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For more information about the Urban Learning, Teaching and Research Interest Group of the American Educational Research Association, contact:

Dr. Angela Louque
College of Education
5500 University Parkway
San Bernardino, CA 92407
(909) 537-7621 office
(909) 537-7510 fax
alouque@csusb.edu

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Recruitment of Future High Quality Urban Mathematics Teachers: A Process of Instrument Development

Pier A. Junor-Clarke
Georgia State University

Christine D. Thomas
Georgia State University

Draga Vidakovic
Georgia State University

Abstract

In this paper we share our approach and current progress in the development of a research-based recruitment instrument that will be used in selecting students for an initial preparation program. This instrument will facilitate the selection of future teachers of secondary mathematics who possess the potential to become high quality teachers capable of advancing the mathematical learning of urban students. A phenomenological stance was applied within focus groups interview in collecting and analyzing initial data. Through this process a list of characteristics of high quality urban teachers were determined and categorized.

INTRODUCTION

Our nation's schools are facing a growing and critical shortage of qualified teachers. Due to projected increases in student enrollment, the rate of teacher retirement, and the attrition rate of new teachers, it is anticipated that schools in the United States (US) will need to hire 2.2 million teachers over the next ten years. In high school mathematics the situation is especially despairing. Nationally, out-of-field teachers teach approximately 27% of high school students. The data show a significant impact on the need to hire mathematics and science teachers. Schools will need to hire over 240, 000 middle and high school mathematics and science teachers over the next ten years (Glenn Commission, 2000).

Further, the data is even more alarming for urban school districts. Ninety-five percent of urban school districts reported an immediate need for high school mathematics and science teachers (Glenn Commission, 2000). These teacher shortages come at a time when the expectations for what students should know in mathematics and science are rising and students across the US, especially those in urban areas, are performing poorly on measures of mathematics and science achievement. High-poverty urban schools face persistent hurdles in hiring the teachers they need, and across the nation there is a crucial need for many more teachers who reflect the racial and cultural mix of students in schools.

In the report, *No Dream Denied: A Pledge to America's Children* (2003), "highly qualified teachers" have been benchmarked by a set of criteria that are aligned with the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) and the National Board for Professional

Teaching Standards (NBPTS). The report has also indicated "American students are entitled to teachers who know their subjects, understand their students and what they need, and have developed the skills to make learning come alive" (p. 7). Despite these claims, the report states that the nation is far from providing every child with quality teaching -- particularly in urban school environments.

Even more challenging is the notion of having high quality urban mathematics teachers in those classrooms for improvement in K-12 student achievement. Goldhaber and Anthony (2003) suggest that teacher quality is the most important educational input predicting student achievement. They claim that teacher quality has historically been synonymous with personal traits, such as high moral character and intellectual curiosity while today it tends to encompass structured standards developed by INTASC and NBPTS. The National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), INTASC and NBPTS, though they differ in some respects, they share common themes about teacher quality. However, despite thinking of teacher quality as an immutable characteristic, Goldhaber and Anthony (2003, p.6) stated that it is possible that some teachers may do well in highly structured environments with explicit standards and accountability measures, while others have teaching styles that flourish in more flexible environments. This thought has further highlighted the need for the recruitment of future teachers into initial preparation programs who possess the potential to become high quality urban mathematics teachers. Therefore, our research is focused on producing a recruitment instrument for identifying such potential teachers. For the context of this paper, we share the process in developing this instrument.

Ultimately, our focus is to increase the number of high quality urban mathematics teachers who seek jobs in urban school districts and are committed to remain in urban classrooms. In that light, we need to understand what is necessary to be a high quality urban mathematics teacher, and how we prepare teachers to acclaim those qualities, remain and be committed to teach in urban schools. There is the need to identify characteristics of teachers who influence urban student achievement and possess the willingness, the stamina and longevity to remain in the urban classroom. A recruitment tool that can accomplish the task of identifying these characteristics within students entering initial preparation programs has the potential to address the numerous challenges related to the mathematics education of urban students. Therefore, the purpose of our research is to develop such an instrument. The research question is: *How can an instrument be developed to facilitate identification of potential high quality secondary mathematics teachers for urban environments?*

METHODOLOGY

For the context of our study, we chose to focus on individuals who had lived-experiences through which they had developed beliefs and perceptions with respect to the phenomenon of high quality mathematics teachers in urban environments. The participants are secondary mathematics teachers who teach in high need school districts. In these high need school districts; a large percent of teachers of mathematics do not hold even a minor in the field. In this study we refer to the participants interchangeably as participants and teachers. The student demographics in these schools are predominantly African-American and English as a Second Language (ESL) learners coming from low-to-middle level income families. Therefore, the nature of our investigations warranted the development of a research design that served as a vehicle for

collecting data on personal experiences with regard to the phenomenon under investigations. This led us to select a phenomenological approach that was implemented through focus group interviews.

During the focus group interviews, the participants were provided with wireless laptops to record their responses. Once they completed their responses, the participants were asked to send their responses via email attachments to the facilitators. Data were also recorded on audiotapes and notes were taken on chart paper during the focus group interviews.

Phenomenological Approach

Phenomenology is indeed a reasoned inquiry, which discovers the inherent essences of appearances. Researchers who use this framework are interested in showing how complex meanings are built out of simple units of direct experiences. That is, a phenomenological study follows the format of explicitly examining one particular phenomenon to allow carefully chosen participants to make meaning out of it (Creswell, 1998).

Focus Group

Focus group interview was the vehicle through which data were collected. In essence it is not a question-and-answer format of interview but it relies on the interaction within the group. The use of focus group allows for explicit interactions that produce data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction (Morgan, 1988). This reliance on interaction between participants is designed to elicit more of the participants' point of view in the context of the views of others, which would be evidenced in the more researcher-dominated interviewing (Mertens, 1998: Patton, 2002). While focus group interviews allow opportunities for participants to hear the views of others, the context of our study maintained a phenomenological stance. As each group member listened to the personal experiences of others, he/she was stimulated to think more deeply about his/her personal experiences related to the phenomenon. Data were collected over two focus group interviews.

Procedures

We, the facilitators as researchers approached the phenomenological interview from a respectful stance, making clear to the participants that their individual understanding of the phenomenon was of paramount interest to us (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). The protocol for the focus group interview was designed to progressively advance the level of reflections of participants by providing opportunities for richer responses. We began by situating the participants in their experiences as learners of mathematics and gradually moved them to the context of their experiences as teachers of mathematics in urban schools. The initial interview question was designed to engage them in focusing on their personal experiences as a learner in the classroom of a teacher whom they considered to be a high quality mathematics teacher. This stage allowed for them to foster a level of comfort for interacting within the focus group. As we moved toward a deeper investigation of the phenomenon group members were more at ease to share their experiences. Below are the descriptions of the progressions of the focus group interviews.

Task I

The teachers were asked to think of themselves as learners of mathematics and to think of a teacher who had the most positive impact on their learning. They were asked to visualize the teacher and recall some adjectives that they would use to describe his/her classroom, methods of teaching, interaction with students, things that he/she did that personally impacted their learning, and any other factors that come to mind. Individually, the teachers were asked to use their laptops to record their adjectives and subsequently write a brief paragraph about the teacher they described (mainly 3-5 sentences). Participants were asked to email their responses to the facilitators.

Task II

To further stimulate the teacher generation of adjectives associated with their experiences as learners of mathematics the teachers were randomly placed in groups of two and asked to share and compile their lists. While doing so, the teachers were to extend this list if other adjectives came to mind. Next, the teachers shared their complied lists with the whole group. In the final step of task II, the teachers emailed the list of adjectives to the facilitators.

Task III

In Task III, the focus was directly tied to the phenomenon under investigation. The teachers were asked to think individually of all that is required to teach students in urban school settings, and to think of the current conversations in the educational arena with respect to high quality teachers. They were further asked to describe what they believed are the characteristics of a high quality mathematics teacher in an urban school. All writing tasks were then emailed to the facilitators.

Task IV

In Task IV, participants were engaged in whole group discussion of their response to Task III. To stimulate rich engagement in the discussion, the facilitator asked these probing questions: (1) Describe what you believe are the characteristics of a high quality mathematics teacher in an urban school. (2) What does it mean to be a high quality urban mathematics teacher? (3) Is there anything more you want to add that will give us the true meaning of a high quality urban mathematics teacher? (4) What specific qualities would you look for in an urban mathematics teacher to consider him/her of high quality? (5) What are the experiences in a typical day for a high quality urban mathematics teacher? (6) Can you think of any of the experiences in a typical day for a high quality urban mathematics teacher? (7) What does the high quality urban mathematics teacher do differently from teachers in other settings? (8) How do you find the balance where you can at least get to where you want to be with the teaching of the content? Their responses during this segment of the focus group interviews were recorded on chart paper, and audiotape.

ANALYSIS/RESULTS

Analysis began within the focus group interviews. Once all adjectives, with respect to high quality urban mathematics teachers, were recorded on the chart paper, the participants were asked to categorize the adjectives. In focus group one; the participants categorized the adjectives as follows: disposition, knowledge of content, approach to teaching, and understanding the

nature of student-teacher interaction. In focus group two, the categories were defined as teaching strategies, personality, management, and student – teaching interaction. Through further analysis we refined the categories as follows: Disposition, Teacher Content Knowledge, Approaches to Teaching/Classroom Management and Understanding the Nature of the Student. Table 1 below shows the adjectives by categories. The bracketed numbers in the chart are indicative of the number of times the adjectives were repeated.

Table 1: *Characteristics of High-Quality Urban Mathematics Teachers*

Disposition	**Teacher Content Knowledge**	**Approaches to Teaching /Classroom Management**	**Understand the Nature of the Student**
Humorous Kind, Stern Clear Patient (3) Exuberant Trusting, Loving Firm Fair Caring (2) Sense of humor Quirky Friendly Positive Good disposition Respectful Professional	Smart Easy to follow Knowledgeable (2) Able to break down concepts in more than one ways Expert (2)	Challenging (2) Assertive Interesting Passionate about the content Interactive Organized (2) Good classroom management Easy to follow Firm and fair Innovative Structured Versatile Multiple teaching styles Consistent No-nonsense Technologically advanced	Understand the nature of student-teacher interaction Hyper-activeness Open-minded

Excerpts, from the transcriptions of the discussion during task III in which the teachers extended their list of adjectives, are presented to illustrate the richness of the focus group discussion:

Barbara, a Caucasian teacher of Algebra II added the adjective flexibility to the list, stating:

… *FLEXIBILITY. I have seen a greater need for adaptation within an urban school district. For one, there's generally more paper work and less efficient ways of completing documents, so you have to be able as a teacher to drop what you're doing to fill out a survey, data assessment, etc. Also, as a teacher you need flexibility and understanding to better serve the students. You've got to give a bit more time for internet research to be completed for the students, know that they may not have the means to buy necessary things for a project, etc. The*

characteristics of compassion, flexibility, and firmness are probably high-lighted more in an urban setting…

Vanessa, an African-American teacher stated:

> *……. we talked about being flexible because so many different things come up that interrupt …our instructional day, …… making adjustments to your way of communicating with the student even though I may, …., if I really want to connect with them, (I just talk like they talk. So they ….can understand what I'm saying. "You know what I'm saying")→ [slang]. ……to work with that urban child, that's what I would do. I need to have that level of flexibility in my communication with them even though ….. I watch movies that don't interest me because that's what they see and I want to be able to communicate with them and be able to make some kind of real world connection with them. I've never seen the movie Shrek but on my bulletin board I have a picture that says Shrek loves quality work because they identify with Shrek. ……. to me I think that's a tremendous amount of flexibility that is called for in teaching children from an urban environment. …..*

Marcella, an African-American teacher explained the approach that a teacher could take to become a high quality mathematics teacher in the urban environment:

> *……Young people are able to tell when someone really does not care for them or when someone is insincere. (They also smell fear (!) so you cannot be secretly afraid of the students either.) You have to have good classroom management. The students will run over you if you are "too soft." You cannot have a boring classroom. You must be able to get the students interested in your subject. You have to be able to create "buy in." Above all, you have to <u>really</u> care about young people. In an urban environment, many children are starved for stability and love in their lives. Many get this from their teachers. You will even find children calling you "Mom" or "Mama _____." Many of the students need to know that someone cares for them. If they think you care for them, then they will begin to care about what you want ……*

In pointing out what teachers needed to know, Vanessa said:

> *……. They[teachers] also need to be willing to grow themselves, they need to know, they need to be able to identify their own strengths and weaknesses and be willing to work with them knowing when to ask for help and be willing to share their successful experiences in the classroom with others. We don't have a lot of teachers who are willing to do that, sad to say. And they need to be able to utilize a variety of teaching methods and strategies. When one thing doesn't work pull something else, pull another trick out of the hat. And just because it works this year doesn't mean it's going to work next year. (Laughter). ….. they [students] need patience. A …… A lot of patience. (Laughter) …..*

It was evident that teachers were speaking from their own personal experiences when Dionne, an African-American teacher explained to the group that:

> *Everyday is different, I mean everyday of my teaching career has been different, you know I've never been able to like just say I got it down this is the way its going to be tomorrow. It almost exciting if you look at it in that light. You know I don't know what's going to happen today!*

Having heard the characteristics, which teachers thought were important for a high quality urban mathematics teacher, as the teachers exhausted their reflections Nicola, an African-American teacher began to talk about "constructive noise" which re-opened the discussion. At this point, Carol who is also an African-American teacher interjected with another focus on the interaction in the urban classroom. She constructed the idea of "constructive hyperactiveness" in saying:

> *I think you would also see, beside constructive noise, constructive hyperactiveness. …But the hyperactiveness is when they start standing and moving from group to group. …..And I think you will see constructive hyperactiveness more in the urban school versus …a suburban school. A suburban school you would just see the constructive noise because they will keep their voices at a moderate level, pretty much sit in their seats, and they're talking to one another the way we are now, but in an urban school, depending on how urban it really is, some of the students because of their environment at home they tend to walk, or stand, or talk with their hands to get their point across…*

With the addition of the adjective, constructive hyperactiveness, a unique perspective of high quality urban mathematics teachers was infused. Prior to this discussion the list of adjectives represented common themes that perhaps can be applied to a high quality teacher across any school environment. However, constructive hyperactiveness stood out as an outlier. Constructive hyperactiveness was recognized as student behavior that could be managed successfully only by high quality mathematics teachers.

NEXT STEPS

At the close of each focus group interview, we asked whether or not the group had exhausted all adjectives. In each focus group the response was they believed we would find more adjectives to add to the list. Based on this response, we have decided to conduct at least two more focus group interviews with the expectation to saturate the data. The adjectives in this list will be used to generate items for the recruitment instrument as we move into the next phase.

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Why Bother? They Are Not Capable of This Level of Work: Manifestations of Teacher Attitudes in an Urban High School Self-Contained Special Education Classroom with Majority Blacks and Latinos

Felicity A. Crawford
Wheelock College, Boston

Abstract

Using an ethnographic approach the study describes the curricula that veteran urban high school special educators use in self-contained special education classrooms with majority Blacks and Latinos. The findings show that the teachers routinely exposed students to elementary level curricula and to material that was rife with racist images of Blacks and Latinos. The findings raise questions about the types of texts, supplementary resources, and professional development opportunities that special educators receive and bear implications for the ways in which special education teacher preparation programs account for widely-held societal viewpoints that shape teachers' beliefs and attitudes and drive their everyday practice.

