas and activities they had learned in their university courses. Each aspect of the model required preservice teachers to reflect on what they were learning and doing within the classroom and the community. Reflection was conducted in both written and oral forms, and by using university faculty, school administrators, and classroom teachers as sounding boards to dismantle stereotypes and misunderstandings. For example, it was common for preservice teachers to view family members as uncaring about their child's education because of incomplete information and understandings. One school administrator pointed out that some families were living in homeless shelters where they shared living quarters and did not have much opportunity to complete homework before the lights were turned out in the evenings. This information challenged the preservice teachers to reconsider their perspective. The three criteria of the CBM, learning about culture, situational learning, and reflection, contributed to creating culturally responsive, highly qualified, teachers for urban schools.

## DEVELOPMENT OF THE MODEL

The CBM grew out of our involvement within the collaboration with partner schools. As a result, preservice teachers were given the opportunity to work in urban schools, and experience life-in-schools, on a daily basis. Three sources of information formalized the CBM of teacher preparation. First, we engaged with community

representatives to identify activities and experiences that fit seamlessly and effectively, into the teacher preparation program (Edwards & Kuhlman, 2007). Next, we negotiated with the principal and teachers at the field site to allow preservice teachers to engage students in semester-long projects that focused on learning about the community. The project-based learning provided situational learning by giving preservice teachers opportunities to engage children in project work focused on their community. Finally, we were on-site with preservice teachers to assist them in completing the project work and support their understanding of the community and culture of the children (Kent & Simpson, 2009). In addition, we provided information about access to resources in the community that could support the project. These three aspects of the CBM provided a process of layering teacher preparation activities on a foundation built upon the understanding and access of the assets of the community (see figure on opposite page).

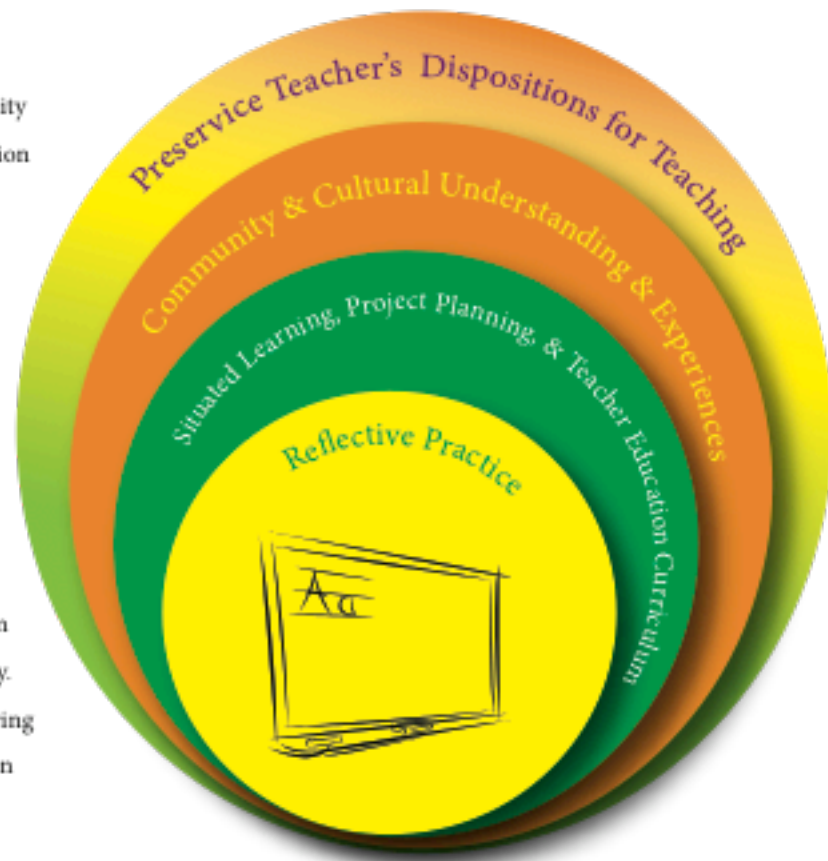
The activities developed to fit into the teacher education program included:

## EVALUATION OF THE COMMUNITY-BASED MODEL

Did it work? In an effort to evaluate the effectiveness of the CBM on the development of highly qualified teachers for urban schools, we gathered feedback from students and teachers participating in the program from 2004-2008. Data included evaluations of the internship class by students, and feedback on each experience included in the CBM (poverty simulation, bus tour, professional development activities, and the community-based project) for each semester. As we collected feedback, we continued modify the CBM each semester. We decided to focus our evaluation on the data collected for the year 2007-2008, because the model had reached a point in the development where application would not require additional, major modifications. In addition, to the data regularly collected, 23 of the preservice teachers who participated in the CBM were engaged in three fo-

## Community-Based Model (CBM) for Teacher Preparation

The Community-Based Model (CBM) of Teacher Preparation infuses the community that surrounds a school into the preparation of new teachers for that school. CBM recognizes three criteria for preparing highly qualified teachers for urban schools: *cultural understanding, situated learning, and reflective communication*. Each piece of the CBM is layered to support the preservice teacher in building understanding and knowledge with field experiences, mentoring by classroom teachers, and support of university faculty. The model graphically describes the layering of experiences, information, and reflection that work together to create a highly qualified urban teacher.



### Goals for the New Model for Teacher Preparation

- Create cultural understanding for preservice teachers by infusing experiences and information about the community surrounding the school into field experiences.
- Experience intensive situated learning experiences working with classroom teachers, peers, university supervisors, and administrators.
- Learn to develop and implement authentic curriculum using a project-based approach, assess and support student-learning, and document learning for families.
- Engage preservice teachers, university faculty, and classroom teachers in reflective communication to inform and improve their practice.
- Partner with preservice teachers, university faculty, classroom teachers, and school administrators to increase student achievement.

ACTIVITY	WHO	WHEN AND WHAT
Community Asset Mapping	Conducted by a university community partner expert; preservice teachers, university faculty and staff	First class of the semester. Preservice teachers learn to map their own assets and think about hidden community assets.
Bus Tour of the Community	Tour led by city alderman-historic expert of the area; preservice teachers, university faculty and staff participating	Second week of the semester, before work begins in the school. Preservice teachers identify community assets and reflect on what they learned about the community.
Poverty Simulation	Poverty simulation facilitators; preservice teachers, university staff, school personnel (invited)	Early in the semester, either before work begins in the schools or in the first half of semester. (Half Day)
Workshop on community violence and families	Conducted by community mental health practitioner, preservice teachers, university staff, school personnel (invited)	Early in the semester, either before work begins in the schools or in the first half of semester. (Half Day)
Development of community-based, semester-long project; includes planning and implementing curriculum and assessing for learning.	University faculty introduce concepts of project work and help identify community assets, preservice teachers	University faculty introduce at first class meeting, support student planning at all class meetings prior to reporting to the school
Development of a community-based field trip to connect to the semester-long project	University faculty support, preservice teachers plan and implement	Preservice teachers plan a community field trip as a culminating experience to the project.
Documentation of children's learning, highlighting community assets.	Preservice teachers, university faculty and staff, school personnel, family and parents	Preservice teachers document children's learning through the project with photos, work samples, narrative displays of work and activities. Partners are invited to tour the school to see the work of the children.

Table 1. CBM Activities

cus groups. These teachers had completed their internship and/or student teaching during the 2007-2008 year. The feedback was becoming consistent and student reflections indicated that the model was working (Kent & Simpson, 2009). The collection of data followed the schedule outlined in Table 2.

Four survey instruments from 2007-2008, from the bus tour, poverty simulation, internship semester review, and the overall evaluation of the program, asked preservice teachers to provide both scaled and narrative data on how or if they valued the experience, what they learned, and how they anticipated using the experience when they became a teacher.

### Bus Tour

Using an anonymous, electronic survey, preservice teachers rated their overall experience on the bus tour in helping them learn about the communities surrounding the school. There were 19 teachers on the fall 2007 trip and 20 on the spring 2008 trip. All the students on the spring trip (20) and 90% of the teachers on the fall trip (17) rated the trip useful or very useful. Most of the feedback was narrative and preservice teachers commented the most useful thing about the tour was getting to see a part of the city where they never go and learning positive things about the urban setting rather than just the stories of crime and violence presented on the evening news.

Preservice teachers (26) commented they found one of the most beneficial things about the tour was learning about the communities where the children lived (Koerner & Abdul-Tawwab, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2006).

A few teachers did not find the tour beneficial. One commented, "...my dad is a city cop and he can tell you all the negative things that happen here. All I heard was positives today. We should hear both." Others reflected on other aspects of the day, "...it drove home the point that [City] is VERY segregated. I guess I always knew it, but the tour really showed me."

### Poverty Simulation

The poverty simulation feedback

Data/Format	Who Completed	Who Collected/Why	When Collected
Introduction Survey- What want to learn, where they had other field experiences, goals.	Students in CBM-name required	Instructor-collected, placed in folder, reviewed to individualize semester	Day 1
Bus Tour Survey	Students in CBM- anonymous	Survey Monkey-emailed to each student	After bus tour (not all respond)
Poverty Simulation Survey	Students in CBM- anonymous	Survey Monkey- emailed to each student	After poverty simulation (not all respond)
Mid-term Feedback Survey	Students in CBM-name required	Instructor-reviewed to make sure students are meeting goals, set additional goals	Mid-semester during weekly seminar
Professional Development Activity Feedback	Students in CBM- anonymous	PD Provider	Following PD
Final Semester Review	Students in CBM-name optional	Instructor-students brainstorm what learned and experienced	Last day of class
Teacher Work Sample	Students in CBM	Instructor, documentation of work completed	End of semester
Overall Program Evaluation	Students in CBM- anonymous	Survey Monkey-emailed to each student	End of semester (not all respond)

Table 2. Schedule of Data Collection

Due to space restrictions, these instruments are not included here. Contact the author for information.

was also collected by an anonymous, electronic survey and included several rating charts to determine how much the simulation helped the teachers develop a better understanding of families living in poverty. On a scale of 1-10, with 10 being the highest, most answers were either an 8 or 9.

Narrative feedback included comments on how preservice teachers became more aware of the struggles of families living in poverty to comments that they had been poor and did not think the simulation taught them anything new. One comment, “this was helpful...I worry people will walk away and go on with their lives...not taking much with them,” was reflective about the value of professional development. Another comment, “...I thought I had financial worries, but now I know it could be much worse...at least I have some options,” indicated participants were personalizing the experience and empathizing with families living in poverty (Ladson-Billings, 2006).

### Semester Review

The semester review results, shown below in Table 3, generated information

that told us what the preservice teachers learned as a result of their experiences in the school and what they hoped to do when they became teachers (Glazer & Hannafin, 2006). It also provided an opportunity for preservice teachers to identify transformational moments of their own thinking during the experience. Data analysis tallied each time a preservice teacher mentioned one of the items. In fall and spring semesters, most preservice teachers indicated they learned about classroom management and teacher behaviors, such as, planning, organizing, flexibility, and using the “teacher voice.” Preservice teachers consistently mentioned learning about curriculum development, lesson planning, and unit planning (Edwards & Kuhlman, 2007). In spring, preservice teachers commented that they learned a lot about instructional strategies, including hands-on activities, projects, and learning centers. In the spring semester, they noted how much they valued the time with the children. Several mentioned teaching and connecting with the children as important during their day in the school.

A few of the preservice teach-

ers wrote narratives about what they learned, Janice wrote, “...children are beautiful, children want to learn, enjoy each other.” Several of the preservice teachers wrote, “... plan, plan, plan...,” both when asked what they learned and what they would do as teachers. Finally, Sarah wrote, “one thing I will not do is taking away my children’s recess time...”

Others wrote narratives about their transformational moments, Jason wrote, “when we went on a field trip and the children were recalling things about trees I had taught them in class...” Brenda wrote, “learning their names. (I know that may seem so simple but the interaction gets better when you call the student by name).” Jackie and Diane, partners wrote, “when my students really got into learning about the habitats, even when I wasn’t there,” and, “when we did assessments...the students really excelled...I wasn’t sure they were learning anything.” One student, Christian, noted his transformational moment was, “When I found out through a lesson that a student did not have a light in his bedroom.”

Response	Fall 2007 (n=9)	Spring 2008 (n=18)
<b>Brainstorm a list of things you learned; What was the most important thing you did during your day; What you will do as a teacher :</b>		
Classroom Management (transitions, routines)	9	28
Differentiate Instruction	3	3
Use of Technology (Smart Board)	5	1
Instructional Strategies (Hands-on activities, Projects, learning centers)	4	14
Teacher Behaviors (Planning, Flexibility, Organization, Voice)	9	18
Value of Peer Relationships	2	5
Implement Curriculum (Unit & Lesson Planning, field trip)	6	17
Understand the learner's background	1	2
Assess Learning	0	5
Actually taught children	0	14
Listened and interacted with children	3	2
Self-Confidence	1	2
Make sure children learn something everyday	1	0
<b>Describe one transformational moment that impacted you:</b>		
Discussing children's background and home-life	4	2
Poor teaching by the cooperating teacher, learn what not to do.	1	1
When realized the children were learning from lessons.	2	7
Positive meeting with parents/family.	0	1
Personally connecting with children.	0	1
Issues at the school (behavior of children)	0	4
No answer	2	2

Table 3. First Semester Review by Preservice Teachers (Interns Only)

Rate the following components as they developed your understanding of diverse cultures and communities surrounding the school where you worked. (n=20)	Very Helpful	Somewhat Helpful	Not Very Helpful	Waste of Time	Did not Participate
Asset Mapping	10	5	4	0	0
Bus Tour	13	2	1	0	4
Poverty Simulation	10	4	3	0	2
Teacher Work Sample: Contextual Factors	14	6	0	0	0
Something Beautiful Project	10	7	1	0	2
Professional Development:					
Post Traumatic Stress in Children in Urban Areas	5	3	0	0	11
Symposium on Urban Education	9	3	0	0	8
Selecting Multicultural Children's Literature	10	2	0	0	8

Table 4. Overall Program Evaluation Diverse Cultures and Communities By Preservice Teachers (Both Interns and Student Teachers)

### Overall Program Evaluation

In the spring semester of 2008, we wanted to ask the current preservice teachers in the CBM, both in the internship semester (n=18) and student teaching semester (n=14), to evaluate the overall program, specifically rating the components of the model as how helpful each was in developing their understanding of diverse and communities where they completed their

field experiences (Adams, et al., 2005; Gomez, 1996; Lenski, et al., 2005; Korerer & Abdul-Tawwab, 2006). Data in Table 4 notes that 20 (out of 32) of the teachers responded and rated the components of the CBM as helpful, with more than 75% of responses falling from very helpful to somewhat helpful. Teachers who participated in the activities saw each one as useful.

Table 5 reports the overall program

evaluation where preservice teachers rated individual activities and requirements of CBM as how helpful they were in learning to teach. There are no activities identified as a waste of time. The most helpful activities were working with a cooperative teacher (n=19) and preparing a classroom management plan (n=18). The Design for Instruction (Unit Plan), Assessment Analysis, and Planning a Field Trip each had 16 pre-

Rate each of the following as it helped you learn to teach: (n=20)	Very Helpful	Some-what Helpful	Not Very Helpful	Waste of Time	Did not Participate
<b>Teacher Work Sample:</b>					
Plan for Assessment	15	5	0	0	0
Classroom Management Plan	18	2	0	0	0
Design for Instruction (Unit Plan)	16	4	0	0	0
Instructional Decision Making	15	2	3	0	0
Assessment Analysis	16	2	2	0	0
Family Involvement Plan	15	5	0	0	0
Planning a Field Trip	16	1	1	0	2
Developing a Text-set to Support the Curriculum	10	2	1	0	7
Working with a Partner	13	5	2	0	0
Working with a Cooperating Teacher	19	1	0	0	0
Working with a Cohort of Students in One School	15	2	1	0	2

Table 5. Overall Program Evaluation Becoming a Teacher (Both Interns and Student Teachers)

service teachers identify them as very helpful in preparing to be a teacher.

The overall program evaluation asked students to rate how prepared they were, at the time of the survey, to accomplish typical classroom activities and requirements. Table 6 indicates that only a few students were still struggling with the common duties and responsibilities of a classroom teacher. The things teachers were most confident in accomplishing included teaching science (13) (the subject of the community project), pacing curriculum (11), and accessing community resources (11). Preservice teachers felt the most unsure of preparing children for the state mandated standardized test (4).

### Focus Groups

Three focus groups were held in May with 23 preservice teachers who just completed their internship (12) or their student teaching (11). Preservice teachers were asked to comment on the experiences they had in the CBM and whether or not the prepared them to teach in an urban school (Glazer & Hannafin, 2006). Four emerging themes from the comments of the preservice teachers included, all of the teachers reported that the CBM was valuable and they believed they would not have had the same experience learning to teach if they had selected an internship and

student teaching in a different setting.

...It was really surprising to me. I did not know what to expect. I am really glad I had this experience. I learned so much. If I went with a different group [sic location] it would not have been the same. My friend in the [sic] district didn't do anything like I did. I was really part of the school. .... (Janine).

Another theme was identifying the pros and cons of the CBM model. Although all of the preservice teachers identified the things that were important to them personally, they thought the pros included having the opportunity to teach each week, preparing cur-

At this time, rate how prepared are you to accomplish:	Very Prepared	Prepared, but still need experience	Still Struggling	I don't think I can do this
Manage classroom behavior	7	10	3	0
Plan curriculum	10	8	2	0
Assess learning	10	8	2	0
Differentiate instruction	7	11	2	0
Teach reading and writing	9	10	1	0
Teach math	9	10	1	0
Teach science	13	5	2	0
Teach social studies	10	7	2	1
Pace curriculum to meet school goals	11	7	1	1
Prepare children to be successful on the state test	4	11	4	1
Engage children in projects	13	5	1	0
Access school resources	8	10	2	0
Access community resources	11	5	4	0
Work successfully with families	8	11	1	0

Table 6. Overall Program Evaluation Prepared to Teach (Both Interns and Student Teachers)

riculum, and learning about classroom management. The only consistent negative aspect was the amount of work the internship required. They all said they were grateful for the experience and the work paid off but they mentioned that it was a harder internship than the experiences of other preservice teachers.

...I would never have learned about classroom management if I had not been required to teach the students each week in internship. I was part of the group that ran the science lab. We had 16 children, 4 times a day, every Tuesday. You really figured out what would work and what wouldn't work. Consistency, that is what worked... (Jason).

Finally, the focus group identified the access to materials through the grant funds and the on-site support of the university faculty really helped them feel success learning to teach in the urban school.

.....my instructor was always there to help. Sometimes we didn't know what to do but she always had suggestions that worked. I don't know what I would have done if she hadn't been there. It made all the difference...(Candace).

## CONCLUSION

As of 2008, over 200 preservice teachers have participated in the CBM of teacher preparation. Approximately 25% of the teachers accepted positions in the urban district where they completed their internship and student teaching. Declining enrollment in the district as of 2008 sent another 25% into charter schools and the "urban-ring" districts that were just outside the inner city. Each year, we continued to work with our former students who became the new teachers in the partnership schools. They anecdotally report they feel comfortable in the school and community because of the CBM and yearlong experience of the teacher preparation program. New teachers also reported that they better understand the students and have a stronger foundation to build upon when designing curriculum and lessons.

The final year of teacher prepara-

tion in the CBM relies on a foundation of knowledge about the community of the children. It uses a variety of experiences to provide preservice teachers with the skills, knowledge, and experiences to become highly qualified urban teachers. Data collected throughout the development of the model provided us with information on how to improve the model each semester. By academic year 2007-2008, the model was complete with minor revisions. The data collected that year provided us with information about the value of the model in preparing teachers to work in urban schools. The group of students participating in the data collection that year was small; however, the data was a true evaluation of all pieces of the model.

The bus tour of the community surrounding the school sets the historic and geographic context of the community for the preservice teachers. The poverty simulation provided teachers with a perspective of families living in poverty (Ladson-Billings, 2006). The semester-long curriculum project developed and implemented by the preservice teachers connected what the children were learning with what they saw in their community. Through situational learning, preservice teachers develop their skills in integrating curriculum, meeting curriculum standards, and making curriculum connections with children's lives by applying what they learned in their teacher education program with what they learned from the experience of teaching. Most importantly, preservice teachers mentioned learning about classroom management through this model, one of the things new teachers struggle with regardless of their teaching placement. All along the way, preservice teachers reflected about what they were learning and experiencing under the guidance of university faculty who accompanied them to the school each day.

As the university faculty, we found the work in the urban schools energized our own practice. This model provided an opportunity to learn about the community surrounding the school and how important it is to weave that knowledge and understanding into the teacher preparation program. As a result of the on-site work with the

preservice teachers, we were able to secure strong university-school partnerships where our research was welcome, provided professional development for the teachers, and were often invited to participate in many other school-family events. This opportunity carried over to our classes beyond the internship and student teaching.

Finally, as reported in the surveys collected after each activity of the CBM, preservice teachers responded that completing activities that specifically gave them experiences in the community, working directly with children, families, and classroom teachers, and collaborating with university faculty, helped them find value in the surrounding community and be able to consider the whole child when thinking about teaching (Koerner & Abdul-Tawwab, 2006). Experiences in the CBM helped them dismantle assumptions about poverty and the community where the children lived. The activities helped them develop confidence as teachers in urban schools.

