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Teachers from the "Neighborhood": Standardized Testing as a Barrier to Certification of Minority Candidates

Kelly McNeal
William Paterson University
mcnealk1@wpunj.edu

Salika Lawrence
William Paterson University
lawrences2@wpunj.edu

This qualitative, longitudinal study documents the academic and professional journeys of 8 college graduates or "scholars" of the Paterson Teachers for Tomorrow (PT4T) program. Data from this study further contribute to the growing body of research focusing on preparing diverse candidates—particularly those from urban and low socioeconomic backgrounds—to become teachers. One finding that emerged from this study documented the barrier caused by the Educational Testing Service's (ETS) Praxis II to the certification of minority teacher candidates. These findings support the call to provide additional support for minority candidates as they pursue their teacher education programs and prepare to take the Praxis II exams.

PT4T is a collaborative project between a state university in northern New Jersey—namely, William Paterson University (WPU)—and four high schools in Paterson. The purpose of this program is to identify potential teachers while attending high school in Paterson in order to support and nurture their educational and professional aspirations throughout their college experience. By providing ongoing support through high school and college, the program aims to foster teacher candidates who return to Paterson as "scholar-

teachers." The PT4T program was shaped by the philosophy that quality teachers for urban communities, such as the city of Paterson, are those who understand—through their own personal experiences—the cultures and complexities of urban schools such as those in Paterson.

Paterson Public Schools educate approximately 30,000 students every year (Paterson Public Schools, n.d.). Paterson's 2007 graduation rate was 67.4 percent; approximately 78 percent of students receive free or reduced lunch (State of New Jersey Department of Education, 2008). The Paterson School District mirrors urban school districts nationwide; despite having a majority of students who are African American and Hispanic—it continues to be staffed by predominantly white teachers and administrators. In the 2006-2007 academic year, 7.5 percent of classes were not taught by highly qualified teachers (State of New Jersey Department of Education, 2008). Thus, PT4T aims to increase the number of highly qualified as well as ethnically diverse teachers working in Paterson.

PT4T scholars attending WPU receive scholarships covering their full tuition if they commit to returning to and teaching in Paterson for a minimum of three years after successfully completing the undergraduate program, including teacher-preparation. WPU is a state university located in the suburban township of William Paterson, New Jersey. It is located less than five miles from all four of the participating PT4T high schools. PT4T scholars admitted to WPU are required to maintain at least a 2.75 grade point average (GPA) requirement every semester, select and complete a major relevant to their proposed future area of certification, and be admitted into and complete one of the university's teacher-preparation programs.

WPU's College of Education is accredited by the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education

(NCATE) and offers undergraduate as well as graduate programs in both initial and advanced programs. The university's teacher-preparation programs require an overall GPA of 2.75 for admission. Teacher-candidates are required to exhibit appropriate professional dispositions throughout their coursework and field experiences.

In addition to graduating from WPU with an approved major and completing a teacher-education program, PT4T scholars must pass Praxis II exams to become certified teachers in New Jersey. Passing a high-stakes standardized assessment for teacher licensure has become more widespread as a requirement since the 1990s; as of 2003, 16 states required teacher-candidates to pass Praxis II exams in order to obtain teaching licenses (Sutton, 2004). Although NCATE does not advocate for the use of a single, high-stakes, standardized test in order to determine teacher-candidates' content and pedagogical competencies, the State of New Jersey requires that teacher-candidates pass the Education Testing Service's (ETS) Praxis II exams—high-stakes standardized tests—to become a certified teacher.