INTRODUCTION

Access, progress, and high quality education are ideas that carry much weight in the U.S. Yet, the quality of education for Blacks and Latinos is in peril. Almost 50 percent of Blacks and Latinos attend high schools with minimal graduation and soaring poverty rates (Balfanz & Letgers, 2006; Books, 2007). In large urban high schools the rate decreases to 30- 40 percent (Wald & Losen, 2007). Previous research shows a disproportionately high number of Blacks and Latinos are in self-contained, urban special education classrooms where the failure and imprisonment rate far exceeds that of their White peers (Artiles, Rueda, Salazar & Higareda, 2002; Balfanz & Letgers, 2006; Fierros & Conroy, 2002; Harry & Klingner, 2005; Harry, B. Klingner, J., Cramer, E. Sturges, K.M. & Moore, R.F. 2007; Harry, Klingner, Sturges & Moore, 2002; Losen, 2005; Losen & Orfield, 2002; Oswald, Coutinho & Best, 2002). Close to 80 percent of 9th grade students in city schools are underprepared for the rigors of high school and are in need of special education services. While educators and policymakers in particular are familiar with the trend of negative outcomes for Blacks and Latinos in such settings, not enough is known about the ways in which special education teachers facilitate learning in self-contained settings.

Using an ethnographic approach (Miles & Huberman, 1995) I embarked on a study which was guided by the following research question: How are veteran urban high school special education teachers' beliefs manifested in their lesson planning and execution in self-contained classrooms with majority Black and Latino students? I asked questions about how they planned their lessons and about the curricular materials they used. I also observed how they acted while teaching in self-contained classrooms primarily because understanding of any behavior remains

obscured unless situated within a specific context (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983). I examined how veteran teachers' beliefs about Blacks and Latinos manifested in their curricula for two key reasons: First, I believe that all children, if given the appropriate support, can learn. Second, it is important for teacher educators to ground their thinking and pedagogical approach in an understanding of the deleterious outcomes of the students whom the current U.S. system of education continually fails, Blacks and Latinos. For instance, Blacks and Latinos are three times as likely as their white counterparts to attend high schools where graduation is not the norm (Harvard Civil Rights Project, 2005).

I found that teachers routinely utilized elementary level curricula and regularly drew on ready explanations (Gee, 2002) that reflected deficit views of disability and race. Particularly problematic was that their students were expected to take and pass several high stakes[1] standardized examinations based on curricular content to which they had no access. In this paper I argue that efforts to change the outcomes of students in the self-contained classrooms would continue to fail if special education teacher educators do not simultaneously provide teachers with opportunities to gain current grade-level content *and* ways to responsibly account for how widely-held societal viewpoints shape their beliefs and attitudes and drive everyday practice (Bartolomé, 2004).

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK/METHOD

The study rests on Mannheim's (1936) overarching theory of ideology, or system of ideas, which posits that as people, our subjective interpretations of others are negotiated by pre-determined thought patterns (or mental steps), which are rooted in our inherited ideas, and our social circumstances. According to Mannheim, inherited ideas and predetermined thought patterns are tacit. We only become aware of them when confronted by radically different modes of thinking that cast doubt on that which we hold to be true. Then, depending on our group affiliation, we respond collectively to either maintain the status quo or work for change. In either case Mannheim's theory strongly supports the notion that we can only fully understand how we interpret an issue, situation, or others by critically evaluating that which we take for granted. Further we are influenced by events that occur and are responsible for shaping how they turn out. Often, that which we value is unconscious and invisible unless questioned. It is these unconscious ideas (with attendant beliefs and attitudes) that become the windows through which we apply meaning in any situation (Mannheim, 1936).

If one were to consider the social conditions under which ideology manifests, one might find situations that advantage some and disadvantage others. Yeboah (1988), for example, contends that ideology manifests in three different types of social practices: cultural, economic and political – each influential and distinguishable by their outcomes. For instance, although schooling began in pre-colonial America as a cultural practice to sustain societal beliefs and values, it has since become a system associated with accumulating and maintaining political and economic dominance. To witness the political and economic manifestations one needs only look at the disparate curricular offerings that prepare some high school students for leadership

[1] The term high stakes here refers to an examination for which the results determines whether or not a high school student is eligible for graduation.

positions and others for low-paying jobs by channeling them into vocational classes where they learn to prepare for factory work (Kozol, 2005).

That ideology (which manifests in one's cultural, economic, and political life) should connect with any examination of curriculum comes, in part, from scholars, such as Apple 1990; Bobbitt, (1924); and Snedden (1921); whose work reminds us that curriculum intersects with conflicts about race, class, gender and religion, to name a few. Apple, for example, states that curriculum is "inherently ideological and political" (p. xix) and that it has always reflected the aforementioned social struggles. Furthermore, I suggest *because* of the far-reaching impact of our ideology on our individual and collective lives, it is not inconceivable that teachers' normative ideas – both conscious and unconscious – govern how they prepare students in special education classes. Finally, more compelling is that recent research identifies a disturbing nexus of race, disability, special education (Conner & Ferri, 2005).

Race, Disability and Special Education

Racially segregated classrooms and over-representation of Black and Latinos in the categories of special education that involve students' cognitive and social development are among the many deleterious consequences of the intersection of race, disability and special education (Conner & Ferri, 2005). Despite the now more than 50 year-old Supreme Court ruling in *Board of Education v Brown* (1954) – which declared that separating students by race was unequal and therefore unacceptable practice – school systems are more segregated than in years past. In fact, since *Brown* there has been a rise in identification of Black and Latino students in subjective categories such as Mental Retardation and Emotional Disturbance[2] (Harry & Klingner, 2005). When juxtaposed with research on teacher expectations, it is evident that subjective categorizations place emphasis on what students are unable to do while masking other probable environmental or contextual factors that shape students' performance (Conner & Ferri, 2005). When left up to those in a position, such as teacher educators, the results may well reflect inadvertently mistaken viewpoints.

Teachers' Expectations

Some of the most disconcerting indicators of teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards students come from a well-established field of research on teacher expectations (Good & Brophy, 2003). For almost four decades the debate in this field has been focused either on the degree to which teachers' expectations are founded on negative beliefs, or the degree to which students are impacted by same. For the remainder of this section I will discuss two different types of expectancy theories: the self-fulfilling prophecy and the sustaining effect. Both these types of studies indicate that what teachers believe have a powerful impact on how they plan and interact with students. In fact, a number of studies show that teachers either work to meet their

[2] Title 34, Section 300.7 (c) (4) (i) of the Code of Federal Regulations define Emotional Disturbance as "a condition exhibiting one or more of the characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects a child's educational performance: An inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors; (b) An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers; (c) Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances; (d) A general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression; (e) A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems. The term includes schizophrenia. The term does not apply to children who are socially maladjusted, unless it is determined that they have an emotional disturbance." (47).

predictions or else work to sustain that which already exists (Good & Borphy, 2003; Rist, 1970; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968; Weinstein & McKown, 1998).

Classic research on the self-fulfilling prophecy by Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968), and Rist, (1970) shows teachers formulating academic expectations of students based on their interpretations of students' attributes and characteristics. Rosenthal and Jacobson manipulated teachers' expectations by predicting student outcome for teachers. Specifically, Rosenthal and Jacobson identified several students to be on the verge of blooming intellectually. At the end of the year the same students who were identified as potential bloomers showed greater gains on achievement tests than others. Rosenthal and Jacobson interpreted the result to mean that teachers' actions precipitated students' outcomes because they identified and acted on their predictions. Although shrouded in controversy regarding the soundness of their methodology, Rosenthal and Jacobson's research nonetheless brought to the fore the power of teacher expectations on academic achievement for the first time. Rosenthal and Jacobson proposed that teachers, through their expectations help to shape students' outcomes.

In a later qualitative observational study Rist (1970) attempted to show how school helps to reinforce the class structures in society. The study, which began in a class of kindergarteners and continued on through to their second grade year, shows that the teacher's initial expectations of students had significant bearing on how the teacher behaved towards, and taught, each group of students. This, in turn, influenced the opportunities they were given to succeed in school. Rist's central position was that the teacher developed differential academic expectations of students based on subjective perceptions of student attributes and characteristics. For example, students in Rist's study were assigned to low, medium and high groups based on their dress, socioeconomic status, and skin color. Rist found that students in each group were treated differently. By utilizing control-oriented behavior, the teacher was instrumental in creating a group of "slow learners" (p.293), thus maintaining the social class system in the classroom.

Although both studies reveal that teachers' expectations weigh heavily on student outcomes, Rosenthal and Jacobson's research does not shed light on how such differential expectations are formed. Rist, in his study, begins to close this gap by proposing that teachers' expectations are based on individual teachers' perceptions of successful people in the larger society.

The second type of expectation studies which Good and Brophy (2003) discuss is the "sustaining expectation effect" (p.68). In the "sustaining expectation effect" the teacher maintains fixed conclusions about a student's academic potential, and continues to preserve patterns of behavior to reinforce this stance, thus leaving little room for students to change. Good and Brophy (2003) suggest that this type of expectancy effect is more prevalent than one might expect. For example, Good and Brophy propose that teachers convey their expectations in a variety of subtle, yet discernable ways, which include less wait time for students deemed less capable; giving, rather than probing students to develop their own understandings; criticizing low achievers for failing to give public feedback to low achievers; calling on low achievers less often; seating low achievers furthest away from them; giving deference to uncertain responses to high achievers only; engaging in less social interactions with low achieving students; providing less informative feedback to low achieving students; fewer amenable non-verbal responses,

including less eye contact with low achievers; greater resistance to listening to ideas from low achievers; and providing inadequate curricular materials and methods to low achievers.

Weinstein and McKown (1998) were also major contributors to research on the self-sustaining effect. In their work they sought to find out the conditions under which expectancy effects are magnified, minimized or changed. Their work highlights the "role of contextual factors in magnifying or diminishing expectancy effects are critical characteristics of teachers and the classroom environments they create" (p. 216). These researchers asked, "How do classrooms that children identify as highly differentiated in teacher treatment toward high and low achievers differ from classrooms in which children perceive more equitable treatment?" (pp. 200 –221). They administered a "Teacher treatment Inventory "(p.221) and conducted semi-structured interviews with 133 high and low achieving fourth graders. They found that students' "awareness of teachers' expectations rests on subtle distinctions in teacher behavior" (p. 221). Weinstein and McKown concluded that school environments, teacher philosophies, individual student characteristics are key to determining what, and how teachers communicate and set the classroom context.

The strengths of the study reside in the fact that they were able to pinpoint the non-verbal cues that provided insight into what teachers expected of students. These include the ways in which teachers group students for instruction; the tasks and materials they utilize; the motivational devices they use during instruction; the latitude they accord students to monitor learning; the vocal inflections when providing feedback – soft tone indicate that the student is doing well; the opportunities they are given to improve their responses; the assessments they provide; and the relationships they establish.

The problem with the aforementioned studies is that the authors did not locate teachers' behavioral patterns in any specific setting nor did they identify students beyond their perceived academic ability and socioeconomic status. This is significant, given that there is much historical evidence that shows that students of color have been accorded inferior intellectual status in schools. Further, in light of Good and Brophy's (2003) recognition that behaviors do not uniformly occur in every classroom and that teachers are often unaware that they have differential expectations of students, this study investigates how teachers plan, teach, and then reflect on their work with Black and Latino students self-contained special education settings.

THE STUDY

I interviewed and observed four (n=4) veteran special education teachers in classrooms with majority Black and Latino students over a seven week period. Data sets included transcripts from 12 interviews; 10 observation protocols; document review; 12 entries of field notes from observations and interviews; and daily reflective memos done throughout the data collection period (minimum 49 entries). The goal according to Miles and Huberman (1994) was to make "multiple comparisons" (p.175) across data sets to derive responses that converged and gave strength to the explanations I provided.

Research Design and Methodology

The central concept that I examined was how teachers implemented curricula and to assert how their attitudes, or audible and visible expressions of how they thought, felt and behaved

towards Black and Latino students impacted their curricular design. To do so, I reviewed teacher and state curricular materials; interviewed veteran teachers; observed and analyzed their verbal and non-verbal communication patterns for themes and provided an interpretation of the meaning I derived from the data I collected (Maxwell, 1996). Using an ethnographic design meant that it was more important to collect data in a manner that yielded maximum "contextual understanding" (p. 64), for it was the lessons rather than the ability to generalize the information to other situations that was important (Creswell, 1998).

Reflexivity

It was appropriate that I acknowledge that, as people, we speak in conversations from a particular vantage point (DeVault, 1995). Therefore, as a researcher from an oppressed group in a racialized society I ran the risk of misinterpreting, misunderstanding, or making participants vulnerable to biases that arose from assuming that Blacks and Latinos function in an educational system that oppresses and under-educates them on account of their race. I counteracted the aforementioned potential threats to the study's usefulness (dependability) by stating my assumptions and by appointing a White colleague to conduct the first interviews with special education teachers. I chose to have my colleague conduct the first interviews because it was in these interviews that I solicited personal information from special education teachers – information that I assumed would have emerged much easier in situations where both the interviewer and interviewee shared similar racial backgrounds.

Third, I engaged in weekly classroom observation to build trust with each participant and minimize distortions in the data collection. Fourth, I engaged two colleagues who were not connected to the study to ask questions that challenged my approach to the research (Isaac & Michael, 1997). Fifth, in an effort to guard against bias I gave the coded transcripts to another individual, who was unfamiliar with the topic, to read for patterns and themes in the data.

Data Analysis

I analyzed four sets of data, which included transcripts from 12 interviews; 10 observation protocols; document review; 12 entries of field notes from observations and interviews; and 49 reflective memos done throughout the data collection period. Central to the plan for analysis was the search for alternative explanations to deepen my understanding and strengthen the explanations I provided (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Specifically I looked across information derived from Strauss and Corbin's (1998) three- tiered system of coding, Gee's (2002) Discourse Analysis Technique, the literature, and the theoretical framework of the study for points of convergence. Further, I applied additional procedures for ensuring the validity of the study.

Validity. My process progressed from identifying the story line, to writing a descriptive passage about what I thought I found, followed by a systematic sorting of the memos I wrote. Further, integrating my understanding was a recursive process that involved constant consultation with the raw data, and the open and axial codes. During each iteration, I asked the following questions: What is happening here? "How do the two data sets relate, or not?" and; "What keeps striking me repeatedly as I read through the transcripts and the codes?" I then repeated the line by line process again, this time coding for the sequences in participants' actions and interactions that occurred over time (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Further, using Denzin's (1978) distinctions, I triangulated data by method, theory, and data source. Next, I used the questions derived from Gee's Discourse Analysis Technique to triangulate the data to analyze portions of the transcribed interviews and field notes. Finally, I corroborated these two data analysis methods and then cross-analyzed it with the literature and theoretical frame I applied to the study.