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## NOTES FROM THE FIELD

# Cultural Applications: Ideas for Teacher Education Programs

By Michael Bartone

As a White male, I grew up in a suburban environment in Connecticut, which included big yards with a lot of room to play safely. I rarely encountered people of different racial backgrounds in my quiet little town, and when I did encounter them, it was mostly on my trips into Hartford or by working superficially with the students who were bused in from outlying towns. Though my interactions in school were limited as a child, I was very interested in understanding what made these marginalized groups, mainly African-Americans and Puerto Ricans, different than my own.

When I moved to North Carolina for college, I began to interact socially with several African-American students, many of whom came from urban environments. I began to question my own identity and role as a White male along with all of the assumptions and stereotypes I had learned as a child. I then moved to Clarkston, GA, near Atlanta to teach in a school with a very diverse population. Clarkston is roughly thirteen miles due east of Atlanta and quietly sits in the shadows of Metro Atlanta's urban sprawl. The town has changed drastically in the last 20-30 years, having once been almost all White to currently being one of the most culturally diverse communities in our country (St. John, 2009). With its easy access to major bus routes and inexpensive apartments and housing, the town became the perfect location for a refugee settlement community in the 1990s and 2000s (St. John, 2009).

I was terribly underprepared to teach this kind of student population at first. For instance, I had originally planned to implement the same classroom management strategies that I had learned from my assisting teachers in North Carolina. Students were given rewards for their behavior and were

judged by the teacher only; there was very little student buy-in. The acceptable behavior was based on a Eurocentric, middle-class frame of reference, to which I had unknowingly subscribed as well. However, I quickly learned from colleagues that this style of classroom management and mindset would be unacceptable in a tougher, more diverse classroom setting. I searched for a program that would help me to be successful during my first year of teaching. Thankfully, I taught with many African-American teachers who helped me to better understand the intricacies and history of what it meant to be Black in America. It was at this point that I realized how integral it was for me and my students that I become more of an active participant in understanding their culture rather than playing the part of the casual observer or teacher who just shows up to work.

So what does my story have to do with preparing teachers in pre-service teaching programs? I believe that my experience is not unique and that the curriculum in teaching programs must be scrutinized more rigorously against the backdrop of ethnic and cultural diversity.

## DATA SUPPORTING THE NEED FOR CULTURALLY RELEVANT TRAINING

According to the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Educational Statistics (2005), the number of – K-12 or ages 5-18 – White students in public schools has decreased since 1980. On the flip side, the number of non-White students – African-Americans, Hispanics, Asian/Pacific Islanders, Native-Americans, and multi-racial students – has increased in public schools. In 1980, 74.6 percent of the school population in the U.S. was White, but by 2004 that percent-

age had dropped to 59.9 percent. That means that 41.1 percent of the students enrolled in public schools in 2004 were non-White and, thus, not part of the dominant U.S. societal culture.

However, even though the number of non-White students has risen considerably in the last 25-plus years, the number of non-White teachers has not equally increased to keep pace with the influx of non-White students. In fact, in 2000 13.5 percent of the teacher population was that of people of color, while 86.5 percent were White (Aldridge & Goldman, 2005). The proportion of White teachers to non-White students has a big effect on how teachers interact with their non-White students (Delpit, 1995; Howard, G, 2006; Schultz, Neyhart, & Reck, 1996; Su, 1996).

Finally, I believe these numbers tell us that colleges or schools of education need not only to start attracting more teachers of color, but they need to continue to educate preservice teachers on how to best work with marginalized populations. According to the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Educational Statistics (2005), in 1980 the total population of White students in schools was 74.6% and 25.4% for non-white students (African-American, Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, Native American, and Multi-Racial). In 2004 the numbers were 59.9% and 41.1% respectively. Thus, in those 24 years, the proportion of the student population that was White *decreased* by 14.7% while the proportion that was non-White *increased* by 15.7%.

## TEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAMS

Sleeter (2000) notes that an effective way of preparing teachers to work with diverse populations is to not only have multicultural courses but to align and connect these courses with field work. Sleeter also states

that in a study conducted by Bondy, Schmitz, & Johnson (1993), the researchers found that when multicultural courses are combined with field work, such as “tutoring in public housing neighborhoods” (p.218), the rate of impact was much higher than those courses that either only did one of these in isolation or those that did not implement either of the two pieces.

Wiggins and Follo (1999) found, through their pre- and post-semester assessments, that their subjects’ placement in diverse school settings before completing the preparation program was helpful, yet did little to change their overall attitude and comfort toward working with students of different cultural backgrounds. Carpenter (2000) suggests “required multicultural teacher education courses” follow the following steps in order to reduce resistance from preservice teachers:

- 1) Clarify and justify the purpose of the course, 2) Address the controversies associated with changing schooling practices by presenting all sides in the course content, 3) Address the teaching dilemmas and methods in order to prepare preservice teachers for actual teaching situations, 4) Give examples, invite guest speakers who can serve as models of multicultural teaching, 5) Maximize placements in local urban schools, 6) Maximize the preservice teachers’ diversity within the teacher education program, 7) If possible, smaller courses are recommended to ensure a sense of safety and comfort. (p. 17)

By doing these things, preservice teachers can develop a better understanding of the intricacies of working with marginalized populations, especially in an urban school setting.

According to Noel (1995) there are three main components to multicultural teacher preparation programs. These are knowledge, attitudes, and skills. As someone who has been through this process during my undergraduate studies, I believe that knowledge and skills are the easiest for preservice teachers to grasp. As a teacher, it is not too difficult to find books or programs that help teachers plan how

to work with diverse learning styles or create solid units. Attitudes are more difficult to change, because this process forces preservice teachers to grapple with their preconceived notions of marginalized groups and find a way to gain a better understanding of the diverse groups they will encounter one day.

### **BASIS FOR NEW PRACTICES AND TEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAMS**

As Berry and Lechner (1995) found, most pre-service teachers they surveyed believed their college course work had prepared them to be culturally aware of the marginalized populations they were about to teach. However, the preservice teachers in Berry and Lechner’s study also noted that they felt unprepared to teach and communicate with students who were from different backgrounds than themselves. Garmon (1998) reports that preservice teachers who demonstrated a willingness to be open to multicultural training and those who possessed a “self-awareness/self-reflectiveness” trait were more positive and receptive to these courses as opposed to students who did not possess these traits; their attitudes did not change during the course of the class. These results align with Wiggins and Follo’s (1999) study, which found, through their pre- and post-semester assessments, that their subjects’ placement in diverse school settings before completing the preparation program was helpful yet did little to change their overall attitude and comfort toward working with marginalized populations. So how can colleges of education help?

The easy answer would be to say that teacher preparation programs need to incorporate more multicultural courses. Banks (2002) states, “Multicultural education is a reform movement designed to make some major changes in the education of students” (p. 1). He also notes that the purpose of multicultural education is to provide students the opportunity to gain a better understanding of where their perceptions and epistemologies about education and culture come from, as well as the perspectives of other cultures.

Taylor (2001) points out one disadvantage of incorporating more multicultural courses, noting that many faculty members feel they are not qualified enough to teach about diversity and cultural sensitivity and therefore avoid the subject altogether. This definitely poses a problem. Many professors in teacher education programs are not very different than the students they are teaching, and this may, in turn, have a deep unintentional impact on the effectiveness of these programs (Parker & Hood 1995).

However, for me, becoming more sensitive to students’ cultures and needs goes beyond just adding more multicultural courses to teacher preparation programs or offering more of the cultural sensitivity training courses that schools and districts give to inservice teachers as part of professional developments.

### **GOING BEYOND MULTICULTURAL COURSES**

In my own third grade classroom, I advocate for more depth instead of breadth in almost everything I do. For instance, as educators we need to teach multiplication facts. However, if we do not give our students the solid foundation in number sense, then memorizing the facts, in my view, is moot. The same goes for implementing courses that emphasize understanding and approaching diversity in one’s community or classroom. We can read and write lessons based on how to incorporate diverse perspectives, but if the message is surface-level only, then we have missed our chance to make an impact.

One content area that lends itself well to teaching with a diverse population is the topic of the Civil Rights Movement. I try to incorporate lessons that will resonate with the experiences of the students on a deeper level. For example, having students understand the reasons why Jim Crow laws were implemented to how the nonviolent protests and sit-ins effected change, especially change that continues to this present day, is powerful. The biggest compliment I have gotten, besides having my third grade students want to write informational reports about

non-standard historical African-American figures (i.e. Amzie Moore, Bob Moses, Diane Nash, James Lawson, Julian Bond, etc.) or stating that they wanted to go to NC A&T “just like the four young college boys,” was a compliment given by a former 1964 Freedom Summer worker in Mississippi. Her grandchildren attend my school, and she noted that my students know more about the Civil Rights Movement than she did! I let my students delve deep and ask probing, and at times uncomfortable, questions. But in turn, they have begun to see different perspectives, whether they were positive or negative, of the movement.

### TEACHERS' AND STUDENTS' RELATIONSHIPS: A FOUNDATION

Delpit (1995) argues that teachers need to understand the “differences that may arise from culture, language, family, community, gender, [and] schooling,” in order to connect with their students. One way of going about this is, in essence, to become an active participant in students' cultural institutions and/or cultural traditions. Delpit also notes that this would allow for teachers to better understand the situations and experiences students talk and write about.

Howard (2006) mentions that through his actions, words, and attitudes he lets students know who he is and that he respects them for who they are by acknowledging that he respects their experiences in life and what they are bringing to the classroom. One way to go about this would be to ask students questions about *where they come from, what they can bring to you [educator], and what they need from you [educator]*, to make their education experiences more fulfilling.

### IDEAS FOR TEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAMS

This brings me to my point about how teacher education programs can better serve their students in regards to multicultural or cultural diversity training. In his review of different ways college teacher preparation and inservice teacher professional develop-

ment programs can be effective when training teachers for multicultural and culturally responsive teaching, LeRoux (2001) states “Because of diverse school populations with diverse backgrounds and unique learning styles and needs in schools today, effective teaching has to address such diversity of learning by needs and means of diverse teaching approaches and strategies,” (p. 18).

One approach I have found helpful in my years of teaching is to genuinely explore and connect with the unique cultures of my students, as Howard and Delpit have both advocated doing. When I first arrived at the school in Clarkston, GA, I talked to the students and parents about their customs and history. I attended social gatherings and visited the houses of students to get a better understanding of where they came from. Additionally, I found myself at church during Sunday service, regardless of the fact that I am a Christmas-and-Easter-kind-of-Christian, as well as walking the campus of the Atlanta University (AU) complex, of which I had never heard before moving to Atlanta. I ate homemade desserts at a Bosnian student's home while looking at his coloring book of where to find the land mines, went to an Ethiopian restaurant with an Ethiopian family and learned not only how to eat injera, but the history around food in their culture, and while in Seattle I attended a luau and learned the history of the Samoan people by dancing and talking with many members of the community. These experiences have become crucial in my growth as an educator working with a diverse population of students.

The most telling moment for me was being in Clarkston, GA during the World Trade Center attacks on September 11<sup>th</sup>. Here I was, a White boy from suburban Connecticut, in a public school with roughly half the population Muslim and with an assistant principal who was Muslim. In addition, we had students from New York City, including one whose father worked in the World Trade Center (WTC).

In my class we had a student who had just moved to Georgia from Brooklyn, New York, and here he was working side-by-side with students whose religion would be the target of hatred

and another form of profiling in the U.S. Our class had such an open dialogue about the events and the cultures involved and what it meant at that moment in our nation's history. A few days after the attacks, I drove an Ethiopian student and his father, who were Muslim, to Emory so the boy could receive his physical therapy. In his broken English the father taught me more than any book or documentary could have about his religion, experiences, and how similar Islam and Christianity really are.

The key I found in all of this was in the dialogue. I could show up to the restaurant and just eat, but if I didn't ask questions about the culture, then I was just doing what many teachers do, thinking that if I eat the food or show kids what foods are represented from a country, then I have done my part incorporating some sort of diversity into my classroom. It is not just about adding holidays and food festivals to our curricula or teachings, but rather infusing perspectives from marginalized groups (Banks, 2002). One thing I remember about our International week while growing up was that we made the food from the country we studied, but learned little else. We might have read books about the country, but histories and experiences of the people came from, almost always, the dominant culture's perspective.

It is those experiences that have made me appreciate diversity and understand where my students are coming from. I suggest that teacher preparation programs find some way to allow students to get beyond the text and into real-life applications to implement a cultural applications component. These programs should encourage students to go to social gatherings or community meetings and talk to the numerous marginalized groups within their community.

### ATTITUDES OF PRESERVICE EDUCATORS AND CULTURAL APPLICATIONS

Preservice educators come with their own perceptions of the marginalized groups with whom they may work one day, and these perceptions can color the way preservice teachers interact with marginalized groups (Gorman,

2004; Pohan & Aguliar, 2001; Walker-Dalhouse & Dalhouse, 2006). These perceptions, I believe, can come from family members, the media, or personal experience, but having teacher preparation programs encourage students to challenge their own thoughts is crucial. They can do this by directly being involved with the groups about which they might have preconceived notions, and such experiences might just have an impact greater than any textbook could illicit. Other educational experiences that teaching programs can provide include facilitating conversations between preservice teachers and community and religious leaders about how to effectively work with children of their specific community.

Finally, for those professors who are uncomfortable with their own understanding of how to teach others about how to work with diverse groups, enabling preservice teachers to go to social events or talk with those belonging to marginalized groups in their own setting, as I had an opportunity to do, could make diversity training more meaningful.

### TACKLING CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT VIA CULTURAL AND COMMUNITY ASSISTANCE

As I stated earlier, in the first year of teaching, discipline/classroom management was a difficult thing for me as well as others I have surveyed. If preservice programs implement the

aforementioned suggestions, then first year teachers could become more comfortable stepping out and questioning their stereotypes and beliefs about their students, changing the way they manage all aspects of their classrooms. This would also allow them to gather information based on open and honest conversations with members of marginalized groups to figure out what works best or to understand cultural norms. Finally, students need to be cognizant of the fact that these leaders and community members are just a proxy and do not necessarily represent everyone in their communities, but they do provide much needed insight.

Classroom management is difficult to master, but if first year teachers have adequate training in *how* to get to understand a culture and *how* to communicate with different groups, then the management piece may seem a little easier and less daunting. Jervis (1996) pointed out that when one lacks the ability to communicate effectively with students from other cultures, s/he is neglecting the chance to have a powerful impact within their classroom.

### CONCLUSION

Going to where students and their families live, play, and socialize is one way of creating personalized relationships. In my years of teaching I have always found it is the little things that make a huge impact on all the lives of people involved. By incorporating a real life cultural application piece,

teacher education programs can give students the tools for interacting, understanding, and better serving the diverse groups of children they will likely encounter in their classes. Furthermore, the kind of training I describe above has the potential to facilitate a stronger relationship between new teachers and their students' families. As Gay (2000) writes, "The personal is powerful." A strong partnership between teachers, students, and students' families can have a positive impact on the students' and families' engagement in the education process.

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## COMMENTARY

# New Goals, Familiar Challenges?: A Brief History of University-Run Schools

By Maia Cucchiara, Temple University

In fall 2001, the University of Pennsylvania opened a public elementary school a few blocks away from its West Philadelphia campus. With the opening of this school, Penn joined the list of colleges and universities that have recently gone into the business of operating elementary or secondary schools.<sup>1</sup> In each situation, the university role differs somewhat—for example, Penn is working in partnership with the teachers union and school district, while the University of Chicago and several other universities actually run their own charter schools—but in every case the university is assuming a responsibility that has traditionally been outside of its sphere. Indeed, the founding of many of these schools was at least partly informed by a larger development in higher education: the emergence of a heightened commitment to civic and community engagement on the part of major research universities.

While the openings of such schools have been announced with great fanfare as representing new opportunities for universities, communities, and students,<sup>2</sup> the idea of a university-operated school is actually not new. In fact, universities have been running schools in the U.S. since the 18<sup>th</sup> century. As is so often the case in the world of education, the history and legacy of earlier efforts is poorly understood, leaving us with little knowledge of their structures, purposes, challenges, and successes. This paper thus asks the following questions: Why have universities historically gotten into the business of running elementary or high schools and what were the goals and structures of those schools? In what ways is the latest batch of university-operated schools a continuation or divergence from this history? What insights does this histo-

ry provide into contemporary efforts?

In this article, I will use primary and secondary source material to explore the history of these schools, examine the role they have played in the larger educational arena, and attempt to draw some connections between historical versions and their more recent incarnations. I will argue that the latest round of university-operated schools, with their goal of serving low-income, urban communities, represents something of a new direction for this endeavor. I will further argue, however, that an examination of the history of university-run schools has much to offer in terms of understanding the particular challenges such schools face. As universities continue to rethink and restructure their relationship with their communities and to make connections between the university and the real-world practices of schools, it is helpful to see these latest efforts as a chapter in a larger story rather than a wholly new phenomenon.

## THE FIRST UNIVERSITY-OPERATED SCHOOLS

University-run or affiliated schools have a long history in the United States. This history reaches back to the earliest colonial colleges, such as Harvard, Yale, William and Mary, and the University of Pennsylvania, many of which operated Latin schools or departments in order to prepare students for college (Good & Teller, 1973). The longest lived of these schools, Rutgers Preparatory, was founded in 1768 and maintained its ties to the university until the 1950s (Sperduto, 1967). Like most preparatory schools, the school at Rutgers was private and provided its students with a fairly elite educational experience. With the increas-

ing availability of high-quality high school education, these schools gradually faded from relevance. At the same time, a number of universities began to explore the “laboratory school” idea.

## LABORATORY SCHOOLS

In the nineteenth century, many universities and normal schools (teacher training institutions) opened “laboratory schools.” Unlike college-preparatory schools, laboratory schools were directly related to the research or teacher-training purposes of the universities. These schools have served a number of functions over the years, including teacher training, demonstration, and experimentation. As such, the history of laboratory schools is one of contested definitions and multiple, often competing, purposes (Goodlad, 1995; Hunkins, et al., 1995; Jarman, 1932; Ohles, 1961).

From the earliest incarnations, laboratory schools were dogged by two major tensions with relevance for today’s schools. First, laboratory schools were meant to be models for other schools to imitate. At the same time, however, these schools tended to serve more elite populations and to have more abundant resources than traditional public schools. This tension limited the schools’ relevance and impact. Second, laboratory schools have frequently had multiple goals—beyond the education of the students—that forced administrators to juggle sometimes-conflicting priorities. The sections that follow will explore these issues more closely.

## Laboratory Schools of the Nineteenth Century—Teacher Training

The first laboratory schools were



operated by teacher-training institutions. They served as “model schools” where future teachers could observe expert teaching techniques, work with the latest equipment, and hone their own skills. This type of laboratory school first opened in New England in the 1820s and had spread as far west as Minnesota by the 1860s (Wen-Ju, n.d.).

One of the most famous of these schools, the Hunter College Campus Elementary School, opened in 1870 as the Model Primary School. The school was affiliated with a teacher-training institute for women (which would later become Hunter College) and was intended to be a “laboratory” for practice teaching. The founder of the school, Thomas Hunter, used the laboratory metaphor very deliberately: “It may be observed, that the living class of young children is used by the normal teacher in a manner similar to the use of the dead body by a teacher of anatomy” (in Stone, 1992, p. 13). This allusion to an anatomy laboratory for medical students—a place where students become expert in a certain extant body of information—reveals an emphasis on learning and sharpening skills rather than on adding to, or even disrupting, commonly accepted knowledge and practices. (A few decades later, Dewey would use the laboratory metaphor to refer to biology and physics laboratories, with very different implications for the school’s mission.)

Though the Hunter School was public, from its inception it attracted a relatively elite student body. Middle-class parents sent their children to the school because of its strong academic reputation, excellent teachers, and such specialized course offerings as French, German, and music (Stone, 1992). In her history of the school, Judith Stone observes that the school’s privileged population soon threatened the school’s usefulness as a “laboratory” and made it increasingly irrelevant to the teacher-training department it supposedly existed to serve. The children at [the] school were a different population from the “poorer” children at the public schools where the new teachers would actually find work. (Stone, 1992, pp. 15-16)

Hunter solved this problem by sending student teachers to spend time in other neighborhood schools where the children were less privileged. While this solution may have been effective, the problem itself foreshadowed a set of questions that would continue to plague Hunter and other laboratory schools: Can an environment as rarefied as a laboratory school have anything to offer educational practices in general? Or must there always be a divide between the “ideal” world of the laboratory and the “reality” of what is possible in most schools?

### Progressive-Era Laboratory Schools— Research and Experimentation

Another type of laboratory school, one that focuses on research, innovation and bridging theory and practice, is closely identified with John Dewey’s Laboratory School at the University of Chicago. When Dewey joined Chicago’s faculty in 1894, William Harper, the president of the university, was in the process of creating a new kind of university, which moved beyond the traditional function of disseminating knowledge and embraced research and the training of researchers (Tanner, 1997). Dewey’s discussion of his school’s mission—and his use of the term laboratory—was consistent with Harper’s own interest in generating new knowledge:

It bears the same relation to the work of pedagogy that a laboratory bears to biology, physics or dentistry. Like any such laboratory, it has two main purposes: (1) to exhibit, test, verify and criticize theoretical statements and principles; (2) to add to the sum of facts and principles in its special line.” (Dewey, 1896, in Van Til, n.d.)