Several criticisms have been raised regarding the Praxis II exams. According to the American Psychological Association (2007), "when test results are used inappropriately or as a single measure of performance, they can have unintended adverse consequences" (¶ 1). Yet many states, including New Jersey, continue to require candidates to pass high-stakes tests as a teacher licensing requirement. Researchers have also raised the issue of validity with regard to Praxis II exams (Goodman, Arbona, & de Rameriz, 2008; Sutton, 2004; Wakefield, 2006). Sutton raised several questions in her research: "What evidence is there that this test predicts successful teaching? What are the consequences of widespread implementation of such tests? Do they lead faculty and students to focus on the wrong aspects of teaching?" (p. 465). Furthermore, Goodman et al. questioned

the validity of such high-stakes testing. "[The] failure to pass these high-stakes, minimum-competency tests could eliminate otherwise qualified teacher candidates from the teaching profession" (p. 26). Critics of standardized testing for teacher candidates (see Goodman et al., 2008; Sutton, 2004; Wakefield, 2006) have also questioned the equity of these exams and the effect these tests have on recruiting minority teacher-candidates to the teaching field (Goodman et al., 2008; Wakefield, 2006), particularly since "a disproportionate number of minority teacher-candidates fail these exams" (Goodman et al., 2008, p. 27).

Such questions have emerged not only because of possible issues relating to equity as well as cultural and racial bias, but also because of the alignment of the content of such tests to national standards. For example, the Conference of English Educators (CEE) (2005), a constituent group of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), developed the *Program Assessment in English Education: Belief Statements and Recommendations*, which critiques the alignment of the Praxis II exams and their alignment with NCTE national standards. CEE (2005) noted:

> In their current forms, Praxis II content and pedagogy examinations do not reflect the *Guidelines* and *Standards*, and we believe serious attention must be given to revising these high-stakes assessments. This work should build on earlier NCTE efforts to advise ETS on issues of alignment among standards, curriculum, teaching, and assessment (p. 1).

Methods and Data Sources

Reviewing program outcomes is necessary for the success of any program. The current inquiry sought to document the academic and professional journeys of eight college students who graduated between 2001 and January 2008, and to examine what factors posed barriers to participants returning to the neighborhood as teachers. Data

was examined to determine the extent to which the program aids graduates in 1) attending college, 2) completing college, and 3) becoming certified teachers who work in the Paterson Public Schools. The use of qualitative procedures provided the opportunity to explore the phenomenon in its authentic context and presented findings that defined, explained, contextualized, and generated hypotheses for future inquiry.

The study utilized qualitative methods, including document and content analysis, to compile mini-case studies (Yin, 1994) of the eight graduates to generate hypotheses at the end of these investigations (Hubbard & Power, 1999). The content of the data was analyzed and categorized according to patterns and themes that emerged. Data collection and analysis were a recursive process; multiple sources of evidence were used to triangulate findings (Yin, 1994). The use of qualitative procedures provided the opportunity to explore the phenomenon in its authentic context and present findings that defined, explained, contextualized, and generated hypotheses for future inquiry.

The main sources of data for this research were initially set to be classroom visitations and longitudinal data, records, and documents relating to the scholars' academic and professional histories. Although the original intention was to spend time visiting the graduates in the classrooms in which they teach, once the research began, it became evident that only one graduate was currently a full-time permanent teacher in Paterson. Therefore, the data collection methods were changed to include a questionnaire, which was sent and subsequently resent via email to all graduates as well as hand-delivered to three graduates. None of the questionnaires were completed or returned. Therefore, the data used came primarily from naturally occurring sources—primarily students' files collected as they participated in the program as high school and college students.

Results

Preliminary analysis revealed that, since its inception in the spring of 2000, 54 high school students have been offered scholarships; 50 have accepted the scholarships, and 8 scholars have graduated from the university. Data revealed that few teacher candidates have received certification and only a two as of September 2008 have returned to teach in the neighborhood as certified teachers.

Few Teacher Candidates Have Returned to Teach in the Neighborhood

As of fall 2008, two out of eight graduates were working full time as certified teachers in Paterson, representing a success rate of 25 percent, when only those scholars who completed their undergraduate degrees are included. Of these eight scholars, seven are female and one is male; six are African Americans, one is Hispanic, and one is Caucasian (see Table 1). The two scholars who are presently teaching in full-time positions in Paterson schools are one female Hispanic teaching high school physical education and one female African American teaching at the elementary level.