RESULTS

Myler High;[3] a comprehensive public school in a working class industrial city in Massachusetts, had a population of students with disabilities that grew by 46 percent between 2001 and 2004. . Founded in the 1800s on the principle of preparing youth for the responsibilities of life, Myler High served an ever-growing population of immigrants who, until the early 1980s, came mostly from Europe. By 2004, with a student/ teacher ratio of approximately 20:1, Myler High served 1680 students in an urban multicultural environment in which approximately 55 percent students came from diverse racial, cultural groups that collectively spoke close to fifty different languages. Of that number, 92.3 percent were categorized with mild learning disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). Like their counterparts in regular education classrooms, students with disabilities in self-contained special education classrooms were expected to take and pass the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) in English and Math (as part of their graduation requirement). Although not yet a requirement on the MCAS, students in Special Education were also expected to be prepared for Science and Technology/Engineering and History using the statewide curricula.

The Participants

Four veteran special educators – Joy, Tracy, Justin and Denise – amassed close to 112 years of teaching experience. They began teaching between 22 and 30 years prior and shared similar characteristics and professional credentials. For instance, all of the teachers were White, in their late forties to mid fifties. Three out of four acquired a Bachelor's degree in Elementary Education and one (Esme), a Master's Degree in Elementary Education. All were initially licensed as elementary school teachers and became special educators because of the abundance of jobs at the time they were hired. Each was subsequently licensed in special education when the changes in reform mandated that all teachers be licensed in the subjects they taught. Consequently, all of the teachers were "grandfathered" into the field of special education based solely on the number of years of experience in a special education classroom. None of the teachers held specific credentials for the subjects they taught at the high school level. None pursued additional college courses after receiving their respective degrees. All expressed frustration at infrequent professional development, which, when available, were mostly geared towards compliance with state and federal laws governing special education.

The Curricula

In each case, the four teachers consistently utilized elementary level curricular material instead of the requisite state-mandated high school curricula. For example, Denise, the History teacher, used a 367 page textbook that was designed for 4^{th}-8^{th} grade by Bernstein (1997) in

[3] The names of the school and city and other identifying names were changed to protect the confidentiality of participants

which the pictures were bold and the text was typeset in 18 point font with 24, 3-page chapters with assignments that required students to "Fill in the blanks;" "Match Column A with column B;" and "put a check next to each sentence…" (p. 20). When compared to the state's expectations for the depth of knowledge and understanding of 9th grade History, Denise's curriculum fell short. While students did gain some information about ancient civilizations, there were never any exercises that promoted the study of pivotal political, economic or social events that shaped the specific period.

Language, according to Gee (2002) "reflects and constructs the situation or context in which it is used" (p. 82). The visual and syntactic simplicity of the foregoing passage construed an elementary school reality in a high school classroom. Further, Nagin (2003), a researcher on literacy development identifies assignments such as those given by the teachers as "writing without composing" (p.39), a practice that promotes skill-based instruction and negates opportunities for students to engage in higher order cognitive processes, such as reflecting and analyzing are essential aspects of critical thinking.

Another, more disturbing sample of materials was used in Tracy's English class and came from a series entitled, *Power English 1: Basic Language Skills for Adults* by Dorothy Rubin (1999). This brightly covered text featured pictures of culturally and linguistically diverse people. Inside, characters were named José and Maria. Below is a sample of one of the exercises Rubin's text:

> ***Fill in the blank with a word from this list. Use each word only once. Be sure the completed sentences make sense.***
> *how when jail police shelter*
> *what husband where who why*
> *1. _____is she so frightened?*
> *2. Her _____ beat her yesterday.*
> *3. My friend called the _____.*
> *4. _____told you all this?*
> *5. _____did they take him?*
> *6. They took him to _____.*
> *7. _____ happened next?*
> *8. She slept in a _____.*
> *9. _____ is she coming home?*
> *10. _____long have they been married?* (p.43)

The state mandates that teachers engender values and attitudes that appreciate differences, and show a sense of responsibility for operating in the interest of their communities. Unfortunately, the discourse in this particular assignment instead reveals racist images of Latinos. Justin's Science curriculum was no different. Below is one excerpt from a text *Introduction to Human Biology* (Author):

> *Can you think of a machine that burns fuel for heat and energy and has such a strong pump that it works for years and years without stopping? A car? No! It is your own body! In this book you will learn about how to plan balanced meals*

[and]… how the body deals with foreign substances, such as drugs, alcohol and tobacco.

Not only was the stereotypical reference apparent, but the syntactical structure was similarly unsophisticated. When compared to the state Science curriculum the materials to which students had access again fell way below the state's expectations for students at this level. For example, the state expected these students to have opportunities to engage in scientific investigations using "a range of skills, habits" and "discipline-specific assessment options based on the core standards in earth and space science, biology, chemistry, physics and technology engineering."

Looking back on each teacher's curriculum two key themes emerged. First, each was embedded with unexamined beliefs and expectations – a claim that many scholars (see Tyack, 1976, 1996; Tyack & Cuban1997 for example) make. Tyack and Cuban (1996) contend that the role of the school extends beyond teaching verbal and written communication to include that of a socializing agency. Although more focused on skill-based instruction, the teachers nonetheless engaged in social practices that reproduced the status quo.

Second, students did not have ample opportunities to develop the higher order skills required for meeting high school competencies nor was there a match between their high school personas and the elementary level curricular materials they were given. The incongruence between the two remind me of Delpit's (1995) assertion that skill based instruction leads to teachers teaching down to students and to Gee's (2002) contention that as people, we communicate with others in a manner that we believe "fits" (Gee, 2002, p.11) the context within which we speak. If, as Gee suggests, we use language in a way that mirrors our circumstances, then the curricular materials that teachers used had significant bearing on the linguistic context they created for students. Further, the four teachers' rationale for selecting the curricula material they utilized highlighted their beliefs about their students and shows how these shaped their curricular choices.

Teachers' Beliefs Guide Curricular Choices

The four teachers did not feel it was necessary to create lesson plans; in fact, they grounded much of their curricular selections in their beliefs about their students' intellectual capacity. For instance, Denise believed that her students' potential was largely "driven by who they are and to a certain extent, how much they can absorb." Similarly, Tracy said, "I go by their innate ability and what I can get from them." Justin's comments further justified why he thought it was necessary to use elementary level material:

I try to find material that is on their level. Obviously you can't use a book that look like it belongs in elementary 'cause you will embarrass the kids and that's not the point – we are trying to have them feel comfortable with their learning but also make it so it's more palatable to them…now obviously when you teach you can use more sophisticated vocabulary but we don't.

Similarly, during one of our pre-lesson conversations Denise said:

I think this may be too hard for them – the kings and queens who ruled nations. They should know people who did not agree with the church doctrine… I would

never expect them to express it in those terms…. So…I was thinking of starting really new stuff with them.

Joy's rationale for minimizing students' opportunities for engaging in independent work also echoed similarly low expectations of their intellectual capability:

I have a worksheet that they do half together and half on their own. This is a very low-functioning group ... So what we do with a quiz like this is work through it together step by step – they read the question together, look for where to find the answer, they find the answers, write them in….

Focusing as narrowly on making sure that students followed each step forestalled opportunities for them to exercise problem solving skills. Working from the same belief about students' intellectual deficit, Justin similarly believed that his students lacked basic information and did not have the sophistication for complex information:

We are doing some work on the ear…by the end of the class the kids will know some function of the ear: how it functions…and also the different parts of the ear and how it works. This is very complicated information. So we will color it instead…

Mannheim's (1936) theory reminds us, as people, we are influenced by inherited ideas. It seemed apparent that these teachers' ideas could have been precipitated by prevailing societal views about Blacks and Latinos and or the culture of special education, both of which were set up to locate failure first (see, for example, Eder, 1982; Meehan, Hartwick & Meihls, 1986; McDermott, 1976; Harry et al., 2002; & Rist, 1970). This next comment by one of the teachers (Justin), however, shows an explicit connection between students' racial background and the teachers' curricular decisions:

In general I think that their ability to retain some of the concepts is minimal. The student that sits in the back – José, is a good example of what I am talking about. José is just starting to see that the earth is round, you know! All those things that are considered basic facts are hard for him to grasp*…so I work off that.*

When asked what he would have done differently Justin said, "I think I would probably open the windows sooner."

IMPLICATIONS/CONCLUSION

Expecting less intellectually became one of several breaches that resulted in materials that diverged sharply from the state curricula. In fact, although all of the students with whom the teachers worked were identified with mild learning disabilities, the teachers' comments and materials nonetheless reflected the assumption that students suffered from acute cognitive impairments. The teachers' tacit acceptance of the same ready explanation about their students' cognitive impairments precipitated their abdication of the responsibility to teach students in a manner that was befitting of the state-mandated grade level expectations.

The teachers' comments also revealed that they did not plan their lessons. Instead, they relied on deeply-held beliefs that rendered the traits they perceived in students,

irrevocable. It was from this perspective that they justified their repeated use of elementary level material, thereby negating the strong models of writing and higher order processing skills. Problematic, too, was that the state allowed these teachers to work unchecked for most of their careers in special education classrooms without the appropriate professional development opportunities. Not only were these slips in administrative oversight unjust, they were illegal because the teachers were not adequately equipped to comply with the mandates of the laws that ensured the rights of students with disabilities to a free and appropriate education. Were these teachers to continue teaching without the knowledge and skills to engage their students with disabilities at the appropriate grade level in the general curriculum, one can expect that their students will likely continue to be under-taught.

As I contemplate the influence of prevailing ideas I am reminded of Mannheim's (1936) theory which states, as people, we are shaped by a myriad of elements including our history, social experiences, daily interactions and the mental steps we take to think through any situation. The same is true for these teachers who repeatedly referenced long-inherited societal deficit beliefs about Blacks, Latinos and students with disabilities. The problem was that their beliefs guided the curricular material they selected as well as their instructional practices. Any effort to move these teachers towards change would have necessitated providing them with appropriate professional development experiences *and* multiple opportunities to reflect on and account for how their beliefs, attitudes, and subsequent actions maintain the status quo and shape the social and academic possibilities of their students.

The findings raise questions about the oversight of the system of special education. First, on what grounds are states making decisions about the qualifications of veteran teachers who move from one field of expertise to another? Second, who determines and reviews the types of texts and curricular resources that special education teachers receive? Third, whose responsibility is it to ensure that teachers have ample opportunities to participate in high quality professional development programs that focus on pedagogy?

In order to ensure the success of students who are served in special education programs nationwide, researchers might consider investigating other special education classrooms nationwide to uncover any discernable patterns in the treatment of Black and Latino students with disabilities in urban settings. Secondly, given that this study raised questions about but did not account for how administrative issues shape urban special educators' experiences, it would be appropriate for researchers to also explore how teacher preparation programs and K-12 special education administrators might work together to create and sustain exemplary professional development programs that help *both* constituencies account for how prevailing societal views shape their beliefs, structural and instructional decisions. To do otherwise would be tantamount to maintaining the current dreadful outcomes for Blacks and Latinos in urban special education classrooms.

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Generating and Maintaining a Distinctive Feature: Lessons for Urban New Schools

Leslie S. Keiler
York College, The City University of New York

Abstract

As the number of new schools explodes in urban centers, educators need to understand the processes and challenges faced by schools trying to develop a central focus for curriculum and instruction. Using case study methods including interviews and document analysis, the current study explores the ways in which a highly successful magnet high school for science and technology developed and maintains its Technology Laboratories as its distinctive feature. Issues such as funding, staffing, leadership, and competition are explored. Recommendations are made for schools seeking to organize themselves around a distinctive center of excellence and questions posed for further exploration.

INTRODUCTION

Around the country urban districts are opening schools at a rapid pace, either out of stark necessity, such as in New Orleans (Simon, 2007), or as means of addressing low graduation rates, low test scores and school violence, such as in Atlanta (Guitierrez, 2007), Chicago (Ayers, W. & Klonsky, M., 2006), and Los Angeles (http://www.laschools.org/news/item?item_id=2140986). New York City will open 43 high schools in September 2007, with many of these new schools organizing themselves around a central theme (http://schools.nyc.gov/Offices/NewSchools/default.htm) ranging from international relations to arts and media to science and technology. However, teachers report concerns over the realities of implementing their schools' themes (Keiler & Carter, 2007). 'New' schools that have reached maturity offer important lessons about founding and sustaining schools with a clear mission to the current iteration of urban school reform.

Formed in response to the Nation at Risk Report (1983), High Tech High[4] is a highly successful, highly selective science and technology magnet school, accepting fewer than 20% of its applicants. Its students win national and international competitions and the most selective colleges compete for its graduates. Educators and policy-makers from across the country and around the globe visit the school, modeling their own programs on it. With the trend toward alternative school formats for public education, a clear and objective understanding of the achievements and shortfalls of such schools, the ways and means by which they develop, as well as the challenges faced over a 20-year history, becomes ever more vital to education stakeholders.

Repeatedly described as the 'distinctive feature' of High Tech High, the Technology Laboratories are the focus of this research. As one faculty member explained: "I see it as the

[4] pseudonym

reason we are set apart from other schools; this is our really unique offering that we have. I think other schools may emphasize research but we have really devoted our resources to this program." These specially designed instructional spaces appear to play a vital role in recruitment, learning, and funding for the school. They form a nexus for debate about the mission of the school and the resources required to support and sustain the school's mission. Understanding the history of these Technology Laboratories illuminates the challenges ahead for the new school movement today.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework for this study begins in the magnet and charter schools literatures of the time of the school's founding and stretches to the current new urban school literatures, in particular the work concerning urban small schools. While the literatures of charter and magnet schools most closely relate to its foundation, unlike many charter schools, High Tech High was not created to circumvent the local school system but as an addition to it, receiving the full support of the district's administration. It shares this characteristic with the new schools being created by urban districts. Much of the magnet school literature addresses the integration role of these schools more prominently than their academic missions (Goldring & Smrekar, 2000), and explores admissions processes rather than school structures (Ming, 2002). Those authors that do focus on programmatic issues tend to omit critical factors in their descriptions and analyses, providing program overviews without demonstrating the process of achieving claimed success (Crim & Odom, 1987; Monaco & Parr, 1988; Passow, 1992). Finally, much of the magnet and charter school literature consists of insider reports without objective observation and analysis, (Graham, 2002; Kass, 1996; Lindeman & Bishop, 1997; Monaco & Parr, 1988; Rakovic, 1987; Taffel, 1987), usually presented by administrators discussing the strengths but not the challenges of their programs (Crim & Odom, 1987). Vocational education literature also contributes to the understanding of specialized schools. For example, Kent (1985) addresses the critical role of industry in a variety of vocational education programs, particularly in the areas of resources and expert advice. He quotes one superintendent's pride in having "a lot of state-of-the-art equipment" (Kent, 1985, 13), attributing this to the newness of the program, but does not address the challenges of staying "cutting edge." Thus, the charter and magnet school literatures leave gaps in understanding critical for those involved in current new school efforts. This study addresses this gap, exploring questions of success and sustainability in an established context that are beginning to be examined in the current new school movement (Ayers & Klonsky, 2006; Keiler & Carter, 2007; Siegel, et. al., 2005; Wasley et al., 2000), adding the critical perspective of time.