Similarly, in *School and Society* (1900), Dewey explained that the laboratory school would further the university’s research agenda: From the university standpoint, the most important part of [the school’s] work is the scientific—the contribution it makes to the progress of educational thinking.... Only the scientific aim, the conduct of a laboratory, can furnish a reason for the maintenance by a university

of an elementary school.” (p. 96)

Unlike earlier laboratory schools, Dewey’s school was not to be a site for teacher training. Instead, it would be a place where he could study children’s learning, test and refine his theories, and create a curriculum “in which developmental, intellectual, and social goals were viewed as inextricably intertwined” (Tanner, 1997, p. 8).

The Laboratory School (originally the University Elementary School) opened in 1896 with sixteen pupils. When Dewey left the University of Chicago in 1904, there were 140 students, 23 teachers, and a number of assistants. From the very beginning, the school was the object of a great deal of attention. Dewey himself wrote numerous articles and lectures about his experiences with the school, and in 1903 an entire issue of the journal *The Elementary School Teacher* was devoted to the topic (Cremmin, 1962, p. 139, note 3). A recent revival of interest in Dewey’s work is manifest in books like Laurel Tanner’s (1997) *Dewey’s Laboratory School: Lessons for Today*, which examines the school’s implications for contemporary educational reform challenges.

In 1936, Katherine Camp Mayhew and Anna Camp Edwards, two former teachers at the school, published the most comprehensive portrayal. *The Dewey School* discusses the school’s history, theoretical underpinnings, curriculum, organization, as well as its day-to-day practices. Mayhew and Edwards describe a school built upon the premise that learning is natural, social and experiential, a school that strove to overcome the traditional fragmentation of the curriculum and the students’ experiences. As Dewey observed, the school’s practices grew from his theories about learning and society:

Because of the idea that human intelligence developed in connection with the needs and opportunities of action, the core of school activity was to be found in occupations, rather than in what are conventionally termed studies. Study ... was to be an outgrowth of the pursuit of certain continuing or consecutive occupational activities. Since the development of the intelligence

and knowledge of mankind has been a cooperative matter... occupations were to be selected which related those engaged in them to the basic needs of developing life, and demanded cooperation. (in Mayhew and Edwards, 1936, p. 5)

Student projects, such as weaving fibers into cloth, involved extensive study of different materials, experimentation with various approaches, and examination of the connections between the students' own processes and the historical development of technology (Dewey, 1900; Mayhew and Edwards, 1936).

Dewey believed the Laboratory School would stimulate change in other schools by proving that it was possible to put his theories about learning into practice: "We do not expect to have other schools literally imitate what we do. A working model is not something to be copied; it is to afford a demonstration of the feasibility of the principle, and of the methods which make it feasible" (1900, p. 94). Once this "feasibility" had been established—and his theories could no longer be dismissed as unrealistic—educators would be free to work out their own methods based upon those same principles (Jackson, 1990). As a result, Dewey believed, the effects of his work with the Laboratory School would be both gradual and profound (Tanner, 1997).

In his discussion of the long-term implications of Dewey's Laboratory School, Philip Jackson (1990) points to a problem similar to the one Thomas Hunter encountered a few decades before: the privileged student body and the abundant resources of the school. Many of the parents of Dewey's students were on the faculty at the University of Chicago—Dewey's own children attended the school—and most were middle-class, able to pay tuition, and interested in education. In addition, the Laboratory School had a very low student-teacher ratio, a highly qualified staff, ample equipment and the resources of the university at its command (Jackson, 1990). Not surprisingly, visitors to the school occasionally commented that Dewey was able to accomplish things that would be impossible in less fortunate environ-

ments (Dewey, 1900, p. 93). Dewey's response to this accusation, that his experiment required "particularly favorable conditions in order that results may be rendered both freely and securely," seemed to dodge the generalizability question (Dewey, 1900, p. 93; Jackson, 1990, p. xxxi). Jackson argues that the ideal conditions of the Laboratory School meant that it "became relatively easy and ultimately commonplace to dismiss what went on there as impractical or as not transferable to other, more ordinary settings" (1990, p. xxxiii-xxxiv). As a result, while Dewey's school achieved a great deal of notoriety, its impact on educational practices in general has been surprisingly limited (Jackson, 1990).

During the first decades of the twentieth century, a number of colleges and universities followed Chicago's lead and opened their own inquiry-oriented laboratory schools. One of the most famous of these was the Lincoln School, operated by Teachers College, Columbia University, from 1917 to 1948. Abraham Flexner, one of Lincoln's founders, observed that the school was intended to be a site for research and experimentation, "a laboratory first of all, which would test and evaluate critically the fundamental propositions on which it is itself based, and the results as they are obtained" (Flexner, 1923, in Cremin, 1962, p. 281). Flexner's use of the term laboratory resembles Dewey's, and, indeed, Lincoln and the Chicago school were similar in many ways.

Lincoln maintained its experimental orientation throughout its years of operation. As one enthusiastic observer of Lincoln noted, the school's interest in experimentation focused primarily on curriculum: "In the vanguard of the movement that is revolutionizing secondary education in America is Lincoln School, which for over ten years has been steadily and persistently experimenting in the field and is working out a new and dynamic curriculum..." (de Lima, 1941, p. 2). The result of this emphasis on constant improvement was, according to historian Lawrence Cremin, a remarkable school where "morale was high; classroom teaching was generally good, frequently excellent; and a pioneering spirit pervaded

the activities of teachers, students, and parents alike" (1962, p. 282-3).

Like Dewey's Laboratory School, the Lincoln School was the focus of a great deal of attention. Publications about the school include personal memoirs, outlines of curriculum, and an issue of *Teachers College Record* in the 1930s (Cremin, 1962, p. 382). Teachers at the school also worked with Agnes de Lima to write two books about Lincoln, books that include pictures of students, discussions of the school's mission and philosophy, and descriptions of classroom practices. In *Democracy's High School* (1941), de Lima and her collaborators depict a school that was in many ways reminiscent of Dewey's Laboratory School. Both emphasized social as well as intellectual development, preparation for life in a democracy, and meaningful learning experiences (Cremin, 1962; de Lima, 1941). The Lincoln curriculum was "based on a searching study of the needs and capacities of children and of the social necessities of our culture and time" (de Lima, 1941, p. 2) and culminated with an examination of contemporary social and economic issues (Cremin, 1962, p. 286).

Lincoln School was also similar to the University of Chicago's Laboratory School in that it served a privileged population with an abundance of resources. It was private, and the students were generally affluent and college-bound (Cremin, 1962, p. 287). The school also had copious equipment and supplies, offered a wealth of courses and activities, and provided a variety of travel and extracurricular opportunities (Cremin, 1962, p. 286). In addition, Lincoln's faculty, which included famous educator and social reconstructionist Harold Rugg, was a particularly talented and creative group who produced their own texts, curriculum guides, and workbooks (Cremin, 1962, p. 282). As a result, Lincoln (and the Institute of School Experimentation that was to publicize its work) faced the same problem that confronted other laboratory schools attempting to share their findings with the larger educational community: "Seeking to serve as a link with the public school, the Institute soon ran into the age-old problem that much of what succeed-

ed under laboratory conditions was not readily applicable to the schools at large” (Cremin, 1962, pp. 289-90).

In 1915, John Dewey and his daughter Evelyn published *Schools of Tomorrow*, a collection of portraits of progressive schools in the United States. While not all of these schools were university-operated, several were, and their descriptions are quite informative. Of the schools described, only one—a kindergarten run by Teachers College—appears to have shared the Chicago laboratory school’s emphasis on inquiry. According to the Deweys, the kindergarten’s mission was to develop an early childhood curriculum that was truly of educational value:

To find what is of real worth, experiments have been conducted, designed to answer the following questions: “Among the apparently aimless and valueless spontaneous activities of the child, is it possible to discover some which may be used as the point of departure for ends of recognized worth? ... Is it possible for the teacher to set problems or ends sufficiently childlike to fit in with the mode of growth, and to inspire their adoption with the same fine enthusiasm which accompanies the self-initiated ones?” (1915, pp. 110-111)

Other university-operated schools seemed to focus less on research and experimentation and more on putting the theories of Dewey and other progressive educators to work. For example, the Elementary School of the University of Missouri had, as “its fundamental idea, that education shall follow the natural development of the child” (1915, p. 41). The 115 students at the school, which was under the direction of a professor, began their studies by learning about those things that were directly related to their lives: weather, food, shelter, clothing, and the life of their community. When the students grew older, the focus of their studies shifted—“due to the widening interests that are coming to the child” (p. 51)—to local and world industries, literature, and languages. Other institutions, including Bryn Mawr College and the “city university” in Pittsburgh, were also able to

use their schools to implement the latest in educational theory and practice.

**Speyer— A school ahead of its time.** Unlike its privileged peers, one university-run school was expressly committed to educating less fortunate students. Between 1899 and 1915, Teachers College operated the Speyer School in a low-income neighborhood near campus. Like other university-run schools, Speyer had an experimental orientation. Its goals, however, had more to do with community than curriculum:

In short, the purpose is to serve the community in every possible way and particularly to experiment in ways and means of bridging the gap between the close of public school work and the time when young men and women settle down to permanent employment at eighteen or twenty years of age. (James Earl Russell, in Puckett, n.d., p. 2)

The school was at once an elementary school, a site for teacher training, and a social settlement where community members could meet for social, recreational, and educational activities (Puckett, n.d.). Historian John Puckett calls Speyer the “first community school,” the precursor of a movement that would affect schools across the country a few decades later. While Speyer’s founders were inspired by Dewey’s work in Chicago, the teaching at the school was inconsistent and frequently less than inspiring:

More seriously, the Speyer School curriculum was neither community-centered nor action-oriented. It is evident that Frank McMurry and his colleagues attempted to transplant elements of Dewey’s Laboratory School at the University of Chicago to a working-class neighborhood in New York City. Unfortunately, McMurry followed Dewey’s actions and ignored Dewey’s theory. (Puckett, n.d., p. 7)

The Speyer School is nevertheless noteworthy for serving a disadvantaged population and addressing directly the problems in a low-income, urban community. In this respect, it

could also be seen as a precursor of today’s university-operated schools.

## Laboratory Schools Since the Progressive Era

In the 1930s, two studies of laboratory schools affiliated with colleges or universities revealed that the focus of these schools had essentially returned to teacher training (Eubank, 1931; Jarman, 1932). In fact, one study’s operating definition of *laboratory school*—“any school used by the education department for observation, participation, directed teaching, etc.”—makes no mention of experimentation or research (Jarman, 1932, p. 4). However, this shift does not mean that inquiry was entirely excluded from the laboratory school agenda; according to Jarman, “research is recognized as one of the primary functions of the university high school” (1932, p. 89), and Eubank commented that “experimentation holds a minor place in the laboratory schools” (1931, p. 24). In general, though, laboratory schools in the ‘30s were sites for the demonstration of high-quality instruction, observation, and practice teaching.

The emphasis on teacher training and demonstration continued throughout much of the century. In the 1950s and ‘60s, however, many teacher educators became interested in conducting research and training teachers in “real world” settings rather than in laboratory schools, which seemed too far removed from the realities of most schools (“Overview of Laboratory Schools,” n.d.). Without a research agenda, laboratory schools often had difficulty justifying their continuing existence, particularly when funds were scarce. As a result, a number of universities responded to financial pressures by closing their schools and shifting student teaching and research to the public schools (King, 1984; Van Til, n.d.). The number of laboratory schools declined steadily throughout the ‘60s and ‘70s, from a high of 200 to about 100 by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (King, 1984; McConnaha, n.d.). Recently, the spread of Professional Development Schools—public schools where expert teachers train future teachers,

model “best practice” techniques, and work with university faculty to conduct research and design and participate in professional development—has posed another threat to the teacher-training function of laboratory schools.

Several of the laboratory schools that remain resemble their predecessors in name only. For example, the University of Chicago Laboratory Schools have evolved into high-achieving schools that serve the children of faculty members and contribute to neighborhood stability while emphasizing neither teacher training nor experimentation (Jackson, 1990; Tanner, 1997).<sup>3</sup> In his introduction to *Dewey's School and Society & The Child and the Curriculum*, Philip Jackson is quite critical of Chicago's schools:

Whatever else today's Laboratory Schools might be, they certainly are not the educational laboratory their founder envisioned. What has disappeared over the years is not the institution itself, which, if anything, seems to have prospered. What is missing today is the schools' entitlement to the key word “laboratory” that continues to define the kind of school it purports to be. (1990, p. xiii)

The University of Chicago is not alone in this respect; a number of contemporary university laboratory schools also appear to serve primarily to provide a superior educational experience to the children of faculty and other middle-class families (Tanner, 1997).

Advocates have responded to the decline of laboratory schools by arguing that these schools do have a role to play in efforts to improve education in the United States. For example, writing in the 1980s, King (1984) argued that laboratory schools represent a unique means of linking schools and universities and can provide university faculty with an opportunity to innovate or take risks with research in a way that public schools would not allow. King worked with the University of Hawaii's laboratory school, which used a focus on curriculum development and teacher training to make continued contributions to the field of education. Another laboratory school proponent claims that the schools' ad-

vantages—the ability to collaborate with outside organizations, implement program changes, and develop curriculum in a way that public schools hindered by bureaucracies cannot—make them the perfect vehicles for education reform initiatives (McConnaha, n.d.).

### Criticism of Laboratory Schools

While laboratory schools clearly have many defenders,<sup>4</sup> their critics are quick to point out that the problems that have long plagued such schools may well be bringing about their demise. One of the most common complaints about laboratory schools is that they do not embody a clear sense of purpose or mission. Their many functions—research, experimentation, demonstration of “best practices,” and teacher training—have tended to conflict or, at the very least, share an uncomfortable coexistence. John Goodlad, who served as the director of a laboratory school at the University of California at Los Angeles, argued that participants have brought too many agendas to the laboratory school enterprise:

The student teacher wants to get employed, the laboratory school teacher wants to demonstrate pedagogical expertise; the experienced teacher visiting in the school hopes to see something he or she can use next week; the professor in a campus department wants access to a research facility with a minimum of hassle; the director of the school probably wants good teaching, experimentation and innovations, and a vigorous research program—all simultaneously. Something has to give. Too often, everything gives and the school ends up doing little or nothing well. (1980, cited in Hunkins, et al., 1995, p. 102)

This problem is not particularly new. In 1932, Jarman observed that the laboratory schools in his study were encumbered by their multiple goals, and thirty years later Ohles (1961) noted that it is not possible to conduct research, train future teachers, and model best practice all in one school.

Observers of laboratory schools who criticize this tendency to “become

everything to everybody” point to the Dewey school as an example of how successful a school with a clear sense of mission can be (“Overview of Laboratory Schools,” n.d.). At the University of Chicago Laboratory School, inquiry was *the* goal, not one of many. This sense of purpose was so powerful that it spread beyond the researchers themselves and infected teachers and students as well (Mayhew and Edwards, 1936; “Overview of Laboratory Schools,” n.d.). While other schools have attempted to follow Dewey's model, the intrusion of additional objectives has frequently inhibited their success (Goodlad, 1995).

Another criticism of laboratory schools has to do with their relatively elite student body and the wealth of resources available to them. This issue—which surfaced for the Hunter school in the late nineteenth century and also confronted Dewey's Laboratory School and the Lincoln School—continues to trouble researchers and teacher educators interested in working with laboratory schools. Because laboratory schools are usually private and their students are often the children of university faculty, the generalizability of research conducted there is questionable (Hunkins, et al., 1995). In addition, many believe that student teachers today—like those at the nineteenth-century Hunter school—need experience working in settings that are more representative of public schools in general.

### UNIVERSITY-OPERATED SCHOOLS AT THE TURN OF THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

Despite the closing of laboratory schools around the country, the university-operated school idea has experienced something of a revival during the past two decades, and the number of colleges and universities that have opened elementary or high schools continues to grow. Here I will focus on a subset of these: The University of California at San Diego, Columbia University, Wayne State University, the University of Chicago, the University of South Florida, Stanford University, and the University of Pennsylvania. This sample was chosen to illuminate key patterns in the ways universities are approaching the op-

eration of schools. Two of the schools in this group were among the earliest to operate charters, two run networks of charters, one opened a neighborhood public school, and one founded a private school. In some ways, the schools these universities run are reminiscent of earlier efforts, while in others they represent a new direction.

In the sections that follow, I will discuss the seven aforementioned schools, providing a brief profile of each and exploring the connections between these schools and the traditional functions of university-run schools. However, because all of the schools I will discuss are relatively new, information about the projects is fairly limited. The material discussed here comes primarily from university and school websites and newspaper reports and, as such, has more to say about what the universities would like their schools to be than about the actual workings of each school.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, this section is not intended to be a comprehensive review. Instead, it begins to sketch the landscape of contemporary university-operated schools and to suggest ways these schools could be categorized and understood, with the intention that future research could build upon these descriptions with more comprehensive data and analysis. Thus, the information provided here conveys a sense of each university's mission and priorities for its school, makes preliminary comparison and discussion possible, and sets the stage for future research.

For heuristic purposes, I will divide these schools into two groups—schools focused on providing a good educational option in the neighborhood adjacent to a university (The School at Columbia University and the Penn-Alexander School) and schools designed to bring the resources of the university to bear on the challenges of educating low-income urban students (Stanford, USF, UCSD, Wayne State, and University of Chicago). Here I will provide a very brief introduction to each school. In the next section, I will make some observations about historical connections, arguing that there are both continuities and discontinuities in mission and structure between this pool and earlier university-operated

schools and linking the latest generation of university-run schools to a renewed emphasis among universities to civic and community responsibility.

### Educational Options for Faculty and Community

Both the University of Pennsylvania and Columbia University have struggled to provide quality, affordable educational options to faculty members and families in their surrounding neighborhoods. In many ways, the School at Columbia University, which opened in 2004, has more in common with earlier university-run schools intended for middle-class children than with contemporary versions. The school is private and was designed to serve the children of Columbia faculty members. Because private schools in New York City are extremely expensive and public schools with good reputations are quite selective, many Columbia professors struggle to find schools for their children that are both acceptable and affordable (Wilson, August 2000). This situation, exacerbated by the overall high cost of living in New York City, often makes it difficult for Columbia to attract and keep faculty, especially faculty with young children. By providing discounted tuition and automatic acceptance to the children of Columbia professors, the University hoped to use its new school to make life in New York City more attractive (Wilson, June 2000).

The school is located on the edge of the Columbia campus; half of its spots are reserved for Columbia University faculty and the other half are open to children in the neighborhood. Tuition is steep (\$28,000 for 2008-9), but the school provides over \$4.5 million in financial aid annually.<sup>6</sup> Like earlier laboratory schools, The School at Columbia University sees itself as a place to model a unique approach to teaching and learning. To a lesser degree, the school's relationship with Columbia University facilitates a training agenda: the school is a site for student teachers, and school faculty take courses at Teachers College. It is not clear that the school is viewed as a site for original research: school materials make little

mention of research and focus instead on the school's rich curriculum and its role as a recruiting device for faculty.

While also designed to serve an immediate neighborhood, the University of Pennsylvania's Sadie Alexander School (also known as the Penn-Assisted School or Penn-Alexander School) is public and part of the local public school system. The Penn school was developed in partnership between the University, the School District of Philadelphia, and the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers and opened its doors in 2001 to students in West Philadelphia. The school was designed to relieve overcrowding at local elementary schools, foster high achievement among its students, and serve as a "demonstration school." It is a site for professional development, clinical training for pre- and in-service teachers, and testing and refining curriculum and instruction.

This project is a part of the University of Pennsylvania's larger effort to revitalize the surrounding neighborhood, an effort that includes attracting and supporting businesses, encouraging home-ownership, and providing assistance with neighborhood safety and clean-up projects. Though the School District of Philadelphia funded the school's construction and is responsible for operating expenses, Penn provides \$1000 a year for each student in order to keep class sizes small and is renting the land to the district for a nominal fee. Academically, the Penn school has been quite successful. Its students score well on state standardized tests, the school has an excellent reputation within the city, and spots at the school, particularly in kindergarten, are in such demand that property values have increased dramatically in its "catchment area." According to one source, location within the catchment area adds \$25-50,000 to the price of a house (Katz, 2008). While this has certainly contributed to the neighborhood's revitalization, critics argue that it is leading to decreased diversity as working-class African American families move out and middle-class white families move in (Dubilet, 2004; Katz, 2008).

## Tackling the Challenges of Urban Schooling

In the past two decades, the University of California at San Diego, Stanford University, University of South Florida, Wayne State University, and University of Chicago have all turned their attention to one of the nation's most intractable problems: educating low-income urban students to high levels. These schools thus represent a shift in both institutional structure and mission from earlier generations of university-operated schools. With respect to structure, rather than operating private schools, their sponsoring institutions have taken advantage of charter school laws to open privately run public schools. Relatedly, rather than provide an innovative or "model" education to students whose parents can afford it, the schools were explicitly designed to bring the resources of the university to bear on the education of low-income youth.

Wayne State University, in Detroit, was the pioneer in this respect. It opened University Public School, the first charter school in the state, in 1991. University Public School's stated goal was "to prepare all students academically, emotionally, physically, perceptually, and socially to become productive adults in a culturally diverse, rapidly changing and highly technological society."<sup>7</sup> Administrators at Wayne State had observed that many of its students—graduates of the Detroit public school system—were unprepared for the demands of higher education, and they hoped to provide Detroit students with a more rigorous educational experience (Lively, 1994).

According to Wayne State's president at the time, the university also hoped its school would contribute to neighborhood revitalization: The university would like to operate in a neighborhood that is stable, with good schools. One reason people don't move back into the city and people don't move into this neighborhood is that there hadn't been schools they could be confident about. (Lively, 1994)

Thus, like the Penn school, University Public School was de-

signed with both educational and revitalization goals in mind.