As of fall 2008, in addition to the two PT4T graduates working as certified full-time teachers in Paterson, three PT4T graduates work as substitute teachers—two females in Paterson schools and one female as a long-term substitute in Orange, New Jersey. Two of these substitutes have not yet passed the Praxis II in their respective subject fields. The remaining three PT4T graduates are not currently working in education-related fields. The only male graduate works in an administrative department at WPU. Although he had worked as a substitute teacher in Paterson, despite taking the exam several times, he did not pass the Praxis II in English, making him ineligible for certification as an English teacher in New Jersey. In addition, a female teacher candidate who is

Caucasian and graduated summa cum laude did not finish the education program at WPU. She did not pass her field experience and, after careful reflection and consultation with her advisers, decided to not become a teacher. She has since been admitted to Rutgers University's graduate school in library science. One African American female graduate was unable to enter the undergraduate teacher education at WPU as her GPA did not meet the required 2.75 (until the semester she graduated); consequently, she was not admitted to the program. After graduation, she enrolled in the Post-Baccalaureate program at WPU and is currently enrolled in graduate-level initial certification courses in order to become certified as an elementary teacher.

Impact of Praxis II on Certification of Teacher Candidates

At this time, more than one third of the scholars who have graduated from the PT4T program are not working as certified teachers based solely on the fact that they have not passed Praxis II exams in their content areas (see Table 2). These three scholars—all African Americans—graduated from WPU's NCATE as well as state-approved teacher-education programs and were recommended by WPU to the State of New Jersey for certification in their respective fields of study. Two of these scholars completed their degrees in English, and the other completed a degree in music. These data support previous research (Goodman et al., 2008; Wakefield, 2006) and further document the negative effect of high-stakes standardized testing on minority teacher-education candidates.

An analysis of college GPA does not appear to directly correlate with the candidates' ability to pass the Praxis II. Scores on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) for scholars who did not pass the Praxis II or needed to take it several times all fell below the 2008 mean average on the Critical Reading as well as the Mathematics subtests. Two out of the three scholars who have yet to pass the Praxis II required

remedial reading courses upon entrance into the university. One student who took the Praxis II test twice before passing and another who took it five times before passing were also required to take remedial reading courses upon entry into the university.

Educational Implications

The results of this study further contribute to the growing body of research focusing on preparing diverse candidates—particularly those from urban and low socioeconomic backgrounds—to become teachers. One finding that emerged from this study further documents the barrier caused by the Praxis II to the certification of minority teacher candidates. Although the data set in this study is small (only eight participants as of fall 2008), the inability to pass the Praxis II test has prevented more than a third of the highly trained scholars from becoming certified teachers in Paterson, New Jersey, an urban area facing a shortage of both highly qualified and diverse teachers. This study's results support recent research (Goodman et al., 2008; Wakefield, 2006) documenting the negative impact of high-stakes testing on the recruitment of minority teacher-candidates as well as recommendations by the CEE (2005) relating to the misalignment between NCTE standards and Praxis II content exams in English and language arts. The findings further indicate that a correlation exists between whether teacher candidates need to a take remedial reading courses upon entry into the university and their ability to pass the Praxis II. Moreover, all students who did not pass the Praxis II had SAT scores in critical reading and math that were significantly lower than the 2008 mean scores.

All scholars participating in the PT4T program hail from public schools in Paterson, New Jersey, a district classified under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) act as being "in need of improvement." Many of the same barriers that these scholars faced while trying to enter college (e.g.,

standardized test scores) likely continue to be barriers as they pursue careers as teachers. The fact that the Praxis II subject area tests are, for the most part, multiple-choice, content-focused reading tests that measure a candidates' low-level knowledge of kindergarten through twelfth-grade curriculum suggests that, although teacher candidates who are minorities or come from low socio-economic backgrounds may excel in their subject areas in college, "gaps" in their knowledge and ability to perform well on standardized tests may continue to exist due to the inequitable schooling they received while attending "failing" schools. It is the hope that these findings will further support the need to question as well as research the validity of high-stakes testing in the area of teacher preparation, particularly in regards to minority teacher-candidates.