METHOD

This study uses case study methods, analyzing school documents and faculty and administrator interviews. The school records include Course Selection Guides, documents from the founding committee and School Board including minutes of meetings and sub-committee reports, publicity pieces by the school, and curriculum documents. This record is far from complete and in many ways served as a departure point for interview questions as much as a resource unto itself.

In addition to the relevant administrators and department head, the 16 faculty members currently attached to all of the school's 13 technology labs were interviewed about the establishment, growth and development of the their particular laboratory, the technology

laboratory program in general, and the school at large. Participants ranged from school founders to teachers with only two years experience there. Interviews lasted from 40 minutes to three hours following a semi-structured format (Merriam, 1988; Kvale, 1996). All but two of the interviews were audio taped and transcribed, with the others relying on detailed notes. Where appropriate this data set was supplemented with interview data from a related study of humanities faculty members at the school (Rennix & Keiler, 2003).

Analyses of these data were through reiterative assertion development, in which the transcripts and documents were chunked (i.e., divided into coherent, single-subject pieces), the chunks placed in categories, and assertions developed as the data in a category was read. Assertions were tested against the complete data set and amended as needed to reflect the statements of the research subjects and the written record (Anderson & Burns, 1989; Cooper & McIntyre, 1996; Maykut & Morehouse, 1994; Millar *et al.*, 1994; Tobin & Gallagher, 1987; Tobin & Fraser, 1987). The assertions address issues of challenges of resource allocation, success and frustration of industry support, the need for professional development, and the relationship between the distinguishing feature and the rest of the school. The results section presents these assertions and the data that supports them.

RESULTS

The changing role of the Technology Laboratories strained resources of time, space, and personnel: the evolution of a distinguishing feature can place unanticipated demands on its resources.

The Technology Laboratories were one of the original and most enduring elements of this school's planning and development. Having grown from four to 13 in number, the labs range in specializations from Automation and Robotics to Biotechnology to Computer Assisted Design (CAD), with each headed by an expert lab director. According to one of the original directors: "in the beginning, in the first two years, the lab directors had no responsibilities; there were no students assigned. They were just completely resource people." One of their main roles was in providing space and expertise for the freshman technology course. Groups of students cycled through the various labs with the lab director serving as the resident expert. As the school grew and students entered the laboratories for senior research projects, the faculty realized that the students lacked the technological skills they required. In response, the directors developed technology electives, which they teach in addition to supervising the senior research. Thus, the school identified a student need and met it; yet they did not anticipate the impact that removing the resource role from the lab directors would have. In early course guides, course descriptions ranging from Calculus to German II mentioned use of the Technology Laboratories. Such a ubiquitous role for the labs is absent from later catalogues. The senior independent research projects and related electives dominate the current labs and their directors, isolating them from the rest of the school. The changing role of the labs and responsibilities of the directors generated benefits, but left some critical gaps.

Industry can provide vital resources in terms of equipment and training, but consistency can be problematic

From its inception, High Tech High has relied upon external funding and resources. Many Technology Laboratory directors discussed the initial infusion of resources including sponsorship for most labs. While a few of the labs continue to have generous sponsors, economic realities in the community have decreased opportunities for others. One long-term staff member explained that the founder of the school was able to access local business and industry resources for the founding of the school; however, "a lot of their interest wasn't long term. A lot of them were interested as far as getting it started, getting it going; and a lot of interest shifted in probably the first two or three years." Further, some teachers claimed that much of the equipment donations arrived broken or outmoded: "A lot of our stuff came as castoffs and for a long time we would get calls from people who wanted to unload things, take a write-off, and we were between them and the trashcan." Thus, industry has been involved to differing degrees and in varying ways; all essential but with a lack of consistency that makes planning and development severely challenging.

The availability of industry sponsors and their continuing commitment controlled the focus and development of several labs. One lab director described what happened when his lab sponsor was not able to fully fund the program they envisioned:

> We here were left with what equipment can we get and how to put a program together that sort of blends the resources that we have and the original vision for the lab. I think that sort of evaluation went on for most of the tech labs. The vision was clear; how do you carry it off?

The school and the lab directors have had to be flexible about the directions their labs have taken, utilizing the available resources and making compromises when reality did not meet expectations.

While some original sponsors have changed ownership, moved out of the region, or had limited resources diverted to other projects, some directors attributed the loss of support to a diversion of focus away from the research laboratories to other aspects of the school. They ascribed the changing priorities to new administrative leadership, leading to limited acquisition of new resources. The lab directors had differing opinions about taking up the responsibility of courting sponsors themselves. One director explained: "groveling is a part of my job." However, another director was not as optimistic:

> The tech lab directors were told 'Well, that is something you need to pick up.' Well, when you are teaching six periods a day when do you do it? And the CEO of some company doesn't want to have lunch with a high school teacher; it should be somebody in a better position to represent more people.

Another lab director explained that the Parent Teacher Student Association (PTSA) had spawned an organization to raise funds for the labs, "We are trying to recoup what was lost and rebuild with a future of expectations and anticipations. Unfortunately that happens slowly and just now we are getting the support that has been reduced over the years." Many faculty members described the equipment needed in order to fulfill their mission in the school and allow students to conduct state-of-the-art research, speaking with guarded optimism about the role the PTSA organization could play.

Well-trained lab directors with time for professional development are critical to lab success; well-supported faculty are the lynch-pin for maintaining a successful focus.

Second only to the specialized student population, those interviewed claimed that the lab directors ensured success of the research laboratory program. The characteristics and skills described as essential for this position included the ability to manage independent learning and get out of the students' way, in-depth knowledge of and enthusiasm for the discipline and its application in the real world, and being an advocate for the laboratory. School planning meetings minutes suggest that the Technology Laboratories were to be "staffed by scientist/technician from local business and industry." While most of the lab directors came to the school from positions in other high schools within the district, three came directly from industry or academia. The latter varied in success depending on their ability to relate to the high school students and acquire appropriate teaching methods.

One of the challenges discussed by all the teachers was of remaining current in their rapidly advancing disciplines, given the time constraints of the job description. One of the most important roles played by industry was initial training and curriculum development, yet one lab director described its inconsistencies and the drop off in interest after labs were established. He continued, "There has always been a sort of an intangible connection where people, particularly lab directors, reach out and say 'what is industry doing?' but there hasn't always been a consistent commitment." In describing the declining role of industry, one director explained that they now had to rely on formal training sessions rather than individualized support: "But that was the thing that was nice about (the original sponsor), it was more informal, and they would schedule it at our convenience." The division manager discussed budget cuts and staffing distribution issues as major factors in limiting professional development opportunities. When asked what advice she would give a new school, the first thing the department chair mentioned was adequate time for professional development.

As the majority of the lab directors reach retirement, the school is faced with replacing this vital resource and has not developed a method for doing so. Many faculty members expressed concern over the hiring of the next generation of directors, since it has been such a specialized field. One experienced teacher suggested a training program for new technology teachers in which retired teachers would work part-time to mentor new lab directors. This teacher acknowledged the significant burden placed on a new teacher in a Technology Laboratory: "I will also tell you the first year I taught (an elective in this lab) I never studied a college subject any harder than I studied then, never, ever. I studied this very hard." This teacher took the initiative to become a student teacher in this lab in addition to her normal teaching load. The teacher suggested that using out-of-ratio staffing would allow teachers already within the school to gain expertise before current Technology Laboratory directors retired taking their extensive resources with them. Such an arrangement might also facilitate the transition of faculty recruited from industry. One teacher hypothesized that the early use of directors as a resource rather than a full-time teacher enabled practicing scientists to be mentored by practicing teachers.

A 'distinguishing feature' can develop a collaborative or a competitive relationship with the rest of the school.

Some teachers, both within and outside the lab group, discussed the role that all aspects of students' education played in their success in senior research. Some lab directors commended the humanities teachers for students' communication and literature research skills. One lab director even suggested freeing class periods for directors to work with humanities teachers in order to "enrich what they are doing and carry our message to them." Some humanities teachers saw it as their responsibility to prepare students for their senior technology lab. These positions suggested a shared vision of the school's mission and how to achieve it.

Other teachers perceived a competitive relationship between the research labs and the other subject areas in terms of time, financial resources, and students' attention. Humanities teachers claimed that the demands of senior research placed limits on their assignments. One lab director believed it was reasonable for science and technology to be prioritized in this way:

> *It is going to take a disproportionate share of your resources and if the name on the door says school for science and technology or whatever then people in other departments have to expect that that is where the primary focus is going to be. If you don't like that then go to the [] Academy for English or English and Social Studies. I'm not saying that everything else isn't important; it is. But then again if you get a bunch of good teachers then everybody is going to try to have the strongest possible program.*

Some teachers perceived a refocusing of the school away from science and technology and toward innovative teaching and curricula in other disciplines. One director argued: "we see funding going for other different kinds of things around the building and it would be nice if we could really make the labs state-of-the-art." The valuable time resource for lab directors to be out-of-ratio had been reallocated throughout the school. While the teachers acknowledge the value of other programs, they still argued that the technology labs: "were supposed to be a little more central than they are."

Some faculty claimed that an increasing number of students came to the school without a desire to study science and technology, attracted by the strengths of non-science and technology programs. They told of students who announced their freshman year that they were not going to complete the mathematics and/or technology requirements, therefore not receiving the High Tech High diploma. Many of the lab directors expressed a desire for more science and technology requirements while others saw the diversity of interest and foci as a strength of the school and an advantage to technology. One director saw a benefit in influencing non-technical students; however, most directors perceived the movement away from science and technology as a loss of the original purpose of the school.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Whether or not a school wants to choose this particular distinguishing feature, the journey that High Tech High has made in designing, developing, and evolving its research laboratories provides critical lessons for school communities creating a central focus.

The need for substantial and consistent external support is vital for the success of a resource-dependent focus, but would benefit any program desiring a real-world connection. While many new schools can brag of initial investment, the challenge lies in maintaining external interest when the school is no longer the new-kid-on-the-block, as well as over periods of economic flux.

For example, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has funded the creation of small schools from New York to Texas, but requires that schools become self-sustaining after the initial years, which creates problems of sustainability for the districts receiving the funds (Miner, 2005). Teachers in small schools receiving Gates Foundation funding express concern over what will happen to their schools and their jobs when starter funds end (Keiler & Carter, 2007). Rather than be surprised by variations in funding, new schools must plan for economic downturns, being savvy about the realities of funding sources and establishing priorities and procedures for when, not if, shortfalls arise.

The vital role that the lab directors have played and the challenges of providing time and resources for their development would be true of any staff attempting to work on the cutting edge of secondary education. In addition to updating the skills of experienced faculty, attracting and training new staff poses serious problems for a highly demanding, cash-strapped profession. Further, although it was the original staffing plan, lab directors from industry have faced mixed success in the High Tech High classroom, resulting from both personal and contextual factors. The longevity of many lab directors at High Tech High would be the envy of many urban schools, which struggle to retain teachers for five years. However, retaining, developing, and replacing senior faculty members is a problem new schools must address as they plan for their maturity. As school attempt to be desirable places to teach and thus retain faculty, they may be creating unanticipated challenges for themselves.

The importance of a clear and comprehensive vision transfers to any educational project. A leader who effectively and passionately maintains the school's mission appears critical for success in keeping the staff and resources focused and flowing (Reese, 2003). Yet when school leaders and other original staff members leave the school, what happens to the vision? Do new administrators and faculty have the right and/or opportunity to mold the school and its objectives? If the school is deemed a success, do students have the right to exploit that success, regardless of their relationship to the original mission? Is maintaining the school's initial purpose stagnating or invigorating in the face of changing political, economic, and educational climates? High Tech High has created a powerful distinguishing feature for itself and provided a remarkable educational experience for its students. The ways in which it and other schools answer these questions and plan for the challenges ahead will determine their success in maintaining and surpassing that standard of excellence.

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Language: The Gatekeeper of Humanity. Implications of South Africa's Language in Education Policies

Judy J. May
Bowling Green State University

Abstract

English is perceived as the language of the powerful elite as well as a tool of oppression and dehumanization. English, as the medium of instruction in South Africa, functions as the barrier to full societal participation of native speakers (Webb, 2003, p.1) and the gatekeeper of humanity. This study combines historical and qualitative methods to examine the impact of South Africa's language in education policies. The author asserts that language is used as a weapon of oppression against those of different languages and cultures (Sarabia, 2003, p.2) perpetuating an unjust order with implications beyond the borders of the African continent.

The English language is perceived throughout the world as the language of power and prestige (Garcia, 2004). Language, writes Geras (1995) can be viewed as "a set of tools and instruments that enable us to cope and deal with the world in one way or another and to pursue happiness, needs and wants" (p.114). Those who share languages and cultural identities different from that of the dominant are often perceived as functioning with a deficiency stemming from the very identities they claim (Nieto, 2002, p. xi). As history aptly recounts, language has been used by those in power as a weapon of oppression against languages, cultures and traditions (Sarabia, 2003, p.2). Oppression, according to Freire (1970), is a loss of humanity and the ongoing struggle of the oppressed to regain such. Dehumanization, as a historical reality, is not a given destiny, but the result of an unjust order that engenders violence in the oppressors, which in turn dehumanizes the oppressed (p. 28). In few places is the use of language as a tool of oppression and dehumanization more pervasive than in post-apartheid South Africa. Pattanayak (1985) writes:

> Language politics is intimately connected with economics and resource planning. Unless resources are so developed that sub-groups within a region or culture or groups within a culturally diverse nation get equal opportunity for their creative fulfillment, language is bound to be used for divisive purposes (p. 403).

While language, education and social mobility are undeniably bound to some extent in most countries, South Africa's history predisposes that these concepts will be inextricably inter-reliant. Education remains a gatekeeper to further opportunities for most, and these opportunities are influenced by the quality of education to which a people have access (Nieto, p. 57). English in South Africa remains the language of the elite and is perceived as the only means by which societal mobility is achieved (Kamwangamalu, 2000, p. 121). In South Africa, "English qualifies as the language of learning, without which one can do nothing, cannot get a job, and cannot succeed in life" (Kamwangamalu, 2003, p. 236).

The purpose of this paper is to examine the use of language as a tool of oppression, dehumanization and injustice in post-apartheid South Africa. First discussed is an epigrammatic perspective of the historical significance of language in South Africa. Secondly, the study briefly presents the perceptions of Language in Education Policies from a variety of educational lenses. And lastly, the researcher discusses oppression as a tool of dehumanization. The author argues that while the effect of language policies in South Africa may lead the reader to believe these issues exist in a vacuum sealed by a continental divide, the ideological perspectives and dogma of oppression and dehumanization are contextually universal.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

South Africa is comprised of 44.8 million people with approximately 80% using one of nine African languages as their mother-tongue (Statistics South Africa, 2003). While there are eleven African languages, Afrikaans and English are the languages of the powerful and elite and have historically played a significant role in the power base in South Africa. During apartheid, South Africa was considered a bilingual state with English and Afrikaans as the only two solitary languages. The onset of a democratic state in 1994 led to the promotion of all eleven languages as official state languages in an attempt to bring status to the native African speaking people.