University Public School, which was located in a low-income neighborhood about one mile from the Wayne State's Detroit campus, served sixth, seventh, and eighth graders. All students in Detroit were eligible to apply to University Public School, and acceptances were determined by lottery. An early evaluation struck an optimistic note, describing the school as having developed an innovative organizational structure, satisfied parents, and responded to students' social and psychological needs. The report was less positive about the school's curriculum and instruction, noting that it was not particularly innovative and had not received enough teacher and administrator attention (Dennis, Colombo, and Sawilsky, 1996). In 1998, University Public School was placed on the state's list of "unaccredited schools" because of its low test scores. In 2002 administrative responsibility was returned to the Detroit Public Schools and the school was merged with an existing middle school.

Another early innovator was similarly short-lived. Designed by the University of South Florida's (USF) Institute for At-Risk Infants, Children, Youth, and Their Families, the Patel Charter School opened its doors in 1998.<sup>8</sup> The school, which served low-income kindergarten through fifth-grade students, attempted to foster "maximum individual and personal development for each student" by providing a "comprehensive educational program to support, encourage, and nurture at-risk children and their families." In keeping with its focus on at-risk children, the Patel School emphasized collaboration between teachers and local agencies to ensure that children and their families received the medical, mental health, child-care, and social services they needed.

While USF's Patel School opened to great acclaim, it struggled with high teacher and principal turnover and low test scores. In 2008, the school was, like Detroit's University Public School, turned over to the public school district. A newspaper editorial published at the time criticized USF and school leaders for incompetence, noting that "poor

planning and a troubling lack of oversight doomed the USF-Patel Charter School from the start" and arguing that USF failed to live up to the "big promises" it made about improving the school (Tampa Tribune, 2008). Thus, despite great ambitions, both Wayne State and USF failed—as have many before—at the task of providing high quality educational experiences and increased learning for low-income students.

Two other universities, also interested in meeting the needs of low-income students, have established networks of schools. In 1998 the University of Chicago opened the North Kenwood/Oakland Charter School (NKO), serving kindergartners through eighth graders.<sup>9</sup> NKO was chartered by the Center for School Improvement, a research and development organization at the University of Chicago that supports education reform in the Chicago public schools. The school's mission is "to provide an excellent education for a representative group of urban students, while serving as a school development center for urban teachers." NKO furnishes students with after-school instruction and tutoring, as well as "wrap-around services" for children and their families. The university has since added to its portfolio and now operates four charter schools in the city—two elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school. While NKO is known as one of the most successful charter schools in the city, Donoghue, an elementary school opened in 2005, has experienced more challenges. A 2006 Chicago *Sun Times* article described the school as plagued by discipline issues and low student achievement (Grossman, 2006).

The Stanford University schools are also charters. In 2001, Stanford New Schools (a non-profit organization tied to the university) opened East Palo Alto Academy. The school is explicitly focused on preparing students for college: it offers college-credit courses, and every classroom door is painted with the name of a college (Sturrock, 2005). Five years later, the university opened an elementary school, East Palo Alto Academy Elementary School. Acclaimed education researcher and reformer Linda Darling-Hammond

has been instrumental to the initiative and to the crafting of a relationship between the schools and Stanford's School of Education. She explains that, in addition to the goal of providing students with a quality education, the schools also help educators "learn more about how to successfully teach a wide range of students, prepare new teachers, and create more productive schools—lessons that inform our research and our own preparation program" (The Stanford Challenge, n.d.). The schools work with predominantly low-income populations, and the majority of their students speak Spanish as their first language. Despite some evidence of improved student achievement, the schools continue to struggle with low test scores. In fact, the local school board recently voted to eliminate kindergarten through fourth grade at the elementary school because of persistently poor student achievement (Bernstein-Wax, 2010).

Of this group, the school that has experienced the clearest success thus far is the University of California at San Diego's Preuss School. Unlike the other university-run schools, Preuss was opened as a direct response to a major policy change. When the University of California System's Board of Regents voted in 1995 to end affirmative action, administrators at the University of California at San Diego (UCSD) were concerned that racial and economic diversity at the school would suffer (Basinger, 1999). They responded by creating the Preuss School, a charter school with an explicit mission: "...to improve educational practices and provide an intensive college preparatory school for low-income student populations, which are historically underrepresented on the campuses of the University of California."<sup>10</sup> By providing disadvantaged students with a rigorous educational experience and exposing them to life on a college campus, Preuss' founders hoped to reduce the achievement gap between low-income students and other students and increase racial and economic diversity at schools like UCSD.

A charter school serving middle- and high-school students, Preuss opened in 1998 and draws students from all over the city and county. Only

those who qualify for free or reduced lunches and whose parents or guardians are not graduates of four-year colleges are eligible for admission to Preuss. In addition, applicants must demonstrate "high motivation and family support" in order to be accepted to the school. UCSD donated land and raised funds from private donors for the school's building, which is located on the college campus, while operating expenses come from the state and the local school district.

Preuss also serves as a demonstration school of sorts, showing that it is possible to use innovative practices to reduce the achievement gap and prepare students for college. For example, in 2006, Doris Alvarez and Hugh Mehan (the school principal and one of its founders, respectively), published an article describing Preuss's successful experience with detracking and enrolling all students in a college preparatory program. They argue, "This gives us an existence proof that detracking (i.e., presenting underserved students with a rigorous academic program, supplemented by a comprehensive system of academic and social supports) can propel students from low-income households toward college eligibility and enrollment" (Alvarez and Mehan, 2006, p. 82). By any number of indicators, the Preuss School has experienced extraordinary success: its test scores are consistently high, over ninety-five percent of its graduates go on to college, a Preuss teacher was recently named California Teacher of the Year, and the school was listed as number ten in *U.S. News and World Report's* "Top Public High Schools."

## NEW SCHOOLS, FAMILIAR GOALS?

### College Preparation

Only one of the schools discussed here, UCSD's Preuss School, has embraced that earliest mission of university-operated schools—preparing students for a particular college and streamlining the transition from school to sponsoring university. Like Rutgers Preparatory and other early academies, Preuss offers a course of study, which all students are required to follow, that meets all of its sponsoring

university's admissions requirements. The major difference, of course, between Preuss and previous preparatory schools is the student body. While the students at Rutgers Preparatory School were a fairly elite group, with parents able to pay private-school tuition, Preuss serves only disadvantaged students. Essentially, Preuss is intended to provide an elite, college-preparatory education to students who normally would not have such an opportunity. While Stanford's East Palo Alto Academy does not have the seamless school-to-university pipeline that Preuss does, it too has institutionalized its focus on college preparation.

### Teacher Training

The traditional focus on teacher training has been modified somewhat by the most recent university-run schools. Penn, USF, Columbia, and Stanford all refer specifically to using their schools as sites for student teaching, but at none of these schools does teacher preparation appear as a primary focus. Wayne State's materials made no reference at all to teacher education, and at UCSD's Preuss School, professional development is an important component of the program, but it appears to be targeted only towards teachers on the school's staff.

While training future teachers does not seem to be as primary to any of the schools discussed here as it was to the laboratory schools of the 1930s and '40s, the idea of using the university-run school as a vehicle for changing teachers' practice has by no means disappeared. Both the University of Chicago and the University of Pennsylvania have embraced the demonstration school concept and serve as sites for professional development for teachers throughout their districts. According to the NKO's website the school is a "development center for urban teachers," where Chicago public school teachers can observe innovative and effective strategies and, eventually, "come to the school for hands-on experience in good-practice techniques." The Penn school operates in collaboration the university's Graduate School of Education and provides

“as many opportunities as possible for educators throughout the network to participate in cross-school visits, peer consultation, professional residencies, workshops, applied research and graduate coursework....” Both institutions emphasize the links between the schools they operate and the other schools in their districts and the positive effects their professional development programs will have on the overall quality of instruction in the area.

### Research and Experimentation

All of the schools I am profiling here have—or had—some research component. At Wayne State and USF, that component seems to be fairly limited and to focus primarily on assessing the effectiveness of the schools’ programs. Columbia, UCSD, Stanford, Penn, and the University of Chicago all would like their schools to play some role in developing and disseminating new ideas about curriculum and instruction. Both UCSD’s Preuss School and the University of Chicago’s NKO Charter School are affiliated with research and advocacy centers, and the proposal for the Preuss School also called for the creation of a center that would coordinate all university research in public schools (Basinger, 1999). Faculty members at Penn work with teachers at the new school to plan and conduct research that will “contribute to enhancing the school’s instructional and professional development programs and to increasing knowledge about successful educational practices.” At none of these schools, however, is the emphasis on inquiry as complete as it was at Dewey’s Laboratory School.

### A NEW PURPOSE FOR UNIVERSITY-RUN SCHOOLS: EDUCATING INNER-CITY STUDENTS

While several of the schools discussed here conduct research and involve themselves in teacher training, their real mission (with the exception of the Columbia school) seems to be to do something more—to provide students who are underserved by contemporary school districts, particularly in urban areas, with a high-quality edu-

cation. In this sense, they are entering an arena explored a century ago by the Speyer School but avoided since by most university-run schools. The universities undertaking this project are also offering an implicit critique of the educational status quo and demonstrating a fresh sense of responsibility for their surrounding communities.

Like many universities around the country, these institutions could limit their involvement with public education to work in existing schools or even to the formation of “partner schools.”<sup>11</sup> The fact that they are choosing to go further and actually develop and operate a school reveals both the concern their administrators feel about existing educational opportunities for local students and a fundamental skepticism of school systems, particularly in the inner city. While politics may prevent other administrators from being so blunt, the frustration expressed by University Public School principal Frederick Borowski—“The system has failed these kids. Can we come up with solutions?”—is widespread (Lively, 1994).

One source of concern about traditional urban schools appears to be the bureaucracy that is seen as an obstacle to reform and innovation. It is striking that of the public schools profiled here, all but one is a charter school operating independently of the local school district. In their materials, several of the universities mention that their school’s charter status will enable them to sidestep such bureaucratic hurdles. For example, Preuss will be “free to develop its own innovative program,” and the USF school was “able to break through the regulatory process and concentrate on education” (Deopere, 1997). Articles about the new schools also highlight their freedom from bureaucracy—nods to the general sentiment that “the system” is at fault (Bustos, 1998; Lively, 1994).

Of course, the mixed outcomes of these schools—the failures of USF’s Patel School and WSU’s University Public School, the success of UCSD’s Preuss and University of Chicago’s NKO schools, and the ongoing struggles of the others—demonstrate that simply forming a charter is no guarantee. This is consistent with the research find-

ings on charter schools overall, which has found enormous inconsistencies from school to school and no uniform or aggregate benefits (Zimmer, Blanc, Gill, and Christman, 2008; Center for Research on Education Outcomes, 2009). The stories of USF and WSU remind us that, even with all their human and financial resources, universities are not immune to the many organizational, financial, and instructional challenges charter schools face.

While university-run charters are different in many ways from earlier university-operated schools, the experiences of these earlier schools nevertheless have important implications. Schools like Preuss, which endeavor to show that it is possible to educate large numbers of low-income students to high levels, avoid the concerns about an elite student body that the laboratory schools faced, but they still have more resources, because of the university’s contributions, than do traditional public schools. On the one hand, this implies that such interventions would be expensive to “scale up.” On the other hand, it also demonstrates that, when provided with adequate resources and supports, low-income and minority students can excel in large numbers, an enormously important contribution.

The issue of multiple and competing goals—which also troubled laboratory schools—is another important one to consider. As these schools take on the challenges of urban education, it will be essential to assess the extent to which they are able to remain focused on this as their primary purpose. With the resources of a major university can also come additional demands—particularly for research and teacher education sites. Yet history tells us that the more such schools become distracted from their central mission, the less likely they are to succeed.

### University-Run Schools and University Civic Engagement

In the 1980s, many university faculty and administrators began to question the degree of alienation that existed between the goals and concerns of the outside world and the life of the university. The result has been a



“University Civic Responsibility movement,” in which universities across the country articulate their commitment to working with their communities, addressing pressing national and local problems (rather than issues of interest only within the academy), and making the preparation of engaged, responsible citizens central to their educational mission (Benson, Harkavy, and Puckett, 2007, p. 111). Thus, the Wingspread Declaration on Renewing the Civic Mission of the American Research University,” the product of a collaboration of major universities, foundations, and other organizations, proclaims:

We need to help catalyze and lead a national campaign or movement that reinvigorates the public purposes and civic mission of our great research universities and higher education broadly. We need to renew for the next century the idea that our institutions of higher education are, in a vital sense, both agents and architects of a flourishing democracy, bridges between individuals’ work and the larger world. (Campus Compact, 1999)

As further evidence of the strength of this movement, the Campus Compact coalition (a group of university and college presidents “committed to the public purposes of higher education”) went from two members in 1988 to over 1,000 in 2006 (Campus Compact, 2007). In a study of university civic engagement, Ostrander identifies five reasons universities have moved in this direction: the desire to make higher education “relevant” in the face of continued criticism, concern about the decline of democratic and civic participation in U.S. society, interest on the part of faculty in making academic knowledge more broadly useful, a sense of crisis about enduring social problems (such as poverty and inequality), and the need to maintain positive relations with local stakeholders (2004, p. 78).

The University of Pennsylvania has been at the forefront of this movement, particularly Penn professors Ira Harkavy and John Puckett. They argue that universities, especially those in or near urban areas, must become more actively engaged in their communities:

What contemporary higher education requires is a qualitative leap forward, a leap that harnesses the university’s broad array of academic resources to the task of contributing to the revitalization of our rapidly changing urban environment... We think American higher education needs to reassess its moral purpose, institute massive changes, and return to the mission of using knowledge more directly to improve society’s condition. (1992, p. 29)

In other words, many argue that by remaining aloof from social problems and civic life, universities do a disservice to their immediate surroundings, society as a whole, and our democratic system.

The decision by a number of major universities to run their own elementary or high schools—all located in urban areas—appears to be rooted in just the sort of reassessment Harkavy and Puckett envision. As one founder of the USF Charter School observed, “We really feel that universities, particularly when we’re located at an urban site and next to a neighborhood that needs a lot of help, really have an obligation and an opportunity to do something for the community” (Barry, 1998). This is particularly the case when it comes to education. For example, Tim Knowles of the University of Chicago’s Center for School Improvement commented a few years ago, “I think there’s a recognition that urban education is one of the biggest domestic policy problems in our country and that it’s time to think about new ways higher education can be involved in addressing this incredible challenge” (Sturrock, 2005). Even at institutions like Wayne State and Penn—where the university has admitted that a certain amount of self-interest underlies its revitalization efforts—the school represents the recognition that the relationship between university and community can be neglected no longer, and indeed, that both university and community thrive when their destinies are seen as intertwined.

## CONCLUSION

In many ways, the history of university-operated schools provides

important lessons for the universities discussed here that are committing themselves to the difficult task of creating high-achieving urban public schools. After all, like the earlier laboratory schools, these newer schools are rooted, for the most part, in an interest in developing and testing new approaches and modeling best practices. As Alvarez and Mehan’s argument—that Preuss’ experience offers “existence proof” that detracking can be done—makes clear, these schools are attempting to show that it is *possible* to educate significant numbers of low-income students to high levels (Alvarez and Mehan, 2006). This history can remind them to take seriously the need for a focused mission and not to ignore concerns about creating such an optimal environment that effective strategies cannot be transferred to other schools. At the same time, the idea that a university can do a better job running an urban school than existing school systems is new enough that it is still untested.

The dean of Stanford’s School of Education recently observed that her school’s decision to operate a network of charter schools was not an easy one to make: “Running schools in an urban community is a very difficult task for anyone. And you’re making the university vulnerable in that there’s no guarantee of success.... It’s not for the faint of heart” (quoted in Schachter, 2010). Stanford’s willingness to take that risk may well be a promising sign both of the recommitment of universities to their communities and of a new sort of investment in urban education. It also represents fertile ground for future research. First, of course, it will be important to determine the extent to which universities like Stanford succeed—with success measured in a variety of ways—in their tasks. Research could also usefully explore the ways in which the organizational culture of a university-run school differs from that of traditional public schools and the consequences of these differences. Third, research could helpfully document what forms of additional resources or interventions are particularly effective. Fourth, research could examine how these schools

deal with the challenges, discussed here, that faced earlier university-run schools. As scholars and practitioners explore this new phenomenon, it will be important to remember that such schools are but the latest episode in a long, rich, and complicated history.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>This article focuses only on schools founded and operated by universities and does not address the many other sorts of relationships universities may have with public schools.

<sup>2</sup>See, for example, Barry, 1998; Saffron, 2000; "Penn's Pal," 1998; Moore, 1999; Snyder, 2001; Smith, 1999; Sturrock, 2005; Rossi, 2004.

<sup>3</sup>Thus, the school continues to serve a privileged population, including President Obama's two daughters, who attended the school before the family's move to Washington, DC.

<sup>4</sup>See, for example, the National Association for Laboratory Schools, <http://www.coe.iup.edu/nals/schools.html>.

<sup>5</sup>Because they were among the pioneers in this movement and opened in the 1990s, the University of California, San Diego's Preuss School and Wayne State University's University Charter School, have been the subject of some research. See Alvarez and Mehan (2005) and Denis, Colombo, and Saliwosky (1996).

<sup>6</sup>Unless otherwise indicated, all information about The School at Columbia University was obtained from its website: <http://www.theschool.columbia.edu>.

<sup>7</sup>Unless otherwise indicated, all information about University Public School was obtained from the school's website: <http://www.ups.wayne.edu/>.

<sup>8</sup>Unless otherwise indicated, all information about the USF Charter School was obtained from the school's website: [http://ari.coedu.usf.edu/ARIWeb/usf\\_charter\\_school.htm#Mission](http://ari.coedu.usf.edu/ARIWeb/usf_charter_school.htm#Mission).

<sup>9</sup>Unless otherwise indicated, all information here is from the NKO website: <http://charter.uchicago.edu/Information/> and the University of Chicago site: <http://www.uchicago.edu/docs/comm-outreach/programs/charter-school.html>.

<sup>10</sup>Unless otherwise indicated, all information about the Preuss School was obtained from the school's website: <http://preuss.ucsd.edu/>.

<sup>11</sup>See, for example, Osguthorpe, et al., 1995.

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## COMMENTARY

# A Critical Analysis of Faculty-Developed Urban K-12 Science Outreach Programs

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## INTRODUCTION

Urban schools across the United States are confronted by the same complex social and economic problems that afflict the communities that they serve (Ladson-Billings, 2008). We have observed that teachers in urban areas often have very low expectations for their students, and the enacted science curriculum is poorly delivered and lacks coherent flow (Prime & Miranda, 2006). There is extensive research that provides evidence that urban schools are under-resourced, woefully underachieving, and populated largely by minority students who live in disadvantageous economic circumstances (Darling-Hammond, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Seiler, 2001). Additionally, research has shown that significant science achievement gaps between minority and majority students have not narrowed from 1996 to 2005 (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2006). These gaps have been coupled with complex factors such as race, ethnicity, immigration patterns and socioeconomic status (Norman, Ault, Bentz & Meskimen, 2001). Based on our anecdotal evidence, we believe that the often lamented problem of underachievement in urban schools can be largely viewed as a problem of the underachievement of poor, minority students.

To address these complex socioeconomic issues, higher education faculty are currently involved in developing and facilitating science outreach programs that specifically target K-12 students and teachers in urban school (Bartel, Krasny & Harrison, 2003). However faculty developers of K-12 science outreach programs, who are funded through various funding agencies, have little background

in educational outreach or in urban school settings (Krasny, 2005). Additionally, after reviewing the extant literature, we have realized that there is scant evidence of well-documented science outreach programs developed by higher education faculty targeting K-12 students and teachers in urban school settings. Given the availability of external funding aimed at addressing low science achievement in urban schools, it is clear that institutions of higher education are engaged in outreach programs. However, we have observed that little information about these programs has made its way into published science education literature. Hence, a more comprehensive understanding of the extent of these programs is vital for individuals who are interested in developing urban science outreach programs. This is especially true in light of our current need to respond to socioeconomic problems impacting the urban K-12 school settings.

Accordingly, the purpose of this paper is twofold. First, we provide an overview and critically analyze three successful faculty-developed urban K-12 science outreach programs. We consider a successful outreach program as one that has been sustained for at least five years after initial funding, and has provided empirically-based research findings from the program. Additionally, we review each program from the following three vantage points: 1) broader impacts on students and teachers, 2) program structure for participants, and 3) program assessment. Second, we offer recommendations to help guide other higher education faculty interested in developing K-12 science outreach programs in urban settings. More specifically, this article sought to determine answers to the following questions:

1. What are the broader impacts of faculty-developed K-12 science outreach programs on teachers and students in urban school settings?
2. How are faculty-developed K-12 science outreach programs structured specifically for teachers and students in urban school settings?
3. How are faculty-developed urban K-12 science outreach programs assessed?

## OVERVIEW AND CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Since its inception in 1991, the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS) has facilitated the nationally recognized science outreach program called Partners in Health Sciences (PIHS) in collaboration with the Arkansas Department of Education and the University of Arkansas at Little Rock (Burns, 2002). All public and private K-12 teachers and their students in the state of Arkansas are invited to participate in this program for free. The program was institutionalized through funding from two separate 5-year National Institutes of Health Science Education Partnership Award grants. After ten years, the PIHS program has reported broader impacts on a total of 1,052 teachers and 11,402 students, and involved 143 UAMS faculty.