Recommendations

Based on the current study, several recommendations have emerged. All potential teachers from under-represented groups should be carefully monitored, mentored, and—when necessary—tutored throughout their college years. Testing students using Praxis II subject area practice tests during every year of college can aid in determining whether gaps exist in the candidates' content knowledge that can be remediated through college-level courses or outside tutoring. In addition, auxiliary reading and writing in content area courses should be considered for candidates who are required to take basic skills reading or writing courses upon entry into the university or who have achieved below-mean scores on critical reading and math SAT subtests. Although the current study is limited due to the sample size, these recommendations—if carried out—could potentially aid the remaining PT4T students attending WPU.

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Table 1

Participant	Race	Gender	Graduation Date	Major/Area of Certification	Experiences in teaching
A	AA	F	May 2006	Psychology / Elementary	Presently working as an elementary teacher in Paterson
B	AA	M	August 2006	English/K-12	Worked as a substitute teacher in Paterson and now works in higher education
C	AA	F	May 2007	History/ Elementary	Worked as a substitute teacher in Paterson but was not hired full time due to lack of vacancies
D	AA	F	May 2008	English/K-12	As of Spring 2008 was working as a substitute teacher in Paterson
E	AA	F	August 2007	Music/K-12	Working as a long-term substitute teacher outside of Paterson
F	H	F	January 2008	Physical Education/ K-12	Worked as a substitute teacher for a semester and will be a full-time physical education teacher in Paterson in Fall 2008
G	AA	F	August 2008	Psychology / did not enter education program because she did not meet GPA requirement	None
H	W	F	January 2008	Music/did not pass field experience requirements	None

Table 2

Participant	SAT Scores* (Critical Reading / Math; highest scores reported)	Overall College GPA	Number of Remedial Reading / Writing (No credit courses taken at WPU)	Number of Credits Attempted but Not Earned	Passed Praxis II
A (teaching)	330/400	3.262	None	6	yes (no data available about times taken)
B (did not pass Praxis II)	380/360	2.851	None	3	no (no data available about times taken)
C (working as a substitute in Spring 2008)	370/400	3.006	1 (reading)	15.5	yes (took 5 times)
D (did not pass Praxis II)	340/480	3.019	1 (reading)	none	no (took 5 times)
E (did not pass Praxis II)	450/470	2.809	1 (reading)	20	no (took 4 times)
F (teaching as of Fall 2008)	450/400	3.311	1 (reading)	2.5	yes (took twice)
G (graduated without taking teacher education classes due to insufficient GPA)	540/380	2.844	None	4	yes (took once)
H (did not pass student teaching)	590/520	3.758	None	19	yes (took once)

*While the mean scores on SATs change every year, the 2008 mean score in Critical Reading was 502 and Mathematics was 515 (College Board, 2009)

The New Changing Faces of Urban Teachers and Their Emerging Teaching Belief

Emiel W. Owens
Texas Southern University
owensew@tsu.edu

Holim Song
Texas Southern University
hsong@tsu.edu

Alternative certification programs are changing the face of the teaching profession. Not only have these programs attracted individuals from different disciplines and educational backgrounds, they have also changed the ethnic and gender makeup of the classroom teaching population. This suggests an increase in point-of-view diversity in the teaching workforce which in turn suggests potential opportunities to effect planned variation in the educational experiences of students in urban schools. The current study examines the perceptions of teachers who come from these non-traditional programs. The study also addresses cultural issues related to teacher perceptions of effective classroom learning environments. The results in the present study suggest that a majority of the teachers surveyed perceived that a classroom that supports cooperative or group activities is an effective classroom environment. Finally, there were significant differences in teacher perceptions of effective teacher practices across teacher ethnicities. These differences, if viewed as resources, may manifest themselves in the form of pathways toward enriching the educational experiences of students in urban schools.