Significance of Language in South Africa

Language, as an effective of tool of power and control, has been laden with conflict for centuries in South Africa. The struggle for language control dates back to the 18th century and the clashes for power between the Dutch and the British. While this paper deals more specifically with the linguistic implications of native Black languages in the current South Africa, at the core of the language struggles in South Africa is the debate over what language is utilized as the medium of instruction in schools.

Parallel, Duel, and Monolingual Medium Schooling

Parallel-medium schooling refers to classes geared toward each student's mother-tongue in the same school building, and dual-medium systems suppose a continuum of language integration with students educated in common classrooms. Monolingual medium schools presume that only one language will serve as the medium of instruction and is largely interpreted as a segregationist measure and a view reflective of apartheid. The use of Afrikaans as monolingual education on the part of the Dutch was a political fight for what the Dutch referred to as their preservation and salvation (Reagan, 1988). To this day the Afrikaans language remains the language of apartheid for most native speaking Africans.

The Ideological Value Assigned to Language

Spencer (as cited in Mda, 1997) asserts that language is a three pronged dynamic embodying structural, functional, and symbolic significance. Accordingly Spencer surmises that all languages are equal on the structural level and the functionality of language merely requires lexical expansion to meet growing economic, social, cultural and technical needs. It is the symbolic representation and the lack of value placed on some languages that present pervasive obstacles for black South Africans. Language differences are not oppressive in and of themselves; the concern is the socially constructed meanings of inferiority that accompanies their use and the culture and traditions attached to them (Nieto, p. 112). Mda cites further research by Spencer who writes that scant worth is placed on the native African languages and those who

speak them. Nieto supports Spencer's assertion noting that "race itself is not what makes a difference in people's attitudes, behaviors, and values, but rather how particular racial groups are valued or devalued by society (p. 54).

Bantu Act No. 47 and Language in Education Policy of 1997(1996)

South African history reflects many Acts aimed at controlling the language usage patterns of native Blacks through education. Two Acts are presented for the purposes of this paper; the *Bantu Act No. 47 of 1953 and The Language in Education Policy Act of 1997*. Acts such as these came on the heels of the Dutch and British struggles and led to the gradual demise of dual and parallel-medium schooling (Reagan, 1988) mandating instead, mother tongue as the medium of instruction for Blacks. The Bantu Act No. 47 of 1953, also known as the "Slave Education Act" (Grober, 1988, p. 103, as cited in Kamwangamalu, 2000) was fueled by Afrikaans speaking South Africans who perceived the acquisition of the English language by Blacks as a threat to the superiority of their language (Mda).

The goals of the Language-in-Education Policy Act 27 of 1997 were to recognize the historically diminished status of the nine native indigenous languages and take practical and positive measures to elevate their status. In so doing, all 11 languages were made official to promote multilingualism through the use of the student's mother tongue as an early medium of instruction to third grade.

Covert Goals of Language in Education Policies

The covert goals of these Acts according to the Research Education in South Africa (as cited Kamwangamalu, 2000) were (a) "to protect white workers from the threat of native African competition for skilled jobs, (b) to meet the demands of white farmers for unskilled African labor; (c) to produce a black population only educated to a level considered adequate for unskilled work and subordinated, and (d) to ensure a people who would also accept its subordination and inferior education as natural for a 'racially inferior' people" (p.1-2,6).

As a result, the ironclad apartheid system remains staunchly entrenched by educating each African group in their own mother-tongue leaving the whites to be educated in English. Language becomes "the yardstick for segregated education" (Kamwangamalu, 2000, p. 124), oppression and dehumanization.

METHODS

This study utilized a historical approach combined with qualitative case studies to examine the implications of South Africa's Language in Education Policies. Historical research seeks to support theoretical positions in addition to drawing parallels between past and present events. The qualitative point of view promotes an understanding of how individuals perceive and attach meaning to their world and a case study approach allows the researcher to more fully "illustrate the complexity of causation" (Krathwohl, 1993, p. 347). This study utilized semi-structured open-ended interviews and the constant comparison method in an effort to link concepts to explain a phenomenon. The constant comparison method permitted the researcher to explore the multi-dimensional Language in Education Policy from the diverse perceptions of educational personnel. Rooted in the grounded theory approach the researcher sought to expound on the impact of current and historical events from a variety of lenses. Grounded theory, according to

Glaser and Strauss (1967), is a general theory of scientific method concerned with the generation, elaboration, and validation of social science theory. This paper seeks to examine the sociological phenomenon of oppression through the use of language. In addition to historical research (policies and documents), direct observation and open-ended interviews were employed with a purposive sample to describe how school and government personnel perceive the implementation of language in education policies.

Participants and Research Questions

The qualitative portion of the study involved interviewing 10 teachers, 6 administrators, 4 supervisors, 2 Department of Education members and the U.S. Consulate General from South Africa's KwaZulu-Natal Province. The study participants were South African educators and policy-makers who were part of a tour of site-visits organized for a delegation of educators from the mid-western United States, of which the researcher was a member. Some of the South African teachers had traveled to the United States for a reciprocal educational experience earlier in the year. The study participants were queried as to the (a) historical impact of South Africa's language policies on successful matriculation of students through the system, (b) the obstacles associated with the implementation of current policies integrating the student's mother tongue as a medium of early instruction, and (c) the paradoxical nature of theory into practice (see Appendix for question protocol).

The researcher used fieldnotes to record the responses to the semi-structured open-ended interviews. While the questions were presented in a preset order, maintenance of the contextual richness of the data necessitated allowing the participants to control the flow and pace of information sharing. Mishler (1986) notes that "we are more likely to find stories reported in studies where respondents are invited to speak in their own voices, allowed to control the introduction and flow of topics, and encouraged to extend their responses" (p. 69).

Data Collection and Data Analysis

Data were collected during early summer 2006 in primary and secondary schools in the KwaZulu-Natal Province in the cities of Pietermaritzburg, Johannesburg, and Durbin as well as their subsequent rural township areas. Data were also collected during an interview with the U.S. Consulate General in Durbin and attendance at an educational policy information sharing session with the Mayor of Pietermaritzburg.

Using the constant comparison method (Krathwohl, 1993), fieldnotes collected during interviews were analyzed and coded following each dialogue in an effort to elucidate emergent themes and concepts and guide the focus of the next interview. Each successive interview participant was chosen in an effort to link the concepts introduced in previous interviews. Data were reduced and categorized according to participant position/title. Because the responses of the participants were context and culture dependent, the investigator attempted to gather a realm of interpretations of a single phenomenon and true qualitative triangulation and member-checks were not employed. The participant responses revealed opposing perceptions of a single phenomenon.

FINDINGS

From a historical perspective the research suggests that over two centuries of racial and language policies in South Africa create a compelling argument for a continued pattern of racial, economical, and educational oppression. This argument appears to find support from the qualitative findings in this investigation suggesting an insurmountable chasm between the perceptions of the personnel responsible for direct service delivery to learners and the policy-makers. The discussion reflects three themes: a) the nexus between the qualitative responses and the historical perspective of South Africa, b) the role of language in the maintenance of the oppressed state, and c) the ideological and universal nature of the role of language, literacy, culture and oppression.

Themes from Teachers

Teacher respondents included four primary teachers and six secondary teachers. The majority of them were veteran teachers save two, who were novice teachers with less than five years experience. All the teachers express dissatisfaction with the lack of progress relative to the implementation of the language in education policies. Their responses indicate that while they acknowledge advances made in the post-apartheid era, their current educational status is inextricably tied to the historical marginalization of Blacks in South Africa. While the teachers teach in under resourced, overcrowded schools, their dissatisfaction rests not necessarily with their lack of resources, but with their inability to adequately meet the needs of their learners.

Lack of resources. A lack of adequate resources is perhaps the most pervasive theme expressed by the teachers. One primary teacher laments that she has learned to make due with what is available, which includes a lack of books and those available are often sadly outdated. A secondary teacher points out that what should be one of their most important subjects, career education, is lacking the equipment and supplies necessary to teach the subjects. The stoves are inoperable, the sinks do not have running water, and there are no computers. A secondary science teacher expresses similar concerns noting a lack of all basic supplies, such as routine chemicals and equipment. Adequate plumbing was a concern at all but one school.

Language in education policy. The respondents overwhelmingly report that the language in education policies create discriminatory barriers in Black schools due to the lack of support and funding for implementation. One teacher reports that it is the "language of power vs. the language of instruction." They also express pessimism regarding change, noting that little is going to change because attitudes have not changed. One primary teacher busily copied workbook exercises by hand while we talked because the shortage of materials necessitates she make 1 workbook for 4 learners to share. She quietly notes that her English is not the greatest and she has learners in her third grade class of 48 that speak a language of which she is not as familiar as she should be, so translation is a challenge. Secondary teachers cite extremely high mobility rates and an influx of learners from other provinces, thus increasing native/English language barriers. Additionally, the fact that all secondary exams are given in English presents an insurmountable barrier to graduation for many.

Dissatisfaction with policy-makers. The teachers assert that those making policy decisions are removed from the real problems. Teachers at both the primary and secondary levels note that district and department of education personnel do not visit the schools often, and even when they

do changes do not seem to occur. One young male teacher charges that "as long as we can't get anywhere down here, they do not have to worry about us up there."

Themes from Administrators and Supervisors

Administrative respondents included three secondary principals, three primary principals, and four supervisors/department heads. The administrators and supervisors also express dissatisfaction with the lack of progress relative to the language in education policies although their discomfort emanates from a number of different sources.

Unresponsive policy-makers. School leaders at all levels reflect distrust on the part of the Department of Education policy-makers. The distrust, one administrator surmises, is because of the lack of responsiveness on the part of the Department of Education. "We need materials; they say they are ordered, we wait, and don't get anything and then it starts all over again. And there is no money in the school budget for materials." The administrators appear to have strong issues with the discrepancy between the theory and the practice of the language policies. One principal states, "It seems that once they write it down on paper, stamp it, and tell us what to do, they are all done. We have no money, no support, and no one coming to ask us how's it going."

Discriminatory practices. Administrators note that the imbalance between native Black schools and those attended by whites and Indians is like day and night. In our Black schools the majority of the children do not have the money to pay tuition, the facilities are decrepit and the student teacher ratio is often 50 to 1. One secondary principal in a countryside school reports that "some of our learners must walk 8 kilometers on rocky, dusty roads and they arrive with no food for the day. This, of course, becomes an issue because we don't have funds to provide a lunch. Additionally, there is no health care, aids is rampant, and teenage pregnancy is on the rise. These are conditions that are not as apparent in Indian schools and non-existent in white schools."

Language in education policy. "Language of power is the language of instruction and the policy on paper is not the workings of the schools." These powerful words were spoken by a secondary social studies supervisor who claims the system is set up to suit some groups; Whites mostly and thusly damns the Blacks. Another administrator laments that "parents are not involved, they do not know or understand how to help their children; they need to know that there is no justice for their children at school. We do not know the native languages and they don't know English. This is working badly." One Indian principal positively cites the many improvements that have occurred such as facilities for all children to attend school and the fact that they are soon to receive a new toilet/plumbing system.

It is important to note that while the teachers and administrators openly discussed the challenges of schooling in South Africa, much of this sentiment was tempered with what this researcher perceived as an essence of thankfulness for the improved state of South Africa.

Theme from the Dept of Education, the U.S. Consulate General's Office and the Mayor

The U.S Consulate General, a Senior Public Affairs Advisor, an educational liaison, and a representative from the Department of Education served as the interview participants. Strong contrasts exist between the perceptions of the teachers and administrators and the members of the Department of Education and the U.S. Consulate General. Policy-makers appear somewhat

oblivious to the concerns of the teachers and administrators. The Department of Education personnel believe conditions are markedly improved for learners and teachers. Said a Department of Education representative, "The government is working; we are getting better; it has never been better for South Africans."

The U.S. Consulate General voices even stronger views on the positive functioning of the schools in the KwaZulu-Natal Province. He focuses heavily on the new and renewed openness of the government and the spirit of cooperation created in the last eight years. He strongly endorses the positives set forth in the language in education policy and herald the fact that more respect is being afforded the native languages and their speakers. Additionally, the educational liaison expounded on the many opportunities for students to study abroad and attend university.

Further, the Consulate and his Senior Advisor described a society in transition. While they acknowledge the great disparity between the wealthy and the poor, the magnitude of their discussion did not compare to the unparalleled plight of the poor expressed by the teachers and administrators. Researcher observations from the policy sharing session from the Mayor indicates a woman who, while clearly reared with privileged advantage, has committed her office to numerous programs for the uplifting of "girl learners," and empowering Black South Africans. While conceding the need for improvements, the mayoral office positively supports the provinces' educational policies.

DISCUSSION

The qualitative responses reveal divergent perceptions between those responsible for service delivery in the schools and those charged with policy development. Given the historical context of race, power and the nation's early stages of democratic development, this comes as no surprise to the reader. The service delivery side report difficulty in implementing policies with inadequately crippling funding and little Department of Education support. Additionally, teachers and administrators point to the lack of policy monitoring on any level.

Conversely, the policy-making side presents a picture of great strides and increased growth in the system. Further, they feel that many opportunities are available for students that did not exist before. Because apartheid was so oppressive and controlling for Blacks, the government seems to perceive that the outward removal of policies reflecting apartheid show remarkable strides and indeed is a gift to the powerless majority. Analysis of the participant responses finds that both sides oddly represent an accurate picture considering the lens from which their picture is painted. David Ferrero (2003) writes that pedagogical and curricular beliefs are extensions of more comprehensive philosophical doctrines that are in turn colored by ideological ones. Educational doctrines reflect metaphysical, epistemological, and ideological commitments conditioned in part by identity and a certain understanding of history and society (p.2).

Another emergent theme was both surprising and disconcerting. While discussing areas in need of improvement, this researcher noticed a consistent underlying "essence" on the part of teachers and administrators that seemed to parallel that of the governmental policy-makers. Although teachers were expressing areas in need of improvement, they also interjected continuous comments relative to how "bad" it used to be and how much "better" life has become. They even appeared grateful for the privilege to breathe "free air." This "essence," as

interpreted by the researcher, leads to attitudes of acceptance and continued voluntary dominance. The researcher also sensed an essence of being so thankful for the lifting of lawful oppression that they are not entitled to further equality. While the reasoning for these feelings was initially unclear to the researcher, Freire elucidates on the ideological perspectives of the dominated in the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

Power, Oppression, and Dehumanization

According to Freire (1970) a source of power for oppressors is in the continued dehumanization of the oppressed. Systematic dehumanization involves the perpetuation of injustice that is not recognized as such by the oppressed. Creating a continued dependence on the oppressors is essential to systematic injustice. This injustice is often perpetuated in the "false generosity" of the oppressors. "An unjust social order is the permanent source of this generosity, which is nourished by death, despair, and poverty." (p.29). Much like a slave is grateful for the blessing to escape a lashing, the direct service providers in this study appear grateful for the blessing of escaping apartheid and the freedom to have a school and access to running water. It is clearly illustrated and yet difficult for the researcher to reconcile that the consciousness of the oppressed state seems to elude the oppressed. Weffort (as cited in Freire) explains that this lack of consciousness is essential to the oppressors as "the awakening of critical consciousness leads the way to expression of social discontents precisely because these discontents are real components of an oppressive situation" (p. 20).