K-12 teachers participating in the PIHS program primarily receive professional development training. Several 1-3, full day mini-courses are offered during the summer to biology/health sciences teachers. Each mini-course is developed and presented by a UAMS faculty member on a specific topic through an interactive lecture and discussion format, and is followed by hands-on laboratory exercises. As

an incentive, teachers receive a tool kit containing materials and supplies necessary to conduct these laboratory exercises with their own students. Additionally, teachers are awarded continuing education credit for each mini-course they complete, and can earn college credit if they complete a total of 5 full days of mini-courses. Furthermore, 10 teachers (Grades 7-12) are selected each year and given stipends to participate in a 5 full-day workshop to develop grade appropriate computer assisted instructional (CAI) modules for use by their students.

Students (Grades 7-12) participating in the PIHS program partake in weekly, interactive, 90-minute broadcasts during the academic year with UAMS faculty. These students are further encouraged to tour the UAMS facilities, and to attend *monthly science nights* to listen to various speakers, in order to expose them to different careers in health sciences.

Surveys were conducted to assess the UAMS speakers, the use of good audio-visuals during presentations, the effectiveness of laboratory activities, the amount of time provided for questions, and future interests of participants. Additionally, surveys were administered to determine whether teachers implemented new professional development training activities with students in their classrooms. Questionnaires were further employed to obtain demographic information of all participating teachers and students.

We believe that a major strength of the PIHS program is the facilitation of a needs-assessment with members from the Arkansas Science Teachers' Association. This vital feedback helps higher education faculty to tailor their presentations to the specific needs and interests of K-12 teachers. We also consider another strong point to be that all program activities were developed by highly-credentialed UAMS faculty members who specialize in the specific science content area presented. Moreover, we posit that the PIHS program has made some significant broader impacts on minority teachers and students. This is substantiated by surveys results that show that 44% of teachers earning college credits

were minorities, and that the percentage of minority students participating in broadcasts and *monthly science nights* were 22% and 63%, respectively.

We believe that a significant limitation of the PIHS program is that teachers were not provided with adequate on-site support to ensure that the professional development activities were successfully transferred in their classroom. This is quite evident from survey results that reveal that 46% of teachers self-reported that they did not perform any new laboratory-type exercises with their students. We also think that UAMS faculty placed an emphasis on traditional teaching formats such as interactive lecture and discussion. Thus, faculty should consider collaborating with science education specialists to incorporate more inquiry-based teaching approaches into their presentations. This is apparent from results from the questionnaire results that indicate that the percentage of minority teachers participating in all mini-courses, and CAI workshops were only 15% and 6%, respectively. Additionally, we believe that faculty should conduct a needs-assessment to determine science topics that minority teachers and students are most interested in. This strategy may have promise in light of questionnaire results that show that the percentage of minority teachers attending the culturally relevant mini-course entitled, "Blood and Sickle Cell Anemia," was 25%. Moreover, we consider some shortcomings of the program to be that only 9% of participating teachers were from elementary schools (Grades K-6), and that only middle and high school students were allowed to participate in program activities. Based on the above data, we conclude that the PIHS program tended to concentrate their outreach effort toward middle and high school students (Grades 7-12).

### Buffalo Geosciences Program

Since its inception in 2001, the University of New York at Buffalo has facilitated the urban K-12 science outreach program called the Buffalo Geosciences Program (BGP) in collaboration with Buffalo State College and the City Campus of Erie Community Col-

lege (Stokes, Baker, Briner, & Dorsey, 2007). This program was created to: 1) provide opportunities for underrepresented groups to participate in geoscience activities, 2) to pursue undergraduate/graduate degrees in geosciences, and 3) to enter geoscience careers. The BGP was institutionalized through funding from a 5-year National Science Foundation Opportunities for Enhancing Diversity in the Geosciences grant. After 5 years, the BGP reported impact on a total of 189 teachers and 5,215 students, and involved 68 university faculty members.

Participating high school students in the BGP complete an Earth Science course, partake in outreach efforts in their school and the community, design geoscience activities for summer camps, assist university faculty and graduate students with research projects, and attend field trips and seminars. Interested high school students can also serve as interns and receive funding to develop and pursue their own research ideas based on existing projects at the university. Students in elementary and middle schools receive outreach presentations to generate interest and create awareness in the geosciences. Presentations for K-12 students generally include two modules. The first module engages them in a lecture and discussion format about geoscience topics relating to current events; the second module provides students with information about careers in the geosciences. High school teachers participating in the BGP primarily receive geoscience-themed literature and training on challenging geoscience concepts.

Surveys were conducted to assess the broadening of participation and to determine high school students' improved awareness of geosciences, and increased interest in geosciences careers, and knowledge of geosciences issues. We believe that a significant strength of the BGP is that students can develop and facilitate their own research projects under the supervision of highly-credentialed university faculty, and graduate students. Based on survey results, we further posit that the BGP has made considerable broader impacts on teachers and students in urban K-12 school settings.

We consider the limited role of high school teachers in the BGP to be a critical shortcoming. University faculty should thus consider collaborating with teachers or science education specialists to incorporate more inquiry-based teaching approaches into their presentations rather than emphasizing a traditional lecture and discussion format. We also believe that some significant limitations of the BGP is that the activities and presentations intended for elementary and middle schools were limited in scope and were not specifically differentiated for various grade levels or student abilities.

### Progressive 3-Year Summer Science Institute

Since its inception in 2000, the University of Alabama's Birmingham Center for Community Outreach Development (UAB CORD) has facilitated an urban science outreach program that centers on a progressive 3-Year Summer Science Institute for high school students (Niemann, Miller, and Davis, 2004). The program's objectives are to: 1) interest students in pursuing careers in science, 2) give students a better idea of what it is like to do real science, and 3) teach students science-related skills. This program was developed in collaboration with the Birmingham City School System, and institutionalized through funding from the National Institutes of Health Science Education Partnership Award grant, the National Science Foundation GK-12 grant, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and philanthropists, Holt and Gretchen Cloud. After 3 years, the program reported broader impacts on more than 200 students. It also involved faculty, graduate students, and staff from UAB CORD, and trained high school science teacher facilitators.

Rising 10<sup>th</sup> grade students are introduced to basic concepts and laboratory skills in a 6-week BioTeach Summer Science Institute. Rising 11<sup>th</sup> grade students are gradually introduced to increasingly more rigorous concepts and laboratory experiences in a 6-week ChemTeach Summer Science Institute. Rising 12<sup>th</sup> grade students serve as interns and conduct a research

project that is supervised by UAB faculty, graduate students, and staff for 9-weeks. Additionally, all participating students were exposed to scientific seminars by UAB experts in the field, university tours, debates on moral and ethical scientific issues, and Mathematics and English Workshops. All students received stipends after they complete each Summer Science Institute.

High school teachers participating in the program are exposed to the nature of science, and concepts of authentic scientific research. Teachers also receive training to learn how to become facilitators of UAB CORD's Summer Science Institute Programs, which include BioTeach, ChemTeach, and Research Internships for Students. Surveys were administered to determine whether: 1) students learned science, 2) students are better prepared for college science, 3) the program provided students with a better idea of what it is like to do real science, and 4) students learned other useful life skills. Other components of the program that were evaluated through surveys include students' suggestions for improving the program, the effectiveness of Mathematics and English Workshops, and the training of high school science teacher facilitators.

We consider the main strength of this program to be the criterion for accepting students for the program. The major acceptance criteria for this program are that students have to demonstrate an interest and aptitude for science. This is substantiated by teacher recommendations, course selection and grades, extracurricular activities, and an interview. We also believe that this criteria and the involvement of UAB's Office of Minority Recruitment and Retention helps to provide an explanation for the high retention rate of inner-city high school students participating in this program.

We consider a shortcoming of the program to be the over-emphasis of teaching formats which include lectures, laboratory lectures, and scientific seminars. It is no surprise that participating students responded that these teaching formats were their least enjoyable component of the program. Faculty should collaborate with science education specialists to incor-

porate other inquiry-based teaching strategies into their presentations.

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This paper provides an overview and analysis of three successful faculty-developed urban K-12 science outreach programs from the following three vantage points: 1) broader impacts on students and teachers, 2) program structure for participants, and 3) program assessment. Through the findings of this paper, and our experiences and responsibilities as directors of grant-funded urban K-12 science outreach programs, we believe that we can offer specific recommendations to help guide other higher education faculty that are interested in developing their own programs.

Regarding the broader impacts on K-12 students in urban settings, it is apparent that many outreach programs tend to concentrate their outreach effort on middle and high school students. However, research suggests that science outreach programs that engage elementary students in hands-on laboratory activities have positive impacts on their attitudes toward science (LaRiviere, Miller, & Millard, 2007). We concur with this research finding and recommend that faculty developers bolster their programmatic involvement in early childhood and elementary education. We believe that this is essential to further broaden opportunities for urban students across all grade levels. We also advise that faculty developers should collaborate with science education specialists to help differentiate their programs for various grade levels and varying levels of student ability, and to incorporate more inquiry-based teaching approaches into their presentations. Since scientists do not typically have any formal pedagogical instruction, science educators are able to provide them with practical guidance especially in learning by inquiry, cognitive development, and misconception research (Zitzeit, Moyer, Otto, & Everett, 2010).

It is also evident that outreach programs are still needed to encourage diversity, broaden opportunities, and enable the participation of women,

underrepresented minorities and persons with disabilities. Our view is substantiated by reports that indicate that number of science and engineering degrees earned by minority and female students is disproportionately low in comparison to the national average (National Science Foundation, 2006). In light of this, we suggest that faculty developers should consider augmenting their programmatic involvement with these populations of K-12 students in urban school settings. It is further noticeable that urban K-12 science outreach programs do not specifically address our current workforce needs in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education (National Academy of Science, 2007). Therefore, we advocate that faculty developers design science outreach programs that seek to expose and engage students to careers in STEM teaching.

### Findings and Recommendations

This article demonstrates that some outreach programs do not provide adequate on-site support for teachers in their classrooms. In our experience with facilitating professional development with in-service K-12 teachers, this kind of support is critical to ensure that outreach activities are effectively implemented. Accordingly, we suggest that faculty developers should conduct a needs-assessment with teachers to determine the specific level of support and resources necessary for effective implementation of outreach activities in their science classrooms.

We also recommend that faculty developers provide program facilitators with training that focuses on planning and developing culturally relevant inquiry-based science lessons, and teaching effectively in urban K-12 school settings. This recommendation is in line with sociocultural dimensions of teaching which identifies the need for more culturally responsive teachers in urban settings (Duarte & Reed, 2004), and seminal research which has shown that teaching through a sociocultural approach has a positive effect on students' attitudes toward learning science (Jegade & Okebukola, 1991). Further, we suggest that faculty developers ad-

equately: 1) assess the needs of urban K-12 students, teachers and schools, 2) align program goals with the school's improvement plan and teachers' professional improvement plan, and 3) link program topics with the science curricula of the school, and local and national science education standards.

Another significant finding of this study is that although developing and facilitating urban K-12 science outreach programs makes a great deal of intuitive sense, it generally lacks empirical validation. When conducting the literature review for this article, we found it rather difficult to find outreach programs that provided clearly articulated research questions, or specific details with regard to how programmatic data and goals can be collected, analyzed, and accomplished. This finding clearly demonstrates the inherent difficulty in determining the overall success and effectiveness of urban K-12 science outreach programs, since many programs within the literature often present their outcomes anecdotally. Thus, based on our background as science education research faculty members, we encourage faculty developers to provide adequate detail with regard to how program goals are to be assessed, and to share their programmatic findings with the STEM community through conferences, research and practitioner journals, and popular publications so that they can be used as a basis for discussion. We further encourage faculty developers to take a more critical, empirically-based research perspective in their outreach efforts.

As faculty-developed urban K-12 science outreach programs begin to proliferate and flourish, it is essential for institutions of higher education to effectively forge collaborations with urban K-12 school settings to ensure that minority students in public schools receive a high quality science education. While many higher education faculty are already successfully engaged in outreach activities with K-12 students and teachers in urban schools settings, a salient trend within the extant literature is that faculty-developed urban science outreach programs are generally unidirectional (e.g. Chan & Flinn, 2005; Hunter, 2006; Kindlund & Boshart,

1998; Munn, Skinner, Conn, Horsma & Gregory, 1999). Thus, we recommend that faculty developers become more collaborative and bi-directional in their goals and activities. This recommendation is in line with Tanner, Chatman, and Allen (2003) who suggest that science outreach programs are specifically poised to blossom into partnerships in which higher education faculty and K-12 school settings collaborate to create a coherent and articulated science education experience for students and teachers. In view of this, the establishment of partnerships between higher education faculty and urban K-12 school settings imply something more than an instructional relationship based on a one-way flow of information. The construct of "partnership" implies direct benefit for all parties involved, and involves two or more people, each with expertise or skills to contribute, working toward a common goal (Tomanek, 2005). Hence, we further advise that faculty developers actively involve all key stakeholders in the strategic planning process to help identify how all partners can benefit and work together towards developing, achieving, and assessing program goals.

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## COMMENTARY

# Family Involvement in Four Voices: Administrator, Teacher, Students, and Community Member

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My parents come to the coffeehouses and it means a lot to me because he (her dad) works from like 2:30 to 4:30 and for him to come out and stay out real late just to come out and support me, it feels good. And my grandmother is on the other side of town; she also has to get up early. It feels good to have support. And they're always saying to do your best at everything. And when you do your best, you've got someone there to encourage you. —*Sherie, 8<sup>th</sup> grade*

Sherie's response came from a focus group session I had with five eighth graders, discussing a program that was implemented in her English class to encourage their families to participate in school events. Her class has a weekly guest teacher: An artist named Theo who works at a nearby community shelter that provides food, tutoring, and after school programs to low-income children and their families. Sherie is describing her positive feelings about her family's involvement, particularly related to this program, which has opened up many avenues of communication and facilitated connections that have been important in her life. The program was designed to create connections among families, community members, students, and teachers, yet the participation and perceptions of all the participants have been very different.

Collaborations and partnerships among schools and community members have been described as a way to provide better educational opportunities for students (DePlanty, Coulter-Kern & Duchane, 2007; Epstein, 1996). Such school–community partnerships have been described as relationships

that involve exchange and engagement with mutually defined goals benefiting all participants. However, the process of developing and articulating goals is complex and can be affected by the different participants' ideas about the program. The purpose of this paper is to consider how a parent involvement program in an eighth grade English classroom was affected by the collaboration and participation of a funding agency, a classroom teacher, a community poet, and students. Through conversations and observations with the participants, I have examined how they perceive involvement within a poetry program that was developed to encourage family participation. The following question guides my inquiry for this paper: How do community members, teachers, and students view family involvement in an eighth grade classroom?

## RELATED RESEARCH

There are compelling reasons to look for connections between adolescent students' families, communities, and schooling experiences; adolescence is a time when children are straddling the world of being a child yet moving toward developing independence as a result of their own experiences and understandings of their life. Significant adults can have an important impact on children's development at any age, but it is particularly relevant during the adolescent years due to the significant life choices they experience as they become more autonomous. Unfortunately, there is a misperception that in developing their autonomy, adolescents need less adult guidance and involvement. Yet, research demonstrates that the opposite is true because adolescents benefit from con-

tinued support and mentorship that is developmentally appropriate and relevant to their needs (DePlanty, Coulter-Kern, & Duchane, 2007). Despite the fact that adolescents benefit from caring adults who participate in their education, involvement of families decreases incrementally as students progress to higher grades (Halsey, 2005).

There is still much to be understood about how to develop relationships that allow families to contribute and support students' literacy learning for children of this age. Adolescents often want their families to be involved, but only if the school practices and family events must support their developing autonomy (Deslandes & Cloutier, 2002) and be accessible and relevant to students and their families (Schmidt, 2000). Furthermore, adolescents often do not encourage their families to participate because they have become increasingly peer-oriented, more independent, and their relationships with their families have changed in many ways (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, 1997; Walker, Wilkins, Dallaire, Sandler, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2005). It is important to note that the developing independence and the desire for involvement do not have to be oppositional forces; however, understanding these different factors helps with considering different kinds of programs that support the needs of adolescents and their families.

Parent participation is defined in varying ways; for some families, involvement is centered on interactions within the home context and might include activities such as talking with their children about their educational experiences, goals, or achievement (De Gaetano, 2007; Foster & Peele, 2001;

Kerbow & Bernhardt, 1993), described as “invisible strategies” (Auerbach, 2007; Lareau, 2000; Lareau & Horvat, 1999). In Auerbach’s (2007) work, she looks at some of the ways minority and poor parents are involved in their children’s schooling and demonstrates that some of the most significant work may not be perceived by teachers and school administrators. For instance, some parents pursue supplemental learning opportunities for their children, such as tutoring or participating in extracurricular activities, without ever initiating contact with the school. Important forms of support are often employed at home and this support “from the sidelines” can be a significant factor in how students understand and view the world. Research has shown that this type of involvement can be a strong determinant of good grades and positive life choices (De Gaetano, 2007; Falbo, Lein, & Amador, 2001).

The various ways that involvement is defined reflects the inequities of society, cultural variances, and economic opportunities along with differing values and expectations of families (Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler, 2007; Halsey, 2005). Culture and power relationships also have a profound influence on the relationships between families and school and many minority families feel alienated from schools as a result of their own negative experiences while they were students. For instance, families of bicultural students may not participate in school events because they feel that they are treated differently or because there are language and cultural barriers that inhibit their participation (De Gaetano, 2007, Cassity & Harris, 2000; Nieto, 2008). In Valdes’ (1996) three-year ethnographic study with ten Mexican and Mexican-American families on the Mexican-American border, she found that teachers often did not understand the families and thus viewed them from a deficit lens. Her work with teachers and families shows that both sides are operating with assumptions that prevent effective interactions:

Both the schools and the families made assumptions about each other. Schools expected a “standard” family, a family whose members

were educated, who were familiar with how schools worked, and who saw their role as complementing the teacher’s in developing children’s academic abilities. It did not occur to school personnel that parents might not know the appropriate ways to communicate with the teachers, that they might feel embarrassed about writing notes filled with errors, and that they might not even understand how to interpret their children’s report cards. (p. 167)

Often, these mismatched expectations occur with families that do not share the same socioeconomic or cultural background as the teacher. While many teachers in Valdes’ study believed that parent involvement would solve many of the students’ educational experiences, she found that advocating parental involvement in a traditional sense is a “small solution to what are extremely complex problems” (p. 31).

Regarding school and classroom participation, the most common forms of parent involvement include parent-initiated contact with the teachers regarding academic matters (Lareau, 1989/2000; Lareau & Horvat, 1999), parent volunteer opportunities, and participation in parent-teacher organizations (Swap, 1993). Families are usually in positions of less power and authority that the teacher and administrators of the school when it comes to decisions about education, and, therefore, they are often excluded from educational decisions and reform (De Gaetano, 2007; Fine, 1993; Lareau, 1989/2000; Lareau & Horvat, 1999). One way to encourage family involvement is to change relationships between schools and home so that power and resources are reconfigured. An important aspect of restructuring the relationships between families and schools is for schools to feel support and encouragement (Swanson, Cunningham, & Spencer, 2003). For example, Fine (1993) describes examples where school curriculum and reform began with considerations of parents; however, this approach is not commonly used as a basis for creating partnerships between schools and families.

## THE PROGRAM AND THE CONTEXT

My research took place in an eighth-grade English classroom in an urban public middle school in a major metropolitan area called Douglas Johnson Junior High School. Ninety-seven percent of the school population qualified for free or reduced lunch. Of the 22 students in the classroom, 17 were African American, 1 was Asian, and 4 were Hispanic; 9 were male and 13 were female. All of the people and places in this article have been given pseudonyms. The poetry program was designed to provide families with a variety of opportunities to become involved in their children’s school experience; students were encouraged to invite their families to coffeehouses, share poetry with them at home, and solicit poetry from caring adults for their anthology, which would be published at the end of the year.

The poetry program began because Pamela, the teacher in this classroom, was looking for a way to connect students’ learning in the classroom to the community. By working with a local nonprofit educational organization called Urban Voices in Education (UVE), she was introduced to Theo. Theo, who was also a poet and artist, agreed to teach a weekly poetry workshop and then emcee bimonthly evening poetry coffeehouses for families, students, community members, and teachers to perform poetry. UVE secured grant money from the Ford Foundation to improve parent involvement, and they used the funds to pay him a stipend for two years. Pamela arranged to “loop” with her students and teach them English for both their seventh and eighth grade years so both she and Theo could continue her involvement with the same students.

English instruction in Pamela’s classroom was a balance of skills instruction and service-based projects; Pamela’s collaboration with Theo was one of several projects that linked the students’ classroom learning to experiences within the community, including classroom projects that incorporated community member interviews and volunteer work that focused on learning through experiences outside of the classroom. Theo’s poetry workshop

became one vehicle to encourage risk-taking and create a space where students could share and learn with each other. The poetry writing workshops lasted approximately 45 minutes and were designed by Theo based on either topics he believed were relevant to the students or music that conveyed an important message. After a 15-minute introduction that included students listening to a song and reading lyrics related to the topic, students were encouraged to move to a comfortable place, work together if they wanted to and write down their ideas in poetic form. Pamela, Theo, and I would circulate and confer with students through the classroom as students wrote and read, and the workshop concluded with an opportunity for students to read their work to the class.