Introduction

In an effort to address teacher shortages many states have established and implemented alternate routes to teaching programs to attract individuals from other disciples into the

teaching profession. Alternate routes to teaching programs or alternative certification programs (ACP) as they are commonly called, offer individuals with no teaching backgrounds opportunities to become certified teachers by meeting state requirements through nontraditional means. These programs have successfully attracted college graduates who ordinarily would not have become teachers. In a recent national survey of alternative certification program graduates, about 50 percent indicated that they would not have become teachers if there had not been an alternative certification program (National Center for Educational Information, 2005). Furthermore, 20 percent of those surveyed said they would not have gone back to college to obtain a teaching certificate.

Review of Literature

Alternative certification programs are changing the face of the teaching profession. Not only have these programs attracted individuals from different disciplines and educational backgrounds, they have also changed the ethnic and gender makeup of the classroom teaching population. Traditionally, the teaching profession has been dominated by females of European decent (National Center of Education Information, 2005). However, in recent years ACP program have attracted more males and minorities into the teaching profession. This is especially true in ACP programs that support urban schools where there has been a 20 percent increase in minority enrollment (National Center for Alternative Certification, 2006). Hispanics represent the fastest growing ethnic group among urban school teachers, nevertheless the number of African Americans and East Asians enrolling in ACP programs have also increased drastically. This suggests an increase in point-of-view diversity in the teaching workforce which in turn suggests potential opportunities to effect planned variation in the educational experiences of students in urban schools thus

enriching the educational experiences of students in urban schools.

While ACP programs have had a major impact on reducing teacher shortages in urban schools, research studies continue to raise issues with these programs (Berry, Hoke, & Hirsch, 2004; Earley, Goldberg, & Huie, 2005; National Center for Alternative Certification, 2006). A major issue traditionally cited is that pre-service teachers enrolled in ACP programs are allowed to teach in classrooms before completing their certification. Moreover, the argument goes on, many of the ACP teachers lack sufficient training in pedagogy theory and classroom management skills (National Center for Alternative Certification, 2006; Earley et al., 2005). ACP teachers must rely on perceptions about learning in the role of practicing educators. The effect is that these teachers generally become frustrated and over fifty percent will leave the teaching profession in their first five years (National Center for Educational Information, 2005).

Recently research has begun to examine the critical role that teacher perceptions of how classroom instruction and student learning contribute to or influence student outcomes. Researchers have found relationships between teacher perceptions and instructional practice (Gordon, 2003). It, specifically, was found that teacher perceptions are directly manifested in practice in classrooms. For example, a teacher who perceives that the classroom environment should be a competitive setting is more likely to belief that students need to be aggressive in his/her classroom to be successful. It is also known that teacher perceptions about learning must coincide with student perceptions in order to maximize learning. What is not known are the perceptions of teachers who come from a non-traditional program? This is primarily because research on teacher perceptions has primarily focused on teachers who come from traditional teacher education programs (Earley et al., 2005). The extent to which cultural

issues inform the perceptions of the ACP teacher is also not known. Are, for example, certain teacher perceptions unique to different ethnic groups? To answer these questions the present study will examine perceptions of first year teachers who are currently enrolled in ACP programs. Furthermore, the current study will compare these perceptions across five different ethnic groups to see if there are cultural issues that are associated with teacher perceptions of learning and effective teaching.

Method

The data used in the present study were collected over a four year time span from teachers enrolled in an Alternative Certification Program. The teachers were all enrolled in an ACP program sponsored by a large urban school district located in the Southwest. The sample was limited to new teachers**;** in this case only those teachers who were in their first semester in the classroom. Furthermore, only secondary teachers were included in this sample. The total sample for the present study included 624 new secondary teachers. Finally, all of the sample teachers were enrolled in courses in order to complete state certification requirements. The ethnic make-up of the sample was 258 European-Americans, 158 African Americans, 81 Hispanic, 94 East Asian (Vietnam, Taiwan and Filipinos decent) and 48 South Asian (India decent).