Language as the Gatekeeper of Humanity

"Language is one of the fundamental signs of our humanity. It is the palette from which people color their lives and culture" (Allman as cited in Nieto, 2002, p. 96). Nieto maintains that the value of language and culture is essential in supporting and sustaining academic achievement (p.91). But, as language serves to unite, it also serves to divide. English and the lack of English proficiency on the part of teachers and students is a pervasive issue that does not appear to be improving. In the years since apartheid was officially removed from the books, over 70% of native speaking Africans still do not comprehend English (Pan South African Language Board, 2000). In fact, Beukes (2004) asserts that English remains unattainable for the majority of South Africans (p.17). Theoretically, English was to be the pathway to liberation, but in practice the vast number of black South Africans have not been able realize its benefits.

Ideological Perspective of Mother-Tongue Instruction

From a theoretical perspective, using the mother-tongue as medium of instruction for the primary years and English thereafter, may have its merits. However, in practice the system begins as a failure due to the lack of resources to hire teachers who are proficient in the native languages, the lack of English proficient teachers, and the pervasive overcrowding in classrooms. Resulting are learners who are not learning in their own tongue, learners who are not learning effective English, and learners who cannot communicate effectively with one another.

While it appears culturally progressive to preserve usage of the nine native languages, the lack of a united shared language, including English, further stifles Black learners' preparation to emerge from oppression. Succumbing to a "divide and rule" mentality, the writings of Freire suggest that ideologically these policies serve a more covert purpose. "The minority cannot permit itself the luxury of tolerating the unification of the people, which would undoubtedly

signify a serious threat to their own hegemony. It is of interest to the oppressor to weaken the oppressed still further, to isolate them, to create and deepen rifts among them; from government bureaucracy to the forms of cultural action with which they manipulate the people by giving them the impression that they are being helped (p. 137).

The Ideological Relationship of Language, Literacy, Culture and Oppression

English is used as the official or semi-official language in over 60 countries. It is the main language of books, newspapers, airports, international business, and academia (Crystal, 1987). As part of the educational process English and knowledge acquisition cannot be neutral (Freire; Nieto). At issue in this article is not the use of English, but the power and prestige connoted in its use and the "low prestige, limited power," and inferiority attached to the people and culture of those using other languages (Nieto, p. 82).

Language as the gatekeeper of humanity is not limited to South Africa. Pennycook (1994) notes that 90% of secondary education around the globe is in English and is "detrimental to the large majority of students" (p.23) and So postulates that English medium schooling has caused learning problems for many students (as cited in Pennycook, 1994). Brand (2004) fears that the tools of social injustice are shifting from "race as a marker of privilege and mobility to English as a marker of opportunity and privilege." (p. 17). Naysmith (as cited in Pennycook, 1994) purports that English is the means by which political, economic, and cultural dominance over another is gained (p. 21). The use of English as an elite property has increased ten-fold since 1900 in countries throughout the world such as South East Asia, Australia, and India (Pattanayak; Pennycook).

SUMMARY

This researcher, in analysis of the writings of Freire, suggests that the language in education policies of South Africa are "manifestations of dehumanization" (p. 33) perpetuated to support the ideological beliefs of the ruling minority. Moreover, the oppressed, twistedly grateful to their oppressive "benefactors," are so far removed from the realization of their unwitting stasis that liberation is not in their consciousness. Additionally, Freire postulates an essential question, "How can the oppressed, as divided, unauthentic beings, participate in developing pedagogy of their liberation?" (p.33). This researcher agrees that without consciousness of their oppression; they cannot. The language in education policies in South Africa, as well as the global use of English, has become a convenient and effective gatekeeper of humanity. Language, literacy and culture cannot be divorced from one another, and the historical underpinnings of South Africa obstruct efforts to place value on one and not the other. Pennycook cites the need for continued examination of the global proliferation of English as a connection to social and economic power, within and between nations, as well its role in the sustenance of injustice (p.23).

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

As with most studies, the findings create more questions than answers. The participant responses here merely add to the existing questions and serve to answer few. There is a tome to learn regarding the policies relative language as a tool of dehumanization in South Africa and the world. If our interest truly rests in the liberation of the oppressed, the findings of this study as well as existing research strongly support the need for continued analysis relative to the use of language to limit the economic, social, and cultural participation of marginalized peoples.

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Appendix

Question Protocol

Teacher Questions
What is your native language?
When did you first begin to learn English?
What type of certification do you hold and where did you obtain it?
What is the mission of your school?
What parts of the government do you draw support?
How long have you been teaching and what locations?
Can you explain how the differentiated language instruction works here?
What type of materials do you use to teach?
How have teaching conditions changed in the last 15 years?
What do you teach and how many students are in your class?
What languages do your students speak?
What languages do you speak?
What is the most difficult part of your job?
What would you change if you could?

Administrators/Supervisors/Department Head Questions
What is the most difficult part of your job?
What is the mission of your school?
What parts of the government do you draw support?
What is your typical day like?
Can you explain how the differentiated language instruction works here?
Where do your students go from here?
What is the cost to attend your school?
What percentage of the students actually pay?
What other funding do you have for materials?
What would you change if you could?

U.S. Consulate and Department of Education Questions
What are the most difficult challenges in your job?
What is your office's role in the system?
How has the education system changed for Blacks in the last 15 years?
What policies do you perceive have been most helpful to Black South Africans? Why?
What are the different departments and for what are they responsible?
In what ways has life changed for Blacks?
What would you change if you could?

The Challenge of Parent Engagement in Urban Small Schools Reform

Julie H. Carter
St. John's University

Abstract

In the growing trend toward urban school reform vital educational stakeholders often function at cross-purposes in determining the mode and trajectory of change. This tug-of-war is even more poignant in cities with racially charged public school histories, and where reform movements serve to bolster hopes for the rescue of ailing economies. Using an ecological framework for analyzing parent engagement in a small schools reform project, the author suggests that even when parent groups understand, work through, and within institutional power hierarchies, there remain fundamental "disconnects" between parents and schools that continue to stymie efforts toward full participation in school reform.

INTRODUCTION

In the growing trend toward urban school reform, especially within struggling urban contexts, vital educational stakeholders such as school boards, unions, parents, university and business interests often function at cross-purposes in determining the mode and trajectory of change. This tug-of-war is even more poignant in cities with racially charged public school histories, and where reform movements serve to bolster hopes for the rescue of ailing economies. In cases such as these, various constituents converge to fight for and claim credit for public school improvement. The literature on parent involvement in urban school reform is very clear on how vital parent voice is to the implementation of meaningful school reform initiatives (Ayers, 2000; Epstein, 2001; Fine, 1994; Finn, Johnson & Finn, 2005). However, more than simply emphasizing this truth, this paper explores the rift in public education left open by missed opportunities to harness parents in the battle for urban school improvement by highlighting the experiences of parents, as they navigate through what Fine (1994) and other scholars have long described as the unequal terrain of power relations between urban educational institutions and urban parents[5]. Through participation in parent activist projects in an urban school district in the Northeast, this paper explores the efforts of one activist parent organization as they attempt to advocate for small school reform within the contested space of a larger urban school reform movement. In making sense of these experiences I draw from an ecological framework for parent engagement conceptualized by Angela Calabrese Barton, et. al. (2004) in which cultural-historical activity theory and critical race theory converge to situate the work of parents in schools. Such a framework allows us to see "what individuals (i.e. parents) know and do, and how that knowing and doing is mediated by the community in which that doing takes place" (p.4). Further, situating these understandings within a context where sets of power relations also play out, illustrates that when "individuals are not positioned equally within networks of activity [they] do not derive the same kinds of benefits from their mediating environments" (p.4).

[5] I am gratefully indebted to the small group of activist parents and university mentors who have helped me reflect and explore the themes in this work and who continue to work for change in the public arena.

Exploring the experiences of parents, who have prior relationships within the district, and are therefore already "located" within a set of relations, allows us to interpret what parents "know" within a context in which what is "known" about them very much mediates outcomes. Using this framework, I argue that even when parent groups understand and attempt to work through and within the power hierarchies that mark educational institutions, there are fundamental "disconnects" between parents and schools that continue to stymie efforts toward full participation in school reform.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Proponents of urban school reform often call for parent participation as a clear departure from school-as-usual formulas in which parents are unwelcome, or viewed as an unwieldy community element to be "managed" rather than embraced. Aside from the rhetoric of NCLB and its supposed accountability to parents (Paige, 2004), reformulated schools are offered up as the only contexts in which teachers, administrators, and schools become truly accountable to parents for the outcomes they assure. In a recent congressional hearing on parent engagement and the reauthorization of NCLB, Wendy Puriefoy, president of Public Education Network, a national coalition of 80 local education funding networks (LEFs), indicated that parent engagement provisions of NCLB have been left under-funded and that parents, therefore, have been shut out of conversations that could lead to a "shared focus" on the goals of school reform agendas such as NCLB (CQ Congressional Testimony, 2007).

So when parents are truly "engaged," what does it look like? A good example of parents and schools working together for school improvement comes from national efforts for small schools reform. When successful, these relationships are often characterized not only as "parent friendly," but ones in which parents are key players in major decisions around curriculum, budget, and mission. About these alliances, William Ayers (2000) writes, "Parents are not annoying outsiders to be tolerated, nor phony "partners" in a patronizing nod toward fairness. In small schools parents must be gift and asset, and often decision-makers regarding broad policy and direction" (p.5). After all, the literature is rich with models on the linkages between parent engagement and student success (Eccles & Harold, 1993; Hoover-Dempsey & Sander, 1995); however at least one study of the linkages between such engagement and student achievement has noted that there must be a "fit" between the mode of involvement and the school's expectations for that involvement, otherwise the child cannot function in the separate realms of the home and school in a way that mediates the parent-school relationship successfully (Hoover-Demsey & Sander, 1995).

This is, in fact, where the tension lies between potential and practice, ideal and reality. Sudia Paloma McCaleb (1997) has indicated, for example, that several basic and hidden assumptions undergird so-called "model programs" seeking parent engagement. Most importantly these include the assumption that there is something wrong or lacking in the family environment, and that emulating school learning at home, what is termed the "transmission school practices model," is the only way to ensure parents and school are acting in accordance with one another where children are concerned. Recent research has suggested that the literature on parent involvement not only lacks consistency around common understandings of what we mean by "parent involvement," but that this lack of consistency pervades research and programs designed to engage parents. Angela Calabrese Barton et. al. (2004) suggests that this confusion makes it

impossible to separate ""what" parents were supposed to engage in [from] "how" parents managed to create or accept opportunities for involvement" (p.3). In other words, there exists a gap in the story of parent involvement in which understanding the process of their presence (or absence) is vital to understanding how successful engagement occurs, or is squandered. Barton et. al's (2004) "ecological" framework for parental engagement, one that explores "what it means to understand parental participation as a distributed, dynamic, and interactive process" (4), is used to analyze the small victories and lost opportunities for parent activism in the current context. Barton (2004) writes that "parent engagement is more than an object or an outcome" but more so "a set of relationships and actions" that occur within a context and make sense in various ways to individual stakeholders. It is, therefore, only within the bounds of that context that "engagement" occurs and can therefore be understood (p.11).

METHODOLOGY

The paper is based upon the writer's participation in, and observations of, parent organizing efforts for small schools reform over the course of two years, in a Northeastern rust-belt city. Through the lens of this case study, a story of individuals, circumstances and events emerge to explain the trajectory of engagement for a parent group during a "snapshot" of one urban school reform initiative. Anecdotes of parent activist efforts are used to illustrate "how parents activate nontraditional resources and leverage relationships with teachers, other parents, and community members in order to author a place of their own in schools" (Barton, et. al, 2004, 11). Through notes and reflections of parent meetings, various local events and my own related work at the local university, I elucidate three themes which include 1) parents negotiating voice and space within a set of larger reform efforts, 2) the disconnect between the practice of parent activism and institutional expectations for parent engagement, and 3) the ways racial politics provided opportunity for, and entry into the decision-making realm.

Context

The school district in which these parent efforts took place is located within a Northeastern "rust belt" city, with a markedly declining student population. From 1990 to 2005 the student population dropped twenty-two percent, leaving total enrollment in 2006 at a record low of 36,500. In the past seven years, many schools have been closed or reorganized in an attempt to compensate for these declining numbers and to attend to crumbling infrastructures. The process of school closings and reorganization awakened a small movement of parents, community members, and university faculty to the need to be closer to the decision making processes behind these changes. Initially this unrest led to a call for "choice," or the suggested power of parents to "vote with their feet" and choose to abandon failing schools. School choice opened the door for district-sanctioned charter schools. With nearly sixty percent of the region's charter schools operating in the city, enrollment figures for the district's schools have suffered greatly and this has led to the largest reported fiscal drain on the city's school budget of the entire state – almost eight percent of the budget redistributed to charter schools in 2004-2005.

In 2003, a local group of parents, community activists, and university faculty who had been working together for approximately ten years on a range of parent advocacy projects began to meet about their concerns for the health of the schools and students "left" in the district, as a result of the charter schools movement. Looking for an alternative that would restore the quality of public schools, without sacrificing precious funds or the few remaining students/parents

committed to public schooling, they explored small school models from New York City, Chicago, and Boston. Although small schools vary in form, they share common features including an overarching theme that guides curriculum development, low enrollment, a commitment to student engagement, and collaborative management which values parents as interested stakeholders and decision makers (Ayers, 2000; Siegel, et. al., 2005; Supovitz & Christman, 2005; Vander Ark, 2002; Wasley et al., 2000). These schools were founded with a particular focus on empowering teachers to make the decisions that are in the best interests of the children and the community they serve (Jendryka, 1994; Meier, 1995) and are seen by many policy-makers, private foundations, parents, and teachers as a solution for the problems facing failing urban school districts (Ayers & Klonsky, 2006; Siegel, et. al., 2005). The group was aware that in 2003, the New York City Department of Education announced a $51 million grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to develop 67 new small public high schools (press release, 2003), however the parents reported not knowing much about small schools and wanting to learn more. After becoming familiar with pilot projects in other states, they decided a first step would be to inform parents, the district, and community stakeholders of the possibility embodied in reformulated small schools. Important to them was the fact that small schools, or "smaller learning communities" as they are now termed by the U.S. Department of Education (high schools only), are often independent of district mandates, while still maintaining their status as "public district schools." Although local charter school advocates made the case for charter schools as "public," these parents felt that small schools were a more viable option, in that they had none of the funding issues that charter school critics tend to decry.

Negotiating Space and Voice

One major challenge to engaging the community in dialogue around small schools reform was that few in the larger community knew about small schools. Understanding the traditional positioning of parents as tertiary to school change efforts, the group knew it was vitally important to position the message from within a group of educational stakeholders already considered legitimate. Barton, et. al. (2004) discuss the importance of negotiating *space* and activating *capital* as essential to full engagement for parents. As "active" participants in their children's school lives, these parents had carved out space within the district and were already considered "participants" in the schools. However engagement in school change efforts was clearly new territory, and they realized they had few "capital" resources to harness. Therefore, initial community conversations were organized with the aide of a few professors from the university, also noted community activists (Johnson, Carter, Finn & Ansari, 2007). About forty community members attended this workshop, in which a national small schools development advocacy group provided models and strategies for reform, while encouraging conversation about the challenges and opportunities that might exist for small schools locally. However, at the end of that school year, a key university partner retired and the link between the efforts of the group and the university was temporarily broken. A graduate student at the time, and a member of the group, I helped to maintain the group's connection to the university, and facilitate collaboration with the university around the issue of small schools for the next year.