Although I observed the program and spoke with Pamela and Theo during the first year of its implementation, my role as a researcher documenting this program began during its second year, while the students were in eighth grade. During that time, the grant administrator at UVE was pleased with some aspects of the program, particularly since many parents who had previously not been involved in their children's schooling were attending the evening coffeehouses and submitting poetry for the anthology. Some of the coffeehouses did not have the level of attendance the administrator was hoping to see, and she began to question her support of the program. During the first year of the poetry program, the poetry coffeehouses had good parent turnout, often with 40 family members attending. However, during the second year of the poetry program, fewer parents were attending the coffeehouses, usually with approximately 15 parents attending. As parent involvement decreased, UVE and Theo recruited other adults to attend; hence at any given coffeehouse there were other community members in attendance to read poetry and interact with the students. It was in this context that I organized and collected information from the four participants – the funding agency, teacher, students, and community members – regarding family involvement.

## DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

This research is part of a larger ethnographic study that documented many aspects of the middle school poetry program, including the literacy learning that occurred as a result of the partnership between the community poet, the teacher, and the students (Wiseman, 2007). My research utilizes a broadly qualitative and descriptive approach (Miles & Huberman, 1994). As a researcher and former teacher, I was both a participant and an observer with this classroom, using ethnographic techniques of participant observation and descriptive analysis to document the poetry program and the classroom interactions (Creswell, 2008). I attended poetry workshops, regular English class sessions, field trips during the school day and after school, and poetry events, and I also met participants for interviews and member checks in the community.

I became involved in this poetry program because of my interest in classroom learning opportunities that connected students' in- and out-of-school literacies. I spent a full school year in this classroom, observing and interacting with Theo, Pamela, and their students. My role evolved from observing and taking notes to working with small groups, assisting students, and discussing their writing and experiences. In addition, I held focus groups with five students to discuss topics related to their experiences within the poetry workshops and their attitudes regarding family involvement (Creswell, 2008). I also conducted interviews and regularly communicated with all the participants regarding the success and progress of the poetry program. The focus groups, interviews, lessons, and evening coffeehouses were audiotaped and transcribed to be analyzed. Themes were established inductively (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) and data were used to generate theory (Coffee & Atkinson, 1996). My goal was to create a story of this classroom that represented the participants' experiences in a way that was sensitive to their knowledge and understanding; therefore, member checks and peer debriefings were a significant

aspect of my research and conducted with students throughout my data collection and analysis. The students in this focus group provided me with member checks regarding findings and throughout data collection and analysis and also read through significant parts of my data analysis to provide verification (Creswell, 2008). It is important to note that I was granted access to students, teachers and community members in this study; however, the school district restricted my data collection with parents and other family members. I interacted with students' families in many instances but did not record any of the conversations for my research because of the restrictions from the school district's review board.

## FINDINGS

In the next section, I present the different perspectives of those involved in the program. First, I present Emily, the administrator from a community agency responsible for funding the coffeehouse program. Then, I describe the classroom teacher's perspective, particularly related to the various efforts she made to increase family involvement in her school and classroom. The third perspective is that of the students, whose relationships and attitudes about literacy played a strong factor in whether or not they encouraged their families to participate in the program. Finally, I present the voice of the community poet to show his perspective and vantage point from working with the students outside of school and in the community. These differing voices illustrate the complexities of designing and implementing a program to increase the involvement of families in a junior high school.

### **The Funding Agency/Administrator: Looking for an "Open Door" to Encourage Involvement with Families**

Emily was an administrator at Urban Voices in Education (UVE), an agency that advocated for students and families in the city public schools. This poetry program was funded from her initiatives; she was awarded a grant from the Ford Foundation and the

funding provided Theo with a stipend to teach poetry workshops to Pamela's classroom for two years. She explained that her impetus was, "to get parents involved with their kids in an intergenerational project". Emily realized that fostering parent involvement at this middle school required actions from the school and the parents and felt that developing a positive relationship was the most important component of working with a program. In an interview, she explained, "If the relationship is built you'd have parents glad to come in. They could find some time". Emily thought that it was important to encourage some "nurturing and trust-building" among the schools and families so parents would feel comfortable participating and supporting their children's education. Establishing relationships with parents and then building a program based on their interests and concerns were two of Emily's objectives. In our conversations about family involvement, Emily reflected on how the perspectives of families are often lost in educational decision-making, which alienates both students and their caregivers from school experiences.

Emily's experiences with Douglas-Johnson Middle School and her initiatives to create programs that bridged the gap between schools and families were affected by school policies. Emily, along with her organization UVE, approached the administration of the school with many different ways that UVE could support their efforts to increase parent involvement. She worked with a teacher to reactivate a parent resource at the school, but it was later taken away as necessary classroom space. As the poetry workshops continued through the spring semester, Emily started attending more of the sessions and speaking with Pamela, the classroom teacher, regarding ways to encourage parents to come to the poetry coffeehouses. Her increased attention to parent involvement coincided with her assessment that the poetry workshop was not improving the base of involvement with parents.

While she placed some of the responsibility for the lack of trust-building on the school administration, Emily also recognized the difficulties of

developing parent involvement from the administrators' standpoint. While Emily expressed that parents could be "difficult to work with", she did not feel that this was an adequate explanation for not encouraging families to have responsibility in their child's school. She explained to me, "If parents support what you are doing, they can really be a factor in raising student achievement". While Emily understood that working with parents took extra time and energy, she also acknowledged the role of the administration in keeping families out of the school. As she reflected on her efforts, her evaluation was both positive and negative:

I think it's been real mixed. It's been real mixed. I don't know--we've worked at from several directions simultaneously by working with the workshop. The thing is, I think, when a school does not have an ongoing kind of openness about family involvement, it's real tough.

Even though she was attempting to support a variety of programs, she believed that these initiatives were hindered by various factors coming from the school.

Emily's approach to parent involvement was to look for opportunities to gain momentum through long-term programs rather than short-term in-services or projects. The poetry workshop was one of many initiatives she supported in order to increase parent involvement, and she explained that she showed the administration a "menu" of options and also worked on "getting a trust building relationship. You have to have that open door". Despite her varied attempts to find ways to create partnerships, she felt disappointment that there was not an improvement in the relationships between families and schools and wished the initiatives of Urban Voices in Education could have encouraged more parents to be involved in the school. Urban Voices in Education's work with the parent resource room and poetry coffeehouses did not increase the participation of families in their children's education from a quantitative standpoint.

Successful parent involvement initiatives change their modes of approaching relationships, increase resources

for parents, and gather information from parents as to how to develop relationships (Swap, 1993). These components were echoed in Emily's approach to working with the school in supporting and designing programs. Emily's experiences at this middle school were aimed at broadening the base of parent involvement. However, the varied and extensive approaches she attempted did not meet their goals of increasing the broad base of involvement in the school. At the beginning of the following school year, Emily and Urban Voices in Education decided not to fund Theo's poetry program. They decided to shift their emphasis from families to initiatives that would increase teacher training and professionalism and the program was discontinued.

### The Classroom Teacher's Perspective: Exploring Ways to Improve School Involvement

From my first conversation with Pamela, I was struck by her energy and enthusiasm for teaching and working with the students and their families. At the beginning of the school year, she listed her ideas for connecting with families in the community through research projects, writing assignments, and text selection. One of her main initiatives was to improve parent involvement because "That's a negative thing about our school. We don't have enough partners and we don't have enough people". Pamela attempted to be in touch with parents on different subjects, particularly when their students were having a hard time with attendance or grades. However, with as many students as middle school teachers are responsible for, this was not an easy task (Sanders, 2001). Pamela participated in a committee that discussed ways to encourage families to become involved in their children's education. She considered different ideas with her colleagues in the school and some days, spent much of her planning time trying to stay in touch with parents with varying levels of success. The evening coffeehouses were planned because Pamela thought they might be a way to motivate students' writing and speaking

while promoting parent involvement.

Pamela worked to further her understanding about parent involvement by attending conferences, speaking with other educators, and discussing topics at school. The idea for the coffeehouse was sparked from a presentation at a conference she attended where a teacher described some initiatives that had been successful in her school. Pamela's initial goals were quite similar to Emily's objectives in that she wanted to encourage parents to attend the coffeehouses as a method for increasing parent involvement. When Pamela proposed the program to Emily, Pamela was interested in increasing parent involvement for the benefit of her students.

Taking on most of the responsibility for organizing the coffeehouses, she put extra effort into contacting parents and creating a welcoming atmosphere for all. Pamela distributed flyers in Spanish and English, bought food and solicited donations for pizza, and organized the room with students. Pamela explained, "We were so happy with the parent turnout the first year. In a weird way, it did achieve, but it never increased. I think that is why Emily was unhappy". Pamela had a good rapport with many of her students and, knowing their backgrounds, she realized that parents experienced barriers to participation such as their work schedules, family responsibilities, and comfort level at school functions, which made it difficult to participate in school events. Transportation, time, and financial resources have been cited as major factors that affect parent's ability to participate (Cassity & Harris, 2000; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995), and Pamela was well aware that these factors affected her students and their families.

During one coffeehouse, Pamela wondered aloud if the students were showing the flyers advertising the coffeehouse to their parents. She made an announcement to the people in attendance questioning whether parents were receiving information about the events:

I was just going to add, because we have fewer parents here, there are people, like I know Desiree's mother, some of you I hope even if it is the first time here to come.

We never know how much information you have. We don't know who gets flyers and information that we want you to have.

Speculating that parents were not coming to the coffeehouses because the students were not giving their parents the flyers or invitations to the events, Pamela identified the problem of communication between students and their families as being a barrier to coffeehouse attendance (McGrew-Zoubi, 1998). Although Pamela distributed the flyers and called parents at home to invite them to the coffeehouses, she was unsure how much information the families were receiving.

Pamela explained to me, "Studies show that parent involvement helps," and she put forth time and energy to encourage participation in her classroom. However, Pamela realized that the barriers from the school were larger than her own individual initiatives. She took on the role of juggling various goals and objectives of UVE, Theo, and students within her classroom. Even though the attendance of the coffeehouses declined during the second year, she believed that the program was successful and was a benefit to her students. As a result, she worked hard to continue everyone's involvement for the sake of her students. Her focus shifted from an initial goal of increasing family participation to recognizing the benefits of the poetry program for her students. Furthermore, despite the fact that the poetry program was discontinued, Pamela continued with her own efforts to encourage families to help their children at school.

### **The Community Poet: "We're not in Mayberry..."**

Theo knew the families of several children from either his involvement in church or from the children's involvement in after school programs at his community non-profit center, Janet's Kitchen. While he encouraged parent involvement, he also believed that counting the numbers of parents at the coffeehouse did not represent their involvement in their children's lives. Also, he emphasized the complexities

involved in encouraging families to participate; he told me, "Many factors had to be in place in order for the families to attend the coffeehouse. The parents have to be able to come in the evenings, have the energy to attend another function, and be willing to write and participate in a school event, and this goal might not be achieved for all students". Furthermore, he realized from his work in the community that having parents involved could present some difficulties for students. He explained to me, "So, it's not as if we are in Mayberry and we're trying to get all of the positive moms and dads to come out and do it".

Theo related to the students' perspectives because of his vantage point as an adult working directly with young people in the classroom, explaining, "If we're in the classroom and we're on the front line, then we have a totally different vantage point than the administrators of it. So, that's where things could potentially get a little murky." Characterizing himself as "on the front line," he used this metaphor to convey that he knows the students from his connections and regular interactions with them. As Theo further questioned the initial goals of the program, his perceptions of Urban Voices in Education's involvement reflect their distance and lack of understanding as a result of differing backgrounds and culture. Since Theo is African American and Emily is white, he questioned how her race and class, which are different than the students', might affect her understanding of the students' circumstances:

You might have a sense where there are administrators from different ethnicities and from different situations where the perception is that the parent is not involved, but to the young person, their perception, which truly is the perception that counts, their perception is, "Know what? As long as I can walk into that house, flip that switch, and the light comes on... And there's food in the refrigerator and there's clothes on my back, then that's the support. That's participation. That's what my mom is doing. She puts a little bit of allowance in my pocket, I can actually get a snack, I can come to school and forget about myself. You know,

to a degree, based on my esteem and somewhat being attached to what I have. That's parent involvement. So, I understand both sides.

In this statement, Theo reflects an understanding of the students that was not addressed in conversations among school staff or Urban Voices in Education administrators. Realizing that some of the students were not encouraging their parents to participate because they had other responsibilities or that they were not able to have this type of support, Theo's understanding of students reflects the mismatched assumptions of schools and families (Valdes, 1996). It also reflects the complex intersections of race and identity and how participants can have different interpretations of a situation based on their own experiences (Nieto, 2008).

As he considered the outcomes of the program, he believed that continuing the focus on parent involvement could be detrimental to students. Theo explained that maybe the initial approach and ideas behind the program needed to change:

And truthfully, I would be the first one to go on record to say that in some ways, the objectives that we went at, in some places we could have been wrong. Because, the goal of the parental involvement and what that could produce, I'm not saying that that is wrong... So if the two years, we created a space where they were able to positively influence each other, then maybe the objective was wrong. So, maybe in the analysis, in the prognosis, and if we do have an opportunity to go at it again, then maybe the objectives need to be reprioritized.

As he evaluated the program and considered the families of the students, he wondered about further expanding program goals by encouraging other community members to write with their parents citing that it was important to "open other avenues" and focus on mentorship rather than family involvement. Theo believed that other community members could be recruited to write and perform poetry with students so that the idea of family would be ex-

tended to include significant adults. In light of the positive impact the poetry program had for students and the situation that many of the families were in, Theo thought that evaluating the program solely on the attendance at the coffeehouses was misdirected. Believing that there were other important successes within the program, namely the positive influence it had for students, Theo did not want students to feel alienated or disappointed that their families were not able to attend.

### **Eighth Grade Students: " Why would I want my parents there? What if I mess up?"**

Students' relationships with their families had a strong impact on whether or not they invited them to participate in school events. Explanations about their families' lack of attendance revealed the students' relationships with their parents, their parents' job responsibilities, and their parents' levels of stress at home. In this study, students were most comfortable encouraging involvement, including engaging with their parents at home, if their relationship supported this type of literacy event. Since the poetry was usually quite personal in nature, the students were affected by whether or not they shared these types of personal feelings with their parents.

For some students, the poetry workshops were the only places where they could safely express their feelings, consider some of the experiences they were facing in life, and receive support from peers and adults. Involving families in a program where students were encouraged to do important identity work provided some students with an opportunity for guidance and mentorship that expanded their modes of communication. For those students who were comfortable, their experiences with poetry and performance as well as their emotional development were often enhanced by bringing poetry performance into the relationship they had with family members. For instance, Shakira felt comfortable sharing her poetry and invited her family to participate in the poetry program. Her family

attended two of the three coffeehouses, and she additionally shared her poetry with her family on a regular basis to convey her feelings. She explained,

My father left and I was angry, but my mom didn't want me to talk about it. I could write poems, though. I wrote two poems about my dad, about hating my dad. When I showed my mom, she broke down and hugged me.

Poetry opened up avenues of communication between Shakira and her mother that may not have otherwise existed. While Shakira had positive feelings about sharing her poetry with her family, in a focus group she also characterized her mother's attendance as a "bad thing." Poetry was a conduit for telling her mother about her experiences; however, Shakira had mixed feelings about her attendance at poetry events because emotional topics sparked similar emotions within her mother and made it difficult for her mother to listen when Shakira was reading.

Some students did not feel comfortable sharing their poetry with their parents, and they prevented their parents from attending the coffeehouses because they were worried about the dynamics. Taniqua was such a student; she was reluctant to share her poetry with her family, never shared the coffeehouse invitations with them, and did not have any parental participation in the program. During the first year of the project, Taniqua was shy and reserved and did not volunteer to read any of her poetry out loud; therefore, she did not attend the coffeehouses. During the second year of the program, she began to open up and share her poetry in class as a result of her increasing confidence and the encouragement of her peers. In a conversation where some of the students were discussing their feelings and attitudes about performing poetry, Taniqua talked about the concerns that prevented her from inviting her mother: "What would happen to me when I got home? Would she say something good about me? What if I mess up?" Taniqua was uncomfortable involving her family in this type of venue because the nature of her relationships with them made it difficult to share



such personal poetry. Taniqua was like several students in this class who tended to rely on support from peers rather than working with her parents to improve and communicate through poetry. She chose to separate the personal nature of the poetry topics from her relationships with family members.

Desiree was another student who did not tell her mother about the coffeehouses during the second year of the poetry program even though her mother had been involved in the coffeehouses during the first year of its implementation. Desiree described how she decided not to inform her mother of the coffeehouses because she thought that her mother was too busy and stressed:

I told her last year [about the coffeehouses] but not this year. It's not the fact that she's lazy. She's stressed out. I know that's the best time to write... And then she's busy and when she's home, I'm not home. When she does get home, my mother sleeps. There's not time to explain it to her.

Desiree reflects the concern that students have when they see their parents working hard and holding down several jobs. Desiree further reflects on the role of communication for other students in the class when she considers the difference between last year's and this year's attendance at the coffeehouse events:

Desiree: Last year, it seems like there were more people. And now, they tell us ahead of time and people be forgetting and they have all these other activities. They finally tell their parents at the last minute and their parents can't come.

Me: Is that something you do? Or is that something that other people in the class do?

Desiree: Me. And it seems like other people do that, too. Because we would tell them that there's a coffeehouse tonight, can you stay?

Desiree's description of how adolescents informed their parents at the last minute is consistent with other students who documented that adolescents discourage families from becoming in-

involved by not providing information on school functions. Taking responsibility for the lack of communication with her mother, Desiree acknowledged that the coffeehouse dates were organized with plenty of time for her parents to make plans if told earlier. While her response was most likely autobiographical, it also reflected why some of the other parents were not attending; the avenues of communication between families and students were often not open and parents did not receive information about the coffeehouses.

For students, the nature of the literacy event can encourage or hinder participation; therefore, looking at the goals of the program and making sure that they are in alignment with the ways that families interact is important. Students' feelings and responses about parental involvement reflected varying life situations and backgrounds. I found that some students encouraged their families to attend and found it to be an important aspect of their relationships, while other students whose families participated described some drawbacks regarding that involvement. Also, some of the students were making the decision that their families should not be involved because of their parents' schedules or stress levels.

### DIFFERING PERCEPTIONS AND IDEAS ABOUT FAMILY INVOLVEMENT

The topic of family involvement, seen from different vantage points, illustrates how perceptions can vary based on experiences and background for participants in a program designed to promote parent involvement. There was much to be learned by simply asking, "What constitutes family involvement?" or "What were your own experiences with family involvement?" Because the intent of the program was to increase parent involvement, this topic became a focal point and an evaluative measure in the spring semester of this study. In many ways, the participants' views of how parents should be involved represented a touchstone that reflected the multiple ways of thinking about the children and families in this study.

All of the participants in this study

expressed differing definitions and perceptions about family involvement that were connected to their identities and roles within the program and in their lives. Emily's experiences at this middle school reflected a history of taking different approaches, yet being discouraged by abandoned initiatives and discouraging administrators. Pamela is a teacher who knew and understood her students' backgrounds and put forth much time and resources to create opportunities for parents to become involved in the students' lives beyond the school day. Theo understood many of the reasons these students would act as gatekeepers and promoted a broad definition of family and involvement, suggesting that that students encourage relationships with community members. The students reported different comfort levels with having their families involved and, in some cases, actually took the responsibility of controlling the communication between school and home.

Much of the evaluative pressure from Urban Voices in Education's perspective was influenced by a specific grant that funded this program and was designed to improve family involvement. Regardless of the efforts of a community organization that attempts to be attuned to the needs of a school community, the relationships established by school administrators can override the initiatives of teachers or community agencies (Fine, 1993; Swap, 1993). When a school has discouraged parent involvement, it is quite difficult to make changes and affect the school and family relationships through initiatives in one classroom. Emily found herself in a difficult position; while she clearly had respect for Theo and his work, her responsibility to meet the objectives of the grant caused her to focus almost solely on the numbers of parents attending the coffeehouse. Since she was responsible for the funding, her dissatisfaction was cause for concern from Theo and Pamela and represented a point of dissonance for both of them.

The teacher in this study believed that having families involved would improve students' educational experiences. As she considered activities that would encourage family participa-

tion, Pamela clearly understood that encouraging families to attend the coffeehouse was unrealistic in some situations due to work schedules, transportation, and family responsibilities. Regarding her collaboration with Theo and Urban Voices in Education, Pamela found herself juggling their different goals and objectives. While she initially thought that the program had the potential to improve parent involvement, her focus shifted when it became obvious that the educational outcomes had more of an impact on the students than did their families' involvement. At the same time, she wanted to continue the collaboration with Urban Voices in Education because they were funding the program and had provided many of the resources to support Theo's work in the classroom. Placed in the position of mediating the goals of the grant and understanding what was most effective for her students, Pamela worked hard to maintain the goals of parent involvement from a realistic perspective.

Theo believed that when it came to family involvement, different adults can be involved, that significant adults can be extended family or close friends, and that parent involvement was not necessarily positive for all students. He also felt a strong connection to the students because of their shared cultural backgrounds. This understanding affected his approach and also resulted in his attitude that parental involvement cannot be forced or mandated—that many of the children excluded their parents for significant reasons that may be beyond their control. Theo's motivations and incentives were quite different because he was not directly responsible for carrying out the objectives of a grant or meeting certain goals or objectives. Theo's knowledge about families and his role as a mentor in this class resulted in notions of involvement that were different than counting the parents that showed up for events.