The instrument used in the present study is a modified version of the Akins (1998) "Emerging Teaching Scale" survey. The instrument measures teacher perceptions about student learning and effective teaching practices. The survey consists of statements related to student learning and effective teaching practices. Individuals were asked to indicate if they agreed or did not agree with each statement by answering yes or no. One statement for example asked the teacher to indicate yes or no to the statement "Learning takes place most effective under conditions in which students are working cooperatively with one another." The percent of teachers who

agreed or did not agree with the statements included in the survey were compared across five different ethnic groups. To examine if significant differences existed in percentages, a chi-square test was performed. The statistical advantage of using a chi-square test is that it is distribution free.

Results

Table 1, Teachers' Perceptions of Student Learning and Effective Teaching Practices, reports the overall percentages of teachers who agreed with each of the items used to measure perceptions of how students learn. The highest percent of agreement on how students learn was "Learning takes place most effective under conditions in which students are working cooperatively with one another." The overall percentage of teachers who agreed with this statement was about ninety four percent. About ninety three percent of all teachers in the sample agreed with the two statements, "Students can learn more by sharing their ideas rather than by keeping their ideas to themselves" and "Ideas of other students are useful for helping another student understand the content of lessons." Fifty four percent of the teachers agreed with the statement "To do well in my class, students must be assertive." About 38 percent of the teachers in the sample agreed with the two statements, "Most of what students learn is learned from other Students" and "Most of what students learn is learned from their teacher." Twenty-six percent of the teachers agreed with the statement "Most of what students learn they learn on their own." Less than 20 percent of the teachers agreed with the remaining three statements, "Students learn more by working on their own rather working with others" "Learning takes place most effectively under conditions in which students are working independently of one another " and "Most of what students learn is learned from books." The percentages were 18.2%, 14.3% and 13.4% respectively.

Table 2, Teachers Perceptions of Student Learning and Effective Teaching Practices, reports the percent

differences on the measures of student learning perceptions across ethnic groups. The results indicate that several significant differences existed. There was a significant difference ($p < .001$) in the percentages of teachers agreeing with the statement, "Most of what students learn, they learn on their own" across the five ethic groups. The chi-square value associated with these differences was 53.2. Fifty percent of Hispanic teachers and South Asian native teachers agreed with this statement. Thirty two percent of the African-American teachers agreed with this statement compared to about thirteen percent of the European-Americans and East Asian decent teachers. Statement two, "Students learn more by working on their own rather working with others" also indicated there was a significant difference ($p < .001$) on how teachers perceived this statement. The chi-square value associated with these differences was 54.2. East Asian teachers had the highest degree of agreement in this statement with about 46 percent of the teachers. A little over 20 percent (21.4%) of the European-Americans teachers agreed with this statement. Less than 10 percent of the Hispanic (8.3%) and African-American (4.8%) teachers agreed with this statement. The statement, "Learning takes place most effectively under conditions in which students are working independently of one another" produced significant differences ($p < .001$) in agreement across the five ethnic groups. The chi-square value associated with these differences was 65.5. Fifty percent of South Asian decent agreed with this statement compared to about 27 of the East Asian teachers. Fifteen percent of the African-American and about seven percent of the European-Americans teachers agreed with this statement. Finally, none of the Hispanic teachers agreed with this statement. There was a significant difference ($p < .001$) on teacher perceptions of the statement, "Students can learn more by sharing their ideas rather than by keeping their ideas to themselves" across the five ethnic groups. The chi-square value associated with these differences was 30.6. One-hundred percent of the South Asian teachers agreed with this

statement. More than ninety percent of the European-Americans (97.4), Hispanic (92.3%) and East Asian (91.7%) agreed with this statement. Slightly over eighty percent (82.6%) of African-American teachers agreed with this statement. There was a significant difference ($p < .001$) in agreement levels on the statement, "Learning takes place most effectively under conditions in which students are in competition with one another." About one-third of the Hispanic (36.4%) and African-American (33.3%) teachers agreed with the statement. Twenty-five percent of the East Asian teachers compared to 19.4% of the European-Americans teachers. None of the East Asian teachers agreed with the statement.