During the 2003-2004 school year, in conjunction with assistance from me and a few university faculty partners, the parent group was able to cultivate vital networks of interested constituents from the school board, the district superintendent's office, the university, and the

district's university-based educational consulting group. These players were vital in bringing conversations to the highest levels of decision making in the struggling district.

After some initial in-servicing conducted by the author for key players, including district leadership and university faculty, a process which was neither immediate nor effortless, the university and district consultant agreed to begin meeting about the possibility of convening several community meetings to gauge interest in small schools. The perspective of both district and university partners was that school administrators, not parents/community, were the most vital participants for these encounters. They did, however, ask for the official sponsorship of the meetings from the parent group, in order to demonstrate that they were not acting on their own. At that point the parent group was seen as a vetted ally, with valuable links to community. It had, in fact, secured a respectably-sized grant for their work with parents, and was able to direct some of that funding toward the small school's effort.

Interestingly, the university did not see a particular role for itself at that time, other than providing a venue for the meetings. Although it maintains the largest school of education in the region, my work as a university insider revealed that administrators and many education faculty believed they had little influence over school change efforts in the district. This perception had partly to do with the fact that the university was located in the suburbs and did not maintain a strong base of city schools as student-teaching cooperating sites. And aside from the efforts of individual faculty in city schools, the university had little explicit commitment to urban education issues. This was, in fact, a good time for the parent group to mobilize for change. With apparently little interest in the issue, the university could help them harness the capital and resources they needed to reach out to the larger community.

However, once the university administration and the district were in agreement that such an initiative would be mutually beneficial, they saw *their* next challenge as that of engaging the larger community, and particularly parents, around the nebulous concepts of "reform." From the perspective of the parent group, however, they had already been left behind. Parent organizers expressed indignation that their work around identifying small schools as a possible vehicle for school reform had been co-opted by groups with already powerfully entrenched interests – the university, the school board, and private consultants. The parents and their activist partners gathered again in meetings and expressed their apprehensions that they had perhaps made a tactical mistake in courting these very powerful interests, as their own interests were quickly being annexed. The very meaning of "school reform" was being re-interpreted. In meetings with the university and school district leadership, the discourse had shifted into a strategy to use small schools reform as a life vest for ailing schools, with little interest as to whether the new schools were small charter schools or small district schools. The distinction between charter schools and district schools had been lost. There was support on the school board for small schools as well. However, leaders of the board had made it known to members of the parent group that some hoped small schools would serve to temper the power that the teacher's and administrator's union had in the district. From the board's perspective, school change was stymied because the unions refused to provide variances to contracts that would allow, for example, a building principal to hire whomever they wanted to teach in their school. Parents began to wonder how and where their interest would re-emerge.

The Parent Participation Disconnect

When the university was poised to include parents in what it now saw as *its* small schools initiative, administrators expressed discomfort with the approach of the parent organization and the rouge reputation they believed it maintained in the community. Traditionally a parent advocacy group, the organizing model to which they ascribed they termed "direct parent involvement." Direct parent involvement is based on a model in which parents help other parents to create individual action plans to address parent complaints that are sensitive to cultural contexts, yet are intervention oriented and may have the goal of influencing policies. Parents had already faced challenges to formal participation in the schools with the advent of School Based Management Teams (SBMTs), a New York State law by the mid 1990's (Regulations of the Commissioner of Education, 2006), and a recommendation by The Council of Great City Schools a few years prior to these efforts (Johnson, Carter, Finn & Ansari, 2007). Parents faced significant resistance to the creation and realization of SBMTs. In one case, for example, a parent was blocked out of any opportunities to communicate with teachers at his child's school by the principal who did not support the SBMT concept. Parents came to realize that the idea of "direct parent involvement" was threatening within the context of school closing and reorganization, and that they were not welcome as partners. They articulated the district's idea of parent engagement as having open, but one-way communication in which parents were *informed* of the changes that would affect their children, at a time Michelle Fine (1993) would consider "too late" for dialogue or even contribution (Fine, 1993).

Any victories parents experienced were hard won, individualized cases. One example of this phenomenon was the case in which one parent wanted her child with special needs to be able attend classes at a local college while still receiving federally mandated education services (through the age of 21). This effort was a long and individualized battle, in which one parent had to learn her child's rights, and then negotiate with union leaders and district in a way that benefited her child. Although not originally their intention, such efforts tended to politicize parent engagement as a necessary means of advocating for their children's individual interests and before the small schools initiative, they had worked to guide one another through these kinds of cases. Michelle Fine (1993) has noted the tension that exists between what is framed as the "public" sphere of schools and the "private" sphere of parent interests. Relegated to the "private" sphere, parent's interests are easily marginalized.

> If parents' interests are shaped as private, and schools' interests as "public," then a conversation toward a common vision is nearly impossible. Parents (as well as teachers) cannot simply be added to the mix of decision making unless the structures and practices of bureaucracy--school-based and central district--are radically decentralized and democratic (Fine, 1993, The Philadelphia Story, p. 19).

However the small schools effort presented a new problem for all parties. Although it was clearly about the needs of children, it wasn't about any particular child's needs. As it was considered of "public" concern, for the common good, any efforts in this direction on the part of the parent group were seen as "political" and clearly not appropriate for parent participation. The schism between what the district considered to be their own "territory" and the interest and intervention of parents allowed the parents to be framed as rouges, and clearly out of their field of expertise.

Racial Politics in Parent Engagement

Understanding the highly political nature of the change process, the parent group harnessed more traditional civil rights approaches to getting their concerns about being "cut out" of the small schools conversation heard and met. As a school district in a historically racially segregated region, parents represent a largely African American student body. About sixty percent of the student body is African American while only about twenty five percent are White. The parent group itself was a balanced mix of African American, white, Hispanic and Native American. Nevertheless, most school administrators, district personnel and school board members at the time were white. Parents in the group noticed that the district often ignored their concerns until they became frustrated enough to vent their anger. Individual parents had experienced results in the past when perceived by school leaders as an "angry black parent." In discussions within the group, parents realized that by harnessing this stereotype they could leverage the white privilege of white parents in the group when advocating for the needs of parents of color. They consciously used this "one-two punch" approach to parent engagement when visiting schools to speak with administrators and teachers about "problems" their children were experiencing. These meetings had traditionally been rather intimidating for parents, who were usually the only "non-educators" in the room. Parents reported that administrators and teachers would talk at them, tell them what was wrong and what needed to be "fixed," and parents had few choices but to acquiesce. In the "one-two" model, parents would come in pairs, if possible one parent-of-color and one white parent. School personnel were less likely to use educational-talk without clarifying what they meant. And the two parents would ensure that the school demonstrated some accountability for the problem, rather than laying full responsibility on the parent. In this way, racial politics created immense potential for getting their concerns heard. This understanding of racial politics worked to their advantage during the initial stages of the small schools efforts. One of the white parents, lived on the same block as one of the white school board members, and even belonged to some of the same social groups. That parent used her racial and class privilege to get the group access to meetings and spaces into which most parents of color were not welcome, and subsequently allowed them to position themselves and deliver their message about small schools as a collective voice. However, once concrete plans for introducing district principals to the concept, and the opportunity for "failing" schools to reorganize as a small school was offered, parents were simply not needed anymore. As a side note, the author's position at the university was also "excessed" so that any efforts to engage in discussions with either the university or the district would have to be from the "outside." The parent and university activist groups did feel some pride in having steered the district and the university toward a source for training and technical assistance (another national small schools development organization), and that by the fall of 2004 the initiative was officially off the ground, albeit without any outside parent support. Also that fall, a teaching post was created to administer one "smaller learning community" that was a result of the school's status as a recipient of a federal SLC grant. By that time, however, efforts by the group had been abandoned. With the district and university acting on their own, the parent group could no longer clearly define their role in small schools efforts. Additionally, many of the children of the original group of parents were "aging out" of the system and prior reasons for coalescing were becoming scarce.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Using an ecological approach to parent engagement (Barton, et. al (2004), the experiences of one parent organization as they mobilized for small school reform exposes some of the nuances of what happens to parent "participation" within urban school reform agendas. Although these parents had cultivated a long history within the district as advocates for their children, and "participants" in the schools, the differentially distributed power around school change efforts allowed parents to be re-hewn as agitators – the poison arrow of parent-district relationships, and be pushed outside of spaces where important conversations would ultimately lead to using small schools as a means toward school reform. Although advocating for children is considered an acceptable form of parent involvement legitimated as "the private sphere" of parent interests (Fine, 1993), when parents become interested in a more generalized agenda, having to do with no particular child, their infringement on "public" space becomes apparent and unacceptable. So too, within the highly politicized context of massive school closings and charter schools on the horizon, the parent organization's model of "direct parent involvement" was likely a threat to a more pressing agenda to turn-around an ailing district, and stem the growing exodus of parents to private and suburban schools. An ecological framework that honors critical race theory (Barton, et. al., 2004) helps push the interpretation further - that as interest in this initiative grew, it was vital that the district and the university be seen as the agents of change, rather than a small group of "rogue" parents-of-color. Additionally, parents understood the racial politics at work in a district where the majority of students are not white, and they were successful in using racial privilege/stereotyping as leverage when working with individual administrators in the service of their children. But as a means to get "in the door" to where important conversations were taking place throughout the change process, racial politics proved an ineffective strategy.

Although, this is clearly a tale about power and the struggle for true partnership, the journey of this one group and its attempts to fully engage in school change are a vital piece in the story of what parents can and are doing for their children and for public education. As school districts across the county increasingly embrace small schools agendas, there are many research questions to be explored including how teachers are being prepared to facilitate relationships with parents in small schools (Keiler & Carter, 2007). Educators and researchers have a responsibility to both engage as active participants and collaborators with parents in their struggle to be heard. If anything, what is underemphasized in this article is the role that individual community members and university faculty members play in shoring up the work of these parents, and the varied ways this work is being conceptualized both with and for parents, and around issues of social justice (Finn, Johnson, & Finn, 2006).

As parents harness increased understandings of the ways that power dynamics and racial politics can and do get played out in the public arena, I believe that communities can more easily determine the form and trajectory of parent activism. The challenges that arise as parents attempt to interpret, intervene, and ultimately re-define the roles traditionally allocated to them particularly amidst larger school reform agendas should also be illustrative to policy makers as they attempt to include parents in urban reform efforts.

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Writing Skills: A Taken for Granted Assumption in Urban Graduate Teacher Education?

Jorgelina Abbate-Vaughn
University of Massachusetts Boston

Abstract

Teachers are held accountable for improving the literacy skills of PreK-12 pupils. However, the processes (or lack thereof) by which teachers at the various levels of schooling are deemed skilled and become actually prepared for such complex challenge have not been explored in depth. This article focuses on urban preservice teachers' beliefs regarding their own writing skills, compared to their actual performance on a cold prompt. Findings indicate that there is little consistency between participants' beliefs and actual writing performance. Implications for teacher educators and policy-making are offered.

INTRODUCTION

Teacher educators juggle to meet competing needs, particularly in times of heightened awareness and debate regarding the ways teacher quality is conceptualized. A growing number of states allow those who pass the state test to teach under preliminary certification right upon graduation from a four-year degree program. This phenomenon is accentuated in urban areas, with their pervasive teacher shortages and poor teacher retention rates. The population of graduate teacher education programs in metropolitan areas includes considerable numbers of novice "teachers of record" on their rosters, who might have both less time to dedicate to coursework and little actual teaching experience. These programs also include graduates from a variety of colleges and universities, with myriad strengths and areas for further development given their pursued majors. With such diversity of academic backgrounds, writing as an essential skill that completers of a graduate program in education are expected to exhibit might not always be clearly identified by such a diverse constituency. It is worthwhile noting that graduate teacher education program in urban state universities do attract a variety of candidates from diverse socio-economic backgrounds and baccalaureate preparation.

This article reports on a small-scale qualitative study that examined the consistency between urban graduate teacher education candidates' beliefs about writing and actual performance on a cold prompt. All participants were one semester away from program completion.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

College graduates' literacy skills have been the object of much research attention. A study by the American Institutes of Research (Baer, Cook, & Baldi, 2006) surveyed the literacy skills of college graduates of two and four-year programs, indicating that over half of those surveyed lacked simple skills such as understanding and executing simple instructions or balancing a checkbook. Similarly, the outcomes of a study by the American Association of Colleges and Universities (2005) revealed that a dismal 11 percent of college seniors are able to write at the proficient level, while holding the belief that college contributes to their skills in writing and

other areas. Upon graduation, writing well is amongst the most important skill degree holders need in the workforce for career advancement. Yet, remedial writing training for those who do not have appropriate writing skills--about 30 percent--costs the taxpayers an annual half billion dollars (National Commission on Writing, 2005).

In teacher education, an expectation for greater accountability in the ways in which future teachers are prepared for the workforce has intensified with mandatory teacher tests in most states. Despite disagreements regarding the necessity for such tests and the tests' ability to measure what matters most in teaching, few would challenge the notion that completers of graduate degrees in education should exhibit competent writing skills.

In teacher education, writing well irrespective of content area expertise has received little attention from researchers (Norman & Spencer, 2005). The *National Writing Project* that begun in 1974 and has since spread nationwide via federal funding confirms a long-held commitment to improving teachers' ability to teach writing. Less has been explored about teachers' own ability to write. In spite of the well-publicized awareness regarding college graduate literacy shortcomings, few graduate teacher education programs have taken the call and emphasized teacher development of level-appropriate writing skills as one of the main programmatic objectives. The generalized assumption appears to be that writing has been mastered elsewhere. It is often presumed that candidates have a command of advanced literacy skills as documented by passing scores in the state teacher test.

Insufficient writing skills likely affect significant numbers of teachers in effectively promoting high literacy skills amongst their own pupils. The literacy scores of 12^{th} graders are stagnant or heading downwards (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2002) . Only 51 percent of high school graduates who took the ACT college admission and placement exam in 2005 met the college readiness benchmark for reading (ACT, 2006). Teachers' general literacy skills, and more pointedly writing performance, are special concerns for teacher educators for the implicit effect the lack of those might bear on pupils' academic achievement.

Writing at the undergraduate level has received significant research attention: the role of writing instruction in improving learning (Herrington, 1981); the different ways writing instruction assumes in a variety of disciplines (Coffin, Curry, Goodman, Hewings, Lillis et al, 2003); and various perspectives with regards to focusing on content, grammar, or both, and the advantages and pitfalls of such approaches (Heyden, 2003; Hunter & Wallace, 1995). Yet, the outcomes of recent studies certainly challenge the effectiveness of reading and writing instruction in undergraduate programs.

Some argue that colleges have not typically put their best faculty resources in freshman and sophomore writing courses, which are often relegated to graduate assistants or low-paid faculty with little incentive to perform (Bok, 2005). Addressing the evidence about college student general literacy skills, well-resourced higher learning institutions have implemented costly writing programs staffed with reputable lecturers, exhibiting a higher degree of student success (Bartlett, 2003).