The students were in powerful positions to broker the relationships between their families and the school. Some students had ideas about family involvement that clashed with the objectives of the evening coffeehouses and their relationships with their parents that were not conducive to shar-

ing their feelings, and they were more comfortable sharing their poetry with classmates. The poetry workshops for some students were the only places where they could safely express their feelings, communicate some of the major experiences they were facing in life, and get support from peers and adults (for more details on this aspect of the program, see Wiseman, 2007 and Wissman & Wiseman, in press). For some students who were testing out important issues and not comfortable doing so in front of family, this was a factor in whether or not they invited their parents, which illustrates how important it is to respect students' developing autonomy when creating programs (Deplanty, Coulter Kern, & Duchane, 2007). As a result, students relied on other people for support, such as peers or other adults, and discouraged their parents from participating.

In order to understand the learning environment in the classroom, it is important to consider the larger context of the students' lives and to conceptualize ways this knowledge can be incorporated within the classroom. Involving family members has been described as one way to do this, but there are many complexities in the intentions and goals of a program designed to incorporate important adults from students' lives into the school environment. Each individual brought her/his own intentions and perspectives, and, in the end, all of these individual voices shed light on the complexities of implementing a family involvement program for adolescents.

## IMPLICATIONS

There are several implications from listening to the different views of the participants in this family involvement program. First of all, from some of the adults and students in this project, it seemed that opening up mentorship and guidance beyond the family might be a positive approach, especially when the levels of participation for immediate family are lower than anticipated. In this program, there were several other community members and other caring adults who participated in the poetry coffeehouses. What if there had

been a mentoring system provided for any child who wanted to collaborate with an adult? Would more students have come to the evening events to work with other types of people? Caring adults would certainly be in the position to support students in various ways, especially in the context of poetic expression and academic involvement. Expanding the notion of involvement seems to be an important idea that could have encouraged more students as well as more adults to participate in this school program.

The second implication is to recognize how significant the content and organization of the program can be for encouraging or deterring family involvement, with the idea that addressing adolescents' concerns is an important way to encourage their participation. With many of the students concerned about future employment and thinking about which high school to apply to and with the teachers concerned about the students' future academic goals, would the participation have been different if students received educational and occupational information at the coffeehouses? As DePlanty, Coulter-Kern, & Duchane (2007) explain, support and mentorship needs to be developmentally appropriate and relevant to adolescents' needs. While the students were very receptive to writing poetry in the classroom (see Wiseman, 2007 for more details), it may not have fit with all of the students' needs or interests to continue writing with family. Carefully considering the goals of the program as well as the needs of the students and their families would be an important point for planning sessions or activities. While there were surveys and questionnaires administered in the first year of the program, it could be that as students got closer to entering high school and as they may have been becoming more independent, their interests changed. Regular assessment and feedback should be an important component of any type of program that encourages involvement beyond one school year.

Third, it is important to recognize the different kinds of involvement and the importance of "invisible strategies" (Auerbach, 2007) and possibly

look to build of some of different ways students receive support. In some settings, technology might facilitate participation – students and parents could write and respond to each other about various topics and create a virtual school presence. While I do not think that technology can replace important face-to-face guidance, it might make some of the ways that families are involved more visible. This would relate to the notion that it is important to create more supportive interactions between schools and families by both recognizing and encouraging different ways of becoming involved (Swanson, Cunningham, & Spencer, 2003). This would also confirm the assertion that one way of creating more supportive school-family interactions is to recognize and encourage different ways of becoming involved.

Finally, the ways that parents view involvement can be affected by many factors, and certainly racial and cultural identity was an underlying factor

that seemed to influence perceptions and understandings in this program. Theo provided one perspective that illuminated a mistrust of administrators and questioned whether the goals of the program were synchronous with what was best for children. Understanding the different needs or interests, particularly of those who are closely involved in the community and of different backgrounds or perspectives, would provide important insight on how programs are structured and how to sustain involvement (De Gaetano, 2007; Nieto, 2008). It might be that understanding more and hearing from different voices, particularly with knowledge of and an investment in the community, would enhance our understanding of involvement. Further studies that incorporate different perspectives and models of successful community partnerships are crucial to knowing about why and how they become involved.

This poetry program was funded to improve family involvement; however,

this goal and its outcomes were complex and reflected differing viewpoints. The various perspectives and approaches to families demonstrate some of the complexities of collaboration as well as the difficulties of increasing parent involvement for adolescent children. Above all, it is important to note that understanding the roles and systems of family support for adolescents is a complex and important consideration.

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## COMMENTARY

# Democratic Teacher Education: In Through the Out Door

By Michael Clapper, St. Joseph's University; C. Aiden Downey, Emory University; Simon Hauger, West Philly Hybrid X Team; and Matthew Riggan, University of Pennsylvania

## INTRODUCTION

Democratic education, the idea that all members of a school community play meaningful roles in determining what is learned and how, has occupied a stable if marginal place in American educational discourse over the last century. Despite a continued interest in democracy as both a means and ends of schooling (Biesta 2006; Parker, 2003; Sleeter, 2008), schools of education have struggled to embrace notions of democracy in teacher education. Our experiences on both ends of teacher education—in universities and in urban schools—have led us to conclude that democratic education is difficult to do when theory and practice, learning and doing, unfold in vastly different communities.

Reflecting on our ongoing work on designing and planning an experimental high school, in this essay we explore the relationship between the where and how of teacher education. We argue that traditional approaches to teacher education reinforce a didactic, and ultimately antidemocratic, model of teaching and learning in which knowledge is delivered from universities to schools. As an alternative, we outline our vision for a school in which both student and teacher education are grounded in principles of democratic learning. Ultimately, we believe that such an approach will result in both more engaged students and better-prepared teachers.

## Background

The view of democratic learning and teacher education we present here emerges from our work together both inside and outside of urban schools. In various capacities, each of us has spent several years working at West Philadelphia High School. Three of us have

spent significant time as classroom teachers in urban schools, and three of us have earned doctorates studying schools and now work in schools or departments of education. Over the years, we have spent too many hours reflecting on all that seemed amiss in our experiences: schools that had lost touch with students, and universities that had lost touch with schools. At each level, what was learned in the classroom was considerably removed from what was needed outside of it. Like so many who work in urban education, we daydreamed and argued about how to find a better way.

In 2007, we applied for and won a small grant to plan a charter high school focused on democratic education. Since then, an unfortunate combination of district and state policy changes have precluded us from moving forward on opening the school. We have, however, continued to work on its design and core principles. This work has led us to the concept of the Workshop for Democracy and Social Entrepreneurship (The Workshop), an urban laboratory school serving high school-aged students. The Workshop will be organized around small, collaborative teams of teachers and students designing and carrying out projects focused on solving real-world problems, from the local to the global. It has its roots in the EVX Project, an after school program at the Academy for Automotive and Mechanical Engineering at West Philadelphia High School ([www.evxtteam.org](http://www.evxtteam.org)) in which students, teachers, and community volunteers have built not only award-winning alternative energy vehicles but also a vibrant learning community and, most importantly, student success in and beyond high school. The Workshop aims to pick up

and continue to develop this approach to communal and democratic learning, making it the centering principle of the curriculum rather than an extracurricular activity. At the heart of the school is a belief in the importance of democratic learning communities to the development of all learners, including pre-service teachers. As teachers and teacher educators, our role is to support beginning teachers as they learn to meaningfully (i.e. democratically) participate in and contribute to the community of learners. To do this, we need to change the location, organization, and focus of the education of beginning teachers. Below, we sketch out what we believe are the implications of democratic learning for teacher education.

## WHERE (AND HOW) TEACHERS LEARN

Efforts to move teacher education out of the ivory tower are not new. Traditional university-district partnerships have occasionally been reconfigured into professional development schools (Abdul-Haqq, 1998; Darling-Hammond, 1994), and, recently, towards community-based teacher education (Zeichner, 2010). The multiple locations where formal and informal teacher education takes place complicate program design as well as evaluation of the effectiveness of these programs. Tension within teacher education programs about the gap between what happens in schools and what happens in coursework has been documented extensively as well (Feiman-Nemser and Buchman, 1985; Grossman, 2005).

Despite these criticisms, most teacher education programs adhere to a traditional model that front loads teachers with pedagogical ideas and skills in order to send them off to practice them in schools. The model uses course-

work to prepare aspiring teachers to student teach, which is itself practice for “real teaching.” For a wide variety of reasons, this model has not worked well to prepare prospective teachers to teach in urban schools. The oft-cited statistic that half of all teachers leave teaching in urban schools within five years may be slightly overblown, but it underscores the need to rethink what we mean when we aim to “prepare” urban educators (e.g., Freedman & Applebaum, 2009). We aim to reverse the preparation paradigm by having beginning teachers’ practical problems guide their learning, and, in doing so, put “theory” in the service of improving practice. This is the same model we ascribe to for our students and ourselves at the Workshop. Just as we hope to reframe student learning around questions or problems that matter to them, our goal is to create learning situations for new teachers that invite them to critically engage theory instead of jettisoning it—an all too common occurrence for beginning teachers, especially in urban schools (Clift & Brady, 2005).

## SHIFTING PEDAGOGY BY SHIFTING LOCATION

Changing the location and organization of teacher education could shift its focus away from preparing new teachers and towards participating in democratic learning communities. Putting teacher education where the practice is combines the best elements of apprenticeship—learning while doing and while watching others—with the best elements of democratic education, where problems, questions, and lines of inquiry are developed collaboratively among teachers and students.

To understand how this might look in practice, consider for a moment the topic of classroom management. Generally overlooked in teacher education course work, it is often the first and most pressing challenge for new teachers in urban schools. It is also an extraordinarily complex subject, one whose study can and should be informed not only by diverse bodies of scholarship and theory from psychology to organizational theory, but also by the perspective, expertise and

craft knowledge of both teachers and students in the schools themselves. Treating classroom management as the subject of serious inquiry would help teachers and students to illuminate the unwritten rules that govern behavior in schools, question assumptions about what aspects of classrooms need to be “managed,” and open up a broader conversation about what rules should govern a democratic learning community and what it would mean to follow them.

Such an approach to teacher education requires an approach to course work that is at once more collaborative and more flexible than in traditional programs. At the Workshop, we envision establishing a committee of high school students charged with acclimating student teachers and conducting a series of workshops designed to familiarize the pre-service teachers with the rules, ideals, and history of the school. Portions of the coursework would overlap—there is no better place to contextualize the philosophy or history of education than within a school—as would much of the fieldwork as pre-service teachers worked with students to conduct small studies within the building. As the pre-service teachers gradually assumed more responsibilities, they would be engaged in teaching seminars based on the questions and problems that emerged in their practices. Most importantly, these seminars would begin in and with the experiences of pre-service teachers, inviting them to view their teaching through the lens of their students’ learning. Because this approach to education organizes academic work around problems of practice for all members of the learning community, the learning would unfold slowly, in real time. By explicitly asking that students, pre-service teachers, and mentor teachers share in the educational work, we understand teachers as coming to be “certified” in a community—a designation that is ultimately more meaningful than the arbitrary endpoints set by a state licensing authority.

In our vision for the Workshop, democratic teacher education is seamlessly woven into the culture of the school. But we believe it would be beneficial even in much more traditional settings. Pre-service teachers face a daunting

task in urban schools. They must find their voice as educators, plan and organize lessons, learn about their students both individually and as groups, and figure out a host of rules—official and informal—about how schools work. They wrestle with dilemmas of discipline and control, balancing the need to maintain control in the classroom with the desire to engage students. They are confronted with the harsh reality of students who are often not at all where the public education system assumes they should be academically. And they must confront all of this in real time, while attending to all of other demands of their lives. One of those demands, of course, is their teacher education course work. Imagine if, instead of being ancillary to their work as teachers, that course work helped to explain what was happening in the schools in which preservice teachers were placed, helping them to resolve dilemmas of practice. The result, we believe, would be teachers who are better prepared for the challenges of urban schools and, therefore, more likely to persist, and ultimately be successful, within them.

Learning about teaching in urban schools means learning about urban communities; practical knowledge of such communities lies not in sociological texts, but in the neighborhoods themselves. Democratic teacher education not only seeks community involvement, it depends on it. A school explicitly committed to the process of preparing urban teachers requires broad community engagement in their development. We envision seminars where parents would be the panelists in teaching pre-service teachers about the history of the community, outlining recent victories or present challenges. Such an approach is important both for the knowledge it introduces into teacher education and for the relationships it helps to build.

Training and certifying teachers within schools represents a significant departure from business as usual, both for universities and for schools. It is not without precedent, however. High Tech High, one of the best known charter schools in the nation, has become accredited as a teacher training site and now develops its own teachers on

site. And the idea of wrapping teacher training around the actual experience of working in schools is becoming more common in alternative certification programs, such as the graduate programs enrolling Teach for America members or the many Teacher Institutes cropping up in large districts around the country. The model we propose is, in some ways, a next step along this path. What is different about our approach is that it fuses the idea of on-site teacher development with principles of democratic education.

## CONCLUSION

Democratic teacher education both demands and supports significant changes in how teacher preparation programs and schools typically operate. Such change never comes easily. The

approach we offer here is more hypothesis than answer, and we know that our own learning will be significantly furthered by the opportunity to put it into practice, with all of the struggle and failure a project like this one entails. We are certain, however, that we cannot train teachers to teach democratically if our pedagogy itself is undemocratic. Democratic learning begins when teachers acknowledge and engage the voices and ideas of students. Democratic teacher education begins when universities acknowledge and engage the complexity and practice of schools.

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## COMMENTARY

# Maximizing the Opportunity Provided by 'Race to the Top'

By Theodore Hershberg and Claire Robertson-Kraft, University of Pennsylvania

## Background and Context

Education policy makers have long searched for a system that will recognize and reward outstanding practice, support educators to improve their performance, and, most importantly, increase student achievement. But we are now at a watershed moment in public education where a Democratic president has challenged the educational status quo. For states and school districts to secure grants from the \$4.35 billion Race to the Top (RTTT) Fund, President Barack Obama is requiring them to “use data effectively to reward effective teachers, to support teachers who are struggling, and when necessary, to replace teachers who aren’t up to the job” (White House, 2009). The scale of the federal investment in RTTT is unprecedented, and the four core education reform assurances – rigorous standards and internationally benchmarked assessments, data systems tracing individual students and teachers, great teachers and leaders, and turning around struggling schools – send a strong message about the federal government’s commitment to systemic change (U.S. Department of Education, 2009).

But the most important among these assurances, according to the published weights assigned in the decision-making process, is the development of effective teachers (U.S. Department of Education, 2009), a clear indicator that the quality of instruction is now understood as the single most important influence on student progress. Research has demonstrated that if low-performing students in low-income communities are assigned a highly effective teacher for five years in a row, this alone could eliminate the achievement gap between high-income and low-income youth. Unfortunately, there is considerable

variation in teacher effectiveness, and students from low-income families are less likely to have access to high quality instruction than their peers in higher-income communities (Walsh, 2007).

Like the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, RTTT emphasizes the importance of improving teacher quality as a vehicle for accelerating student progress and closing achievement gaps. However, the new policy redefines the indicators used to measure student outcomes – and in turn, teacher effectiveness – by focusing on the growth that individual students make over the course of the year, rather than on their achievement level at a particular point in time. To receive funds, states’ RTTT proposals have to include student growth as one of the multiple measures in an enhanced teacher evaluation system and propose plans to use this information in decisions related to compensation, career advancement, and tenure. In fact, states barring the use of student data in teacher evaluation are not even eligible to apply (U.S. Department of Education, 2009).

Critics of the administration’s approach contend that because teachers’ impact on student learning cannot be measured without error, it is impossible to create fair and accurate systems for evaluating and rewarding performance. By this standard, however, current practice fails on both counts. Research has demonstrated that the factors driving the existing compensation system – academic credentials and years of experience – have a limited impact on student learning (Walsh & Tracy, 2004; Goe & Stickler, 2008; Hanushek, Kain, O’Brien, & Rivkin, 2005). Moreover, evaluation and compensation systems are not designed to effectively identify, reward, or develop high-quality instruction. In a recent

report that investigated teacher evaluation and dismissal practices in 12 diverse districts in four states, Weisberg et al. (2009) discovered that personnel evaluation systems rate virtually all teachers as good or great; fail to recognize excellence or address poor performance; and neglect to provide sufficient professional development, particularly for novice teachers. New proposals for evaluation and compensation systems may not be perfect, but they will be more effective than what school districts having been using for decades.

Though these reforms may be gaining momentum, policies designed to measure and reward teacher effectiveness are neither new nor untried solutions. The challenge for current policy makers will be to overcome the shortcomings of previous attempts by employing metrics that take into account the multiple dimensions of teachers’ work, producing results teachers view as accurate, and providing sufficient training to help them interpret and utilize the data to improve their instructional practice. This essay will discuss various positions on current efforts and outline a series of recommendations for reformers to keep in mind as they design new initiatives. To maximize the potential of these new policies to make good on their promised goals, states will have to build both the capacity and the will to sustain reform.

## Current Efforts

The availability of federal funds has led to a flurry of activity at the state level. Over the course of the past year, several states have rewritten their education laws to make their applications more competitive. For example, California passed a law eliminating its firewall between student test scores and teacher evaluation (Maxwell, 2009),



New York went further by reaching an agreement that would include student performance data in teacher evaluation and accelerate the dismissal process for ineffective teachers (Medina, 2010), while other states, such as Michigan, used legislative measures to remove caps on charter schools (Bouffard, 2009). Additionally, many unions who were once reticent to participate in RTTT, such as the Pennsylvania State Education Association, have agreed to endorse their states' proposal (Hardy & Graham, 2010). However, many critics remain skeptical, contending that we have yet to see the potential impact of RTTT; they question whether states are truly committed to sustaining the proposed reforms or merely interested in securing much needed funds in dismal fiscal times (Smarik, 2010). Fostering political will may ensure short-term implementation of the proposed regulations, but the long-term policy goal of catalyzing systemic reform will require building statewide capacity. Even if states have every intention of implementing the policy provisions, because of limited enforcement capacity, RTTT's effectiveness in changing actual outcomes will depend on how the policy makes its way through the inter-governmental system to influence district, school, and ultimately, classroom practice (Cohen & Spillane, 1993).

## Recommendations

Perhaps most disconcerting to critics in the academic community is the fact that RTTT requires states to move forward with reforms for which the evidence base is underdeveloped – e.g., the validity of measuring teacher effectiveness based on student growth and the use of pay for performance as a mechanism for improving teacher quality. Despite limitations in the research, current practice suggests some important considerations for states to keep in mind that will maximize the opportunity presented by RTTT. The recommendations below are primarily drawn from the recently published book, *A Grand Bargain for Education Reform: New Rewards and Supports for New Accountability* (Hershberg & Robertson-Kraft, 2009), which we ed-

ited in collaboration with some of the nation's leading reformers. We also extract lessons from the experiences of several long-standing initiatives designed to improve teacher quality and the two states, Delaware and Tennessee, who received funds in the first round of the RTTT competition.

## Use Multiple Measures to Evaluate Performance

Most of the current teacher evaluation systems rely on a single measure of performance, and as a result, do not reveal enough information about the quality of instruction. New evaluation systems should adopt a balanced approach, using multiple sources of data to gauge teacher effectiveness and recognize outstanding performance. In the system we envision, value-added assessment would provide the empirical component in teacher evaluation by identifying the most-effective and least-effective performers. Student learning outcomes would be accompanied by results from rigorous evaluation frameworks that rely on multiple observations over the course of the year to identify teachers of various levels of performance.

Used together, multiple measures offer a much more robust picture of teacher effectiveness. Denver's Professional Compensation System for Teachers (ProComp), the most comprehensive effort to date to change the way a school district pays its educators, provides teachers with four components through which to build earnings – knowledge and skills, professional evaluation, market incentives, and student growth (Gratz, 2005). Additionally, both Tennessee and Delaware's applications evaluate teachers based on multiple measures, though Delaware mandates that educators cannot be rated as effective until they have demonstrated satisfactory levels of student growth (State of Delaware, 2010; State of Tennessee, 2010). To ensure that the results are as accurate as possible, states including student growth as a component in teacher evaluation systems should use rigorous value-added models that base estimates on multiple years of data.<sup>1</sup>

## Align Evaluation with Rewards and Consequences

New methods of evaluation should then be used to inform new rewards and consequences. Pay-for-performance and the dismissal of ineffective educators play a central role in the RTTT guidelines because they align new system goals with rewards. Compensation systems should be designed to attract top talent, establish a clear link between pay and improved performance, and offer highly effective teachers higher salaries and additional opportunities for career advancement. Conversely, though educators who do not meet agreed upon standards of performance should be provided extensive support, there needs to be a mechanism in place for dismissing the ones who fail to make adequate progress through a fair process.<sup>2</sup> Both Tennessee and Delaware's applications call for these provisions; for example, Tennessee will provide \$12 million in competitive funding for districts who commit to making the transition to new compensation models, and in Delaware, educators can be removed if they demonstrate a pattern of ineffective performance over a two or three year period (State of Delaware, 2010; State of Tennessee, 2010).