For writing instruction to change at the graduate level, however, there would be the additional need for the professional development of higher education faculty. The National Commission on Writing in America's Schools and Colleges (2003) proposes that university faculty should have access to explicit training that emphasizes writing as a key tool in the development of higher-level performance in any given academic area. Successful faculty development efforts to change the way teacher education programs conduct business have been described elsewhere, intensifying the notion that given goals in teacher education are achieved when they are stressed consistently across a program by all faculty (Costa, McPhail, Smith, & Brisk, 2005).

Little has been researched about promoting writing skills at the graduate level through specific coursework focused on writing, despite growing evidence of its need. Most of the emphasis on writing well is only stressed upon those in pursuit of terminal degrees. The use of textbooks (Craswell, 2005; Swales & Feak, 2004) might be advised individually by faculty for the benefit of students who need support. The paucity of research in teaching writing skills to graduate degree seekers suggests an urgency to closely monitor graduate students' writing performance, more importantly for those who intend to pursue a career in teaching.

METHODOLOGY

This article reports on a subset of the data (N= 26) collected for a small-scale study (N= 64) conducted at an urban university whose teacher education student population includes a variety of backgrounds: students with undergraduate degrees from top-ranked and low-ranked universities and colleges; teachers of record who achieve preliminary certification by passing the state tests and students who have never taught; career changers of various ages and recent graduates; and students whose parents have attained educationally at various levels. Research indicates that parental education and family background are important factors in predicting student achievement overall, and help predict college attendance and completion rates particularly across ethnic groups (Cameron & Heckman, 2001). While the aims of the larger study is described elsewhere (Abbate-Vaughn, 2007), the examination of this subset of the data was meaningful for the deeper insights it provided on actual preservice teacher beliefs about their own writing.

Demographically, the subset sample included 22 females and 4 males, 3 students of color, and one student whose native language was not English. The gender demographics of the sample coincided with nationwide trends in teacher education regarding the dominance of females in the field (75 percent), but was lower than the 25 percent of male representation in graduate teacher education programs, at 15 percent. In terms of representation of students of color, the sample exhibited less diversity than the comparable pool of graduate teacher education students nationwide of 19 percent (AACTE, 2002), at 11.5 percent. All participants had passed the required state test to obtain initial certification.

The research questions that guided the study are: (1) What are the perceptions about their own writing of students at a graduate program leading to teacher licensure? and (2) Are student beliefs consistent with writing proficiency as demonstrated on a cold prompt? Data collected to answer these questions consisted of a cold writing prompt and a survey.

The Writing Prompt Rubric

The decision of utilizing an on-site administered cold prompt was informed by (a) a desire to mimic as much as possible the type of writing on which prospective teachers are often assessed via state tests; and (b) the existence of take-home, term-paper evidence as part of prior coursework completed by the participants in the program, but scant information on actual writing skills. It was deemed that cold-prompts resembled many of the writing activities in which teachers might be engaged on a daily basis, such as responding in a short time to multiple emails from parents, colleagues, and/or administrators.

The initial writing assignment was given a grade according to a rubric adapted from Howard, Ifekwunigwe, and Williams (2005), and included the ratings of *competent, satisfactory, marginal,* and *unsatisfactory* (see Appendix I). The prompts administered to this subset of participants were assessed by the researcher, who had at the time 5 years of experience teaching writing-intensive research courses.

The Survey

Data for the second question included short-essay answers to the following questions: (1) How comfortable do you feel about your general writing skills? and (2) How comfortable do you feel about your academic writing skills? Both questions required numeric categorization and a detailed explanation. The two types of responses were analyzed qualitatively, coding the responses that occurred with most frequency and the themes appearing from participants' short essay responses.

Analysis of the data set included: (1) a comparison between stated beliefs about writing and actual achievement in the writing prompt; and (2) an analysis of emerging themes regarding student attitudes towards general and academic writing skills. A synthesis of findings follows below.

FINDINGS

General and Academic Writing Skills: Are They Related?

Upon administration of the prompt, the participants completed the survey's short-essay responses regarding their degree of comfort with general and academic writing tasks. The difference between both was defined on the survey:

> General writing skills are those employed in writing emails, your own journal, free-write reflections you may have written for a course, etc. Academic writing skills are those utilized in formal papers for courses, thesis, articles you may submit to teachers' journals, and/or conference proposals, which typically follow an established academic writing style, such as that of the American Psychological Association (APA).

A summary of the participants' responses is depicted on Table 1:

Table 1: *Graduate Preservice teachers' Perceptions About Writing (N=26)*

	Comfort with General Writing Skills	Comfort with Academic Writing Skills	Actual Score Writing Prompt (reported in relation to Perceptions About General Writing Skills)			
			Competent	Satisfactory	Marginal	Unsatisfactory
Very Comfortable	**20 (77%)**	15	**4 (15%)**	**7 (27%)**	**7 (27%)**	**2 (8%)**
Moderately Comfortable	**6 (23%)**	9		**3 (11%)**	**2 (8%)**	**1 (4%)**
Not Comfortable	**0**	2				
Total	**26**	**26**	**4**	**10**	**9**	**3**

Seventy-seven percent of the participants in this subset of the data believed to have appropriate general writing skills, although 35 percent (9 students) in that category performed at the *marginal* or *unsatisfactory* levels on the prompt. Only 15 percent of those who believed themselves good writers scored at the *competent* level. Twenty-three percent of the participants reported to be moderately comfortable with their writing, and were actually more attune with their actual writing performance. Finally, no students in this data subset believed their writing skills needed improvement.

Previous research has indicated a higher correlation between students' beliefs about their writing and actual performance (White & Bruning, 2005). A parallel study with another subset of the data (N=38), with a more abstractly-worded prompt yielded an even larger disconnect between student beliefs about general writing skills and actual performance (for a more detailed account of such findings, see Abbate-Vaughn, 2007). For comparison purposes, results from both data subsets are offered on Table 2.

Table 2: *Comparison Between Data Subsets # 1 (N=38) and #2 (N=26)*

	General Writing #1	General Writing # 2	Competent		Satisfactory		Marginal		Unsatisfactory	
			#1	#2	# 1	#2	#1	#2	#1	#2
Very Comfortable	27 (71%)	20 (77%)	5 (13%)	4 (15%)	8 (21%)	7 (27%)	4 (11%)	7 (27%)	10 (26%)	2 (8%)
Moderately Comfortable	7 (18%)	6 (23%)			3 (8%)	3 (11%)	2 (5%)	2 (8%)	2 (5%)	1 (4%)
Not Comfortable	4 (11%)	0					2 (5%)		2 (5%)	
Totals	38 (100%)	26 (100%)	5	4	11	10	8	9	14	3

Although there is very little difference among the students' perceptions about their general writing skills, the outcomes of the cold prompt for the data subset discussed on this paper (identified as subset #2) suggest that the more precise wording, concrete topic, and stricter guidelines of the essay required impacted the students' quality of writing by diminishing performance at the *unsatisfactory* level. Similarly to the data subset #1, however, the themes that emerged from the short-essay answers included the notion that good writers might not necessarily perform well in academic writing, and that academic writing takes the enjoyment out

of writing. Evidence for such themes overlapped in participants' responses. A representative sample of those is summarized below:

> "My writing is narrative in style which conflicts with academic writing. I'm happy writing without structure" (SuS#15).
> "I feel it's very easy for me to express my thoughts in a journal or verbally, however, academic writing is difficult to follow. I prefer creative writing" (SuS# 8).
> "General writing I can do and do it every day. It's the organization and references in academic writing that I'm not used to" (SuS#24).
> "Teachers don't have to write this stuff. This APA style seems more appropriate for academia than for teachers" (SuS#3).
> "I consider myself a pretty good writer. As a future English teacher, I'm always writing my thoughts and stories. It's the organization of academic writing that kills me, there's no room for one's voice" (SuS# 21).

It is not clear whether participants had acquired those ideas from previous unsuccessful or poorly scaffolded academic writing assignments or as the outcome of a sequence of courses where reflective, unstructured writing was prioritized. At the end of a graduate program, a considerable number of the prospective and in-service teachers in the sample still viewed academic writing as a marginal element in the teacher's bag of tricks.

Misguided Beliefs?

The writing prompt taken immediately after the short essay survey stated:

> Pretend you are at your first job interview. A member of the interviewing committee asks: "Give us the main three reasons why you want to be a teacher." Please write a persuasive essay that addresses the committee member's question. You have about 45 minutes to complete this prompt.

Due to page limitations, the two prompt samples from students who manifested to be very comfortable with their writing skills but performed at the *unsatisfactory* level on the writing prompt are presented:

Sample #1

> I did not set out at the beginning of my college career to become a teacher: first I changed my major from physics to classics during my first term at the university as an undergraduate. I was taking a mythology course because it fascinated me to hear the same stories that fascinated me as a child and I was becoming dissatisfied by my physics course realizing that this was not for me, dreading specially the lab component. As I was looking into other majors, I realized that while I would go the physics/math section of the bookstore for study guides I would also visit the literature section because I liked it. I loved my mythology class and the topics proposed by the professor.
>
> My change also had to do with a girlfriend I had at the time. I was about to graduate with a major in classics and a minor in math and yet I had no idea of what I wanted for a career, all I knew is that it should be in my field, classics. At the time, the state I was living in and specially the city I was in had a need for Latin teachers. I thought nothing of this until my girlfriend, who was majoring in special education, suggested that I become a mentor at an elementary school and I did and enjoyed it.

This showed me that I love working with children. The final straw came when I worked at a residential institution for blind and visually impaired children. It was the best work I ever had. Even though the kids I worked with had other issues, I enjoyed going to work every day. I love working with children and students, love the subject matter, and want to share this love with others.

The essay above exhibited the problems described in the "unsatisfactory" category of the rubric: unclear purpose, problematic organization, coherence, and sentence structure, and points unsupported. A similar perspective emerges from the second sample below:

Sample # 2

The reasons why I want to be a teacher would be that teaching is rewarding, I continue to learn through teaching, and I love children. The reason why I chose rewarding as my first reason is because it is a job that you benefit from. You get watch children grow and learn from what you teach them. They are like an open book and you are the person filling in the pages. You can see a student 10 years later and they will remember you, for your lesson on Ancient Greece or what you helped them after school.

The second reason I said I wanted to work as a teacher was I keep learning through teaching, As a teacher you are constantly changing the way you teach. You are like a scientist doing an experiment. Also I believe you learn from your students, they are not only learning from you but they are teaching you. They might teach you to solve a math problem in a different way.

My third reason why I want to work as a teacher is because I love working with children. I think it takes a special person to want to become a teacher, not only wanting to be a teacher but a success at it. Although I listed three reason, there are many reasons why a want to become a teacher.

This second prompt exhibits a very repetitive, immature style of writing, with many shortcomings in terms of mechanics, sentence structure, and overall coherence given the intended audience.

The prompt's grade did not bear in the overall grade for the sections of the course in which it was administered. This may have led some participants to put marginal effort in its production. Some others might have internalized that the conversational--and sometimes confessional--strategies for learning about teaching used in many teacher education courses to promote a disposition for self-studying one's practice is the prevailing form of writing across teacher education programs.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The findings inform the debate on college literacy and highly qualified teachers in that they help interrogate assumptions about the writing performance of graduate students seeking to become teachers. While small sample studies like the one reported here help in identifying problems, they need to be followed by larger scale research. This study's implications for practice include (1) the need for assessing the artifacts that graduate students might be required to furnish for admission--such as on-site written responses to writing prompts rather than home-produced essays; and (2) the development of programmatic supports for student writing

throughout teacher education programs at all levels. Graduate students need to be assessed as having demonstrated basic skills (such as writing) in addition to profession-specific skills needed in their pursuit of a teaching license. Finally, an implication for policy stems from the fact that although all students in the sample had passed the state's teacher test that includes a thorough literacy component, a significant number of them (35 percent) had scored at the *marginal* and *unsatisfactory* levels on the writing prompt. Higher education institutions might wish to consider adding alternative measures of student performance in writing.

The disconnect between student beliefs about writing and actual student performance might indicate the need for rethinking the role of writing in both undergraduate and graduate teacher education programs, in order to improve the ways teachers approach writing as an individual activity and a professional tool for the classroom. Intensive writing courses that concentrate on different "forms" of writing that teachers need (grant writing, curriculum development, written communication with employers and parents, by way of email and paper correspondence) are proposed as part of teacher education programs at all levels.

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Appendix I

Rubric adapted from Howard, Ifekwunigwe, and Williams (2005):

Competent: describes papers whose writers clearly communicate their purpose effectively and efficiently with an introductory paragraph that presents the general impetus/rationale for the paper or assignment. The writers use specific detail to describe, analyze and reflect on the materials selected to build their case. The sentence structure is sophisticated and varied, and the diction precise. These writers get to the heart of the issues and provide connections for readers. They set a frame/rationale in their first paragraph and attend to all parts of the prompt. They understand that reflection is a reconsideration of the whole. In terms of development, they offer a good deal of specificity. Their diction is precise and sophisticated.

Satisfactory: describes competent writers who communicate their purpose with detail. One or more of the parts the writers were to address may be neglected or need development and

elaboration. The papers may contain some errors in mechanics. These writers are clear and offer the actual wording of prompts to give readers a sense of specificity. They do not engage in much analysis and reflection.

Marginal: describes papers whose writers offer procedural accounts of the information requested in the prompt with little attempt to analyze and reflect upon the implications of the material summarized. Sentences may lack clarity, which interferes with the communication of ideas and details. The work is marginal on two fronts: (1) very little clear rationale or insightful analysis and (2) many sentences that interfere with reading. The first few sentences might attempt to set the stage for the piece, but the clarity is not there—the reader needs to translate or infer. Some sentences are difficult to understand on first reading. In addition to punctuation errors, the writer mixes past and present tense and has sentence boundary problems, as well as lacking transition sentences between paragraphs.

Unsatisfactory: describes writers who are unable to communicate their purpose to readers. Organization, coherence, sentence structure and diction are problematic. Various points are not supported by enough information for the reader to understand the points the writer is attempting to make.

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Dr. Angela Louque
College of Education
5500 University Parkway
San Bernardino, CA 92407
(909) 537-7621 office
(909) 537-7510 fax
alouque@csusb.edu

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2. The manuscript title and abstract should appear in the body of the manuscript. To facilitate the blind review process, no authors' names or institutional identifiers should be noted in the manuscript. If they are included in the paper, the manuscript will be returned to the author(s) without a review.
3. The recommended manuscript length is approximately 1,500 to 3,000 words.
4. Figures, tables, charts, and graphs must be camera ready.
5. All manuscripts must conform to the stylistic guidelines of the most recent publication manual of the American Psychological Association.
6. Manuscripts (including abstract & title), Manuscript Submission Form, and Membership Verification should be emailed as *Microsoft Word* documents in three different attachments that can be downloaded separately.

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4. The manuscript is well-written (well-organized, clear in purpose, and free of grammar, punctuation, and spelling errors).
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6. The manuscript is free of biases/stereotypes.
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