## Build Capacity

While some teachers may work harder because of new incentives, rewards and consequences alone will not help teachers enhance their performance unless they also have the capacity to implement necessary changes in their instruction. Educating all students to high standards is challenging work, and because of this, states must ensure that RTTT money is used to provide teachers with ample resources to improve their practice. To be most effective, professional development should offer a system of supports that is job-embedded, focused on data, driven by teachers, and sustained over time. This additional assistance should be made available to *all* teachers: multiyear mentoring for new teachers, consultants for struggling teachers, and coaches for all other teachers wishing to improve their craft. Developed

by the Milken Family Foundation, the TAP program offers a concrete example of how to balance new rewards with additional supports. It offers teachers additional compensation based on improved performance, opportunities for career advancement, and an expanded range of job-embedded professional development (National Institute for Excellence in Teaching, 2008).

### Empower Teachers as Equal Partners in Reform

The RTTT fund provides an unprecedented opportunity for states and districts to embrace system-wide change. Yet, whether or not districts can successfully sustain such types of initiatives has been shown to depend in large measure on teacher buy-in and union support (Hannaway & Rotherham, 2008). The fear among critics of RTTT is that making high stakes decisions based on students' test results will lead to narrow curricula, increased rates of competition among educators, and a demoralized teaching force (Smarik, 2010). To address these concerns, new systems should use multiple measures to gauge teacher effectiveness, provide group incentives and opportunities for increased col-

laboration, and ensure that teachers compete only against themselves – and not with each other – to reach a set of agreed upon performance standards. But most importantly, comprehensive reform must be done *with* teachers and not *to* them, and policy makers should seek to ensure that teachers play an active role in the implementation and evaluation of RTTT initiatives.

The “grand bargain” we propose offers a simple but powerful quid pro quo: carefully targeted investment in return for fundamental reform. At the core of this approach, teachers are held responsible, as individuals, for student-learning gains, but in return, they are given a greatly expanded role in schools: e.g., through reforms such as peer review, where they play a key role in helping to support and evaluate their struggling colleagues and through shared-decision making, where they have an equal say in the major issues that affect their classroom. Rather than imposing change through top-down mandates, the best chances for success lie with progressive educators and union leaders who will willingly collaborate to improve public schools.

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### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Sanders and Rivers discuss the characteristics of robust value-added models in “Choosing a Value-Added Model,” in *A Grand Bargain for Education Reform: New Rewards and Supports for New Accountability* (Hershberg & Robertson-Kraft, 2009).

<sup>2</sup>Additional information on how to design these systems can be found in Wallace, “Compensation,” and Grossman and Robertson-Kraft, “Peer Assistance and Review,” in *A Grand Bargain for Education Reform: New Rewards and Supports for New Accountability* (Hershberg & Robertson-Kraft, 2009).

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## BOOK REVIEW

# Improving the Odds: Developing Powerful Teaching Practices and a Culture of Learning in Urban High Schools

By Thomas Del Prete, Teachers College Press, 2010, 192 pp.

Review by Shannon H. Andrus, University of Pennsylvania

Thomas Del Prete's book *Improving the Odds: Developing Powerful Teaching Practice and a Culture of Learning in Urban High Schools* provides both an argument for rethinking urban school reform and examples of how it is being done. As chair of the Education Department at Clark University, Del Prete is well-positioned to understand, explore, and explain the ways that Clark partners with three nearby high schools in Worcester, MA, each of which is trying – with various degrees of success – to change the status quo for the students they serve. He uses the three schools as case studies for new possibilities in the face of the challenges that beleague most urban districts in this country.

Del Prete provides a history of the schools and the community in which they are located, painting a fairly typical picture of a diverse urban student population struggling with test scores, matriculation in postsecondary education, and other measures of success in public education. He then explores the concept of modern educational reform, arguing that it must be about changing “entrenched expectations, belief systems, and structures as much as teaching practice and the allocation of resources” (p. 7). He believes that educators need to change how they think of possibilities for students and for teaching and to challenge themselves to believe that success is possible for all students. He also addresses the many problems associated with using tests as a measurement of student and school success, and he argues that we need to think about the quality of teachers and teaching in new ways.

In the first chapter of the book, Del Prete provides an agenda for “reframing reform” that is organized around

five areas: institutional culture and practice, teaching quality, educational opportunity and quality, partnerships and networks, and community revitalization. The focus of the book is quality teaching, which he interprets as that which fits the context in which it occurs and is an integral part of a reform that addresses beliefs as much as strategies within a school. He acknowledges that his intention is not to explore all of the signifiers of constructive reform in detail. Instead, he uses examples from the three schools to paint a picture of meaningful reform at the school level, focusing in particular on teachers as they teach and collaborate with colleagues.

He next describes the three high schools highlighted in the book, including the history and current nature of their collaboration with the Jacob Hiatt Center for Urban Education at Clark University. The University Park Campus School (UPCS) is closest to meeting the actions Del Prete outlines as necessary for real reform and seems to be having the greatest success. To stress the efficacy of UPCS, Del Prete begins the book by describing three recent graduates of UPCS, all of whom are finding success in college despite many educational and personal hurdles and all of whom attribute their unlikely success to their experience at UPCS. The other two schools are, to some extent, foils of UPCS, proving through their struggles why changes of the type Del Prete advocates are needed.

After the introduction and first framing chapters, the bulk of the book is organized by descriptions of different teachers' classrooms within the three high schools. Del Prete is the director of the Hiatt Center and knows the seven teachers in the book well, many of whom teach and work at the Center

in addition to teaching high school. Several are recent graduates of Clark's education program. He has chosen the seven because they embody the expectations and beliefs about teaching and learning that fit with his model of reframed reform. One of the actions that Del Prete stresses is the necessity for reform of this type to provide structures for supporting collaborative teacher learning. The three schools' partnership with Clark University allows for such a structure, in this case the “Rounds” program. Like medical rounds, teaching Rounds bring together professors, graduate students, and classroom teachers to observe and discuss practice. The classroom teacher who is hosting prepares a Round sheet with questions for the observers to consider while watching the lesson. The group discusses the plans for the class during a pre-Round session then watches the teacher and meets again afterwards to discuss the framing questions and other observations and thoughts that emerged. Del Prete's description of how Rounds work and examples of how teachers are able to collaborate and learn from each other is a particularly useful part of the book.

The seven chapters devoted to teachers each describe a lesson that was part of a Round. Del Prete was in the classroom each time participating in the Round and used the observations as data for the book. He contrasts the classes of new and experienced teachers, as well as lessons that went as planned and those in which the teacher or students struggled. These descriptions of the lessons – and the teachers' actions, intentions, and reflections upon them – are engaging. Though it is difficult to represent the nuance of the myriad actions and reactions that

occur within a class full of high school students, Del Prete does a good job of capturing the essence of what was occurring in each class and the teachers' interpretations and responses to it. Descriptions of actual teachers, students, and classrooms are always helpful in texts about education reform, and Del Prete uses the seven lessons he observed to show what reframed reform can really look like in the classroom, while also touching on the larger contextual factors that need to be in place to truly support such reform.

In addition to providing examples of actual classroom teachers, part of Del Prete's purpose in showcasing and analyzing the classes is to highlight the differences between the three schools, choosing three teachers from UPCS and two each from the other two high schools for that purpose. However, while reading about each of the teachers it is easy to lose track of which teacher belongs with which school, especially since many of the teachers collaborate across schools through their connection with Clark. At times, he mentions ways the high schools other than UPCS have made choices that do not support real reform, but he does not lay out a clear comparison of what the schools are or are not doing in order to be effective. Instead, the reader is left with a sense that there are differences between the schools, but without more than a few concrete examples scattered throughout the text to illustrate those differences.

The general sense of the schools that Del Prete provides is both a strength and a weakness of the book. Teachers and teacher educators will likely be excited and inspired by the energy, enthusiasm, and creativity of the teachers showcased in the book. There is much to admire and to replicate. The practice of Rounds has clear benefits for improving teacher practice and collaboration. The attitudes of all involved towards continuous learning through collaboration and reflection is particularly inspiring. Where the book falls short, however, is in providing enough of a behind-the-scenes look at how this reform really functions within a school. Del Prete does not address many questions that may arise in the

minds of readers about how to do this. For instance, while there are clearly a great number of students who are benefiting from the reform practices of UPCS, there is no in depth explanation of how the school grapples with ongoing difficulties such as student mobility or literacy remediation. And though Del Prete begins and ends the book with vignettes about the academic lives and successes of three UPCS students, student voices and experiences are absent from the bulk of the book. The inclusion of their experiences and further exploration into the ways that the schools affected them would add an important additional dimension to the book. There is also almost no discussion or inclusion of administrators, whose viewpoints on the realities of instituting change would have been helpful. While Del Prete might argue that this is a book about teaching and teachers, including the perspectives of others involved would have provided an additional way to understand how this type of reform can really happen.

These omissions can be overlooked, however, because the book is not intended to be a step-by-step manual, nor does it claim to have solved every problem in urban schools. In fact, two of the three schools are struggling to implement many of the actions of reform that Del Prete advocates, but that does not stop committed and connected teachers from doing inspiring work. Yet, there is one area that Del Prete does not acknowledge enough and that truly limits the applicability of these examples to other struggling schools: the unique and crucial relationship the schools, especially UPCS, have with Clark University. The relationship appears to be the key factor making the reform, and subsequent success of students, possible. Clark students intern at the schools and often later take jobs as teachers there. Clark professors and students appear to be in constant collaboration with teachers and the time and energy for conducting Rounds are clearly available due to the connection with a university. The high school students are even required to either take or audit a course on Clark's campus during their senior year, which is pos-

sible due to the metaphorical and actual proximity of the schools. While the success of UPCS and the progress of the other two schools are compelling arguments for the importance and potential of school/university partnerships, it would not be possible for every urban school in the country to form such a partnership. Given that reality, the book would have been well served by more of an acknowledgment of that limitation and more concrete advice on how to begin to embrace this type of reform in the absence of such a connection.

Overall, *Improving the Odds* provides a well-written and appealing glimpse into classrooms that represent an alternative understanding of what reform could mean for today's struggling urban schools. The theories and habits of mind that Del Prete advocates are a welcome respite from a focus on test scores and narrow understandings of teacher quality. Even more importantly, Del Prete shows this reform in action and makes it clear how it can have a real effect on students' lives. And while most teachers and schools may not be able to immediately create this type of reform, this book will provide ways to name the types of changes that schools do need to make and perhaps the motivation to start working in at least small ways towards them.

**Shannon Andrus** is currently an advanced doctoral student at the Graduate School of Education at the University of Pennsylvania. She is also a senior research associate at the Center for the Study of Boys' and Girls' Lives. She is currently researching teachers' experiences in single-sex urban public schools and is also interested in teacher education and issues related to gender and education more broadly. Prior to studying at GSE, Shannon was a high school English teacher.

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## BOOK REVIEW

# Learning in School-University Partnerships: Sociocultural Perspectives

By Amy Tsui, Gwyn Edwards, and Fran Lopez-Real, Routledge, 2009, 200 pp.

Review by Christopher G. Pupik Dean, University of Pennsylvania

Researchers in universities and educators in K-12 schools are often seen as having different forms of expertise when it comes to understanding education. University faculty are well-versed in educational theory and research while school-based teachers and administrators have intimate, practical knowledge about what makes schools work. School-university partnerships create opportunities for learning by providing a space for the interaction of the different forms of expertise. In *Learning in School-University Partnerships: Sociocultural Perspectives* (2009), Amy Tsui, Gwyn Edwards, and Fran Lopez-Real use sociocultural theories to analyze a partnership formed between the University of Hong Kong and local schools. They also illustrate the potential for sociocultural theories to enhance the larger literature on school-university partnerships. The authors recognize that although extensive work has been done with respect to both school-university partnerships and sociocultural theories of learning, this literature has only recently entered the larger discussion. This book sets the stage for a continuation and expansion of this discussion.

The authors use the first section of the book to provide a succinct yet thorough review of literature in the fields the authors aim to integrate. They begin by examining research on school-university partnerships and the ways learning has been understood within this literature. Much of the early literature in this field deals with the implementation of school-university partnerships, especially focusing on the need for and meanings of collaboration, cooperation, and community. The authors find that little of this early

work deals with learning processes. However, a significant focus for some newer research includes the importance of 'communities of practice': a sociocultural idea focused on processes of learning. Based on their review, the authors argue that sociocultural theories should have a larger place in research on school-university partnerships.

Two areas of neo-Vygotskian theory have been suggested as tools to enhance the understanding of school-university partnerships. The first, activity theory, suggests that goal-directed activities are carried out through mediational tools and underpinned by a system of rules, a community, and a division of labor. The authors rightly point out that "the activity theory framework leaves certain important issues unexplored" (Tsui et al., 2009, p. 34) and therefore employ a second area of neo-Vygotskian thought: the theory of social learning developed by Lave and Wenger (1991). This theory argues for the importance of participation in 'communities of practice'. In communities of practice, learning occurs through legitimate peripheral participation, boundary crossing, and identity formation. The authors provide a clear description of complicated ideas, thus effectively setting the stage for an application of these concepts.

In the second section, these sociocultural theories are applied to a series of five studies regarding the partnership between the University of Hong Kong and local schools. For each study, an aspect of sociocultural theory is used to analyze and understand the results. The first study examines the way three student teachers begin to form their professional identities through their inclusion in the community of

practice. For instance, one teacher is given workspace in a communal area while another works in seclusion. The teacher who works in the communal space experiences a form of legitimate peripheral participation that the other teacher does not experience and which helps to explain differences in the formation of their professional identities. The second study examines the identity formation of mentor teachers based on their position within a community of practice. The authors illustrate how inclusion in a community of practice, where mentor teachers can work together to determine their mode of practice, results in empowerment while exclusion from that community results in alienation. The sociocultural concept of activity systems is used in the third study to examine the practice of 'tripartite conferences' where student teacher, mentor teacher, and university tutor meet to discuss the observation of a lesson taught by the student teacher. By viewing the tripartite conference as an activity system the authors uncover the complexity involved in the formation and negotiations of the relationships and interactions that compose this structure. This allows for a more nuanced picture of this process than could be achieved without sociocultural theories. In the fourth study the 'lesson study' is examined as an activity system and boundary crossing experience. Lesson studies involve the collaborative construction and evaluation of a lesson by university tutors and mentor teachers. As an activity system and a form of boundary crossing, this experience allows the creation of dissonance for both parties by putting them into a situation where they must negotiate the underlying principles of their separa-

rate communities of practice. By viewing this process through a sociocultural lens, it is not just apparent that learning occurs, but also how such learning occurs: through the creation of dissonance. The final study continues an examination of boundary crossing. As an element of the partnerships formed between schools and the university, a 'fellowship scheme' is established where teachers and administrators are given three months leave from their school to work at the university in an intensive program. These teachers and administrators then take their experiences back to share with their school communities. As a form of boundary crossing, this experience allows the creation of dissonance and an opportunity for learning, which shows the power that sociocultural theories have to explain the processes by which learning occurs.

Though the analysis is successful in using sociocultural theories to explain learning processes in school-university partnerships, only selected aspects of sociocultural theory are applied in each case. A unified sociocultural framework, applied to each case,

would provide a more complete picture of the learning processes at work. As noted above, the authors see the sociocultural theories they describe as being complementary and that paying attention to only one "leaves certain important issues unexplored" (p. 34). Three of the studies only use concepts related to communities of practice and another focuses exclusively on activity systems. In the analysis of only one study, which focuses on the 'lesson study', aspects of both activity systems and communities of practice have been applied. The analysis of the learning processes studied would have been greatly enhanced by the application of both concepts to each study. For instance, the study of the tripartite conferences focuses on understanding these processes as activity systems. This analysis is certainly illuminating, but these conferences could also be evaluated as a community of practice with boundary crossings as the university tutor and school-based mentor teacher negotiated each other's respective forms of expertise.

This book makes a valuable contribution to the literature on school-

university partnerships through its application of sociocultural theories of learning to the particular studies described. However, the most significant impact of this work lies in its ability to expose the literature on school-university partnerships to further sociocultural analysis. By providing both a theoretical exposition on sociocultural theories, and demonstrating their applicability to school-university partnerships, this work opens the door to further application of sociocultural concepts in order to better understand and improve the learning of students, teachers, and university faculty in school-university partnerships.

**Christopher G. Pupik Dean** is a PhD student in Education, Culture, and Society at Penn GSE. He is currently studying the philosophical foundations for civic education as well as school-university partnerships around service learning and participatory action research.

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## BOOK REVIEW

# Race, Schools, and Hope: African Americans and School Choice After Brown

By Lisa M. Stulberg, Teachers College Press, 2008, 213 pp.

Review by Sarah Klevan, New York University

In the introduction to *Race, Schools, and Hope: African Americans and School Choice after Brown*, Lisa Stulberg explains that one of the principal aims of her book is to expand the conversation around post-*Brown* African American school choice, a movement that she feels has been inaccurately represented by current historical and sociological accounts. She is especially concerned by the rhetoric of school choice opponents, from both ends of the political spectrum, which characterizes choice movements as unequivocal rejections of racial integration and American public schooling. These concerns inform the central questions of her book: “How can school choice be a form of both giving up on American public schools *and* a form of hope and faith in American schooling (sic)?” and “How can many who oppose school choice paint its proponents as hopeless and desperate parents and educators who have given up on American education, yet school choice advocates over the past 50 years, particularly African American advocates, talk about schools as if they hold so much promise?” (p. 2). The central argument of Stulberg’s book is that the politically charged nature of the dialogue around African American School choice movements has resulted in a narrow perception of choice movements as anti-desegregation and anti-public schooling. The aim of her book is to complicate the conversation around African American school choice by showing that choice movements have been important sites for debate around key political and race issues, rather than clear rejections of public education and desegregation.

Stulberg’s book is divided into two sections that encompass four case stud-

ies of African American school choice movements. The first section, which draws upon historical archival research, describes the New York community control movement of the 1960s, the independent school movement of the 1970s, and the voucher programs of the 1990s. The second section of the book is dedicated to her fourth case study of African American school choice, the charter school movement of the 1990s, and the current decade. This section draws upon ethnographical data collected by Stulberg and tells the story of the West Oakland Charter School (WOCS), of which she was a founding member. She describes the founding of WOCS as well as the challenges and successes faced by the school. Additionally, she frames the story of WOCS within the political and historical context of Oakland and the national charter school movement.

Stulberg’s first case study, the community control movement, is a clear exemplar of her approach to broadening the conversation around African American school choice movements. Here, Stulberg provides an historical account of an African American community in Harlem that wrested control over a small school district that served their community, allowing them to manage hiring, budget, and curricular decisions pertaining to the district’s schools. Stulberg argues that the work of Diane Ravitch, an historian of education, characterizes the dominant view of the community control movement. Ravitch’s writing on the community control movement frames the leaders of this movement as militant separatists and bemoans what is perceived as a complete departure from desegregation as a strategy for achieving racial justice.

Stulberg complicates this perspective by describing the way in which local activists who energized the community control movement were responding to a failure of the New York City Board of Education to fulfill its promise of integrating Harlem schools. While many of these activists did not want to turn their back on the potential of integration, they also sought an immediate solution to the crisis of school failure for their students. Thus, within the community control movement, there was an internal debate around whether community control represented a necessary delay of desegregation or a rejection of desegregation as a means for achieving racial justice. Though the route these activists chose might have appeared to be nationalistic, their choices were not made from a monolithic, anti-integration perspective. By describing the motivations of the community control activists, Stulberg demonstrates that a real debate about around integration and nationalism was held within this movement. According to the author, Ravitch’s view overlooks these important nuances amongst the perspectives of the movement’s leaders.

A great strength of Stulberg’s book is her engagement with difficult questions and her persistent refusal to simplify the complex nature of school choice reforms. Stulberg’s interest is not to impose her central argument on the case studies she examines but rather to present the reality of the movements she describes in all their political, historical, and racial complexity. As a result, some of her case studies fit more neatly with her central argument than others. While this makes her book a challenging read, especially for readers with limited background in



the content of the book, Stulberg appears conscientious of her complex approach, which she mitigates through clear, specific writing and explanations of central concepts and terms. This makes the book accessible to academics and non-academics alike. Furthermore, the grounded nature of the case studies suggest that Stulberg intends to reach a wide audience, with a particular interest in engaging reformers who are invested in improving schooling options for African American students.

In framing the aims of her book, Stulberg places herself in conversation with writers and academics who oppose school choice movements on the grounds that choice movements represent distinct departures from integration as a strategy of achieving racial equity in schools. She frequently quotes Diane Ravitch, who writes from this perspective. She also quotes Tamar Jacoby, a fellow of the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research, and Jim Sleeper, a columnist and writer based in New York City, who hold similar views, including these perspectives

in order to characterize the dominant view of African American school choice. Given the dominant perception of school choice movements as anti-integrationist, separatist, and even militant, Stulberg's contribution to the discussion of choice movements reframes the choice debate in important ways, especially for those who are invested in the potential for choice movements to systemically alter the educational landscape for African American students.

In the conclusion of her book, Stulberg explains that current forms of school choice, primarily voucher programs and charter schools, are not positioned to systemically repair the inequities faced by African Americans in the public schooling system. She also puts forth her own perspective on school reform. "...I believe that the best model for school reform lies with an active and involved federal government, with funding and protection geared toward equity and resource distribution, but with space for local freedom, innovation and control." (p. 171). In so doing, her imperative be-

comes clear. Stulberg's aim in writing the book is to alleviate the politically charged nature of these reforms so that they can expand and become more effective for larger numbers of minority students. Like the leaders of the movements she describes, Stulberg is ultimately hopeful about the potential of choice movements to make a real difference in the educational experiences of African American students.

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