The largest reported chi-square value indicating significant differences ($p < .001$) exist among the five ethnic groups was on the statement, "To do well in my class, students must be assertive." One hundred percent of the South Asian teachers agreed with this statement compared to only one-third of the European-Americans teachers. About eighty two percent of the East Asian and seventy three African-American teachers agreed with this statement. Forty percent of the Hispanic teachers agreed with this statement. There was a significant difference on the percentages of agreement on the statement "Most of what students learn is learned from other students." About 64 percent of the Hispanic compared to 23 percent of the European-Americans teacher agreed to this statement. Fifty two percent African American, 43 percent of the South Asian and 27 percent East Asian teachers agreed with this statement.

Perceptions of the final two statements, "Most of what students learn is learned from their teacher" and "Most of what students learn is learned from books" indicated significant differences ($p < .001$) exist. On the first statement sixty percent of South Asian teachers compared to eighteen percent of East Asian teachers agreed with this statement.

Forty five percent of the African American teachers, followed by thirty seven percent European-Americans teachers, and a little over thirty six (36.4%) of the Hispanic teachers agreed with this statement. On the second statement, "Most of what students learn is learned from books" twenty five percent of the East Asian teachers agreed with this statement. Twenty percent of the South Asian teachers followed by nineteen percent of the African-American teachers and a little above nine percent (9.4%) of the European-Americans teachers agreed with this statement. Finally, none of the Hispanic teachers agreed with this statement.

The statement, "Learning takes place most effective under conditions in which students are working cooperatively with one another" indicated differences ($p < .01$) exist in the percent of teachers that agreed with statement across ethnicity groups. European-Americans, Hispanic and East Asian teachers reported above ninety percent levels of agreement with this statement. Their reported percentages were 97.4%, 91.7% and 92.9% respectively. Eighty seven percent of the African-American teachers and 85.7% of the teachers of South Asian decent agreed with this statement.

Discussion

Teacher shortages in urban school will continue to be a major problem until teacher preparation programs are able to better train teachers for the environment they serve. Urban educators are faced with many unique situations to be successful in their school environment. These professionals must understand the institutional factors that exist in high-need and typically under funded schools and school districts that can undermine students' access to excellent and equitable education opportunities (Banks, 2006). For instance, climates of high expectation are routine in schools that serve children from middle income and European-American backgrounds (Brophy & Good, 2000; Wilen, 2004). The opposite is true in schools that serve lower income urban learners from ethnic

groups of color (Wilen, 2004). These schools are typically characterized by climates of low expectation (Edmonds, 1979; Wilen, 2004). Research has shown a high positive correlation between teacher expectation and student performance (Brophy & Good, 2000; Wilen, 2004). The first important finding in the present study relates to the descriptive results that summarize teacher perceptions about student learning. The results in the present study suggest that majority of the teachers surveyed perceived that a classroom that supports cooperative or group activities is an effective classroom environment. This is of particular interest because research has shown that cooperative education enhances classroom instructions by providing practical work experience that is relevant to students' career goals (Kerka, 1998). Furthermore, cooperative learning also capitalize on the heterogeneous student bodies of most urban schools (Brophy & Good, 2000). Finally, the teachers in our sample did not perceive environments that emphasize competition nature. This is also of particular interest because research recommends that to help urban students achieve, the teacher must help them believe they can become good students (Wilen, 2004). Moreover urban students do better in a more nurturing environment that do not create in classroom rivalries (Stone, 2002).

Another important finding from this study was that teacher perceptions of effective teacher practices significantly differed across teacher ethnicities. African American, South and East Asian teacher perception of an effective learning environment was that students need to be assertive in their classroom to be successful. European-American and Hispanic teachers on the other hand in large disagreed with this statement. Hispanic and South Asian teachers were more likely to agree with the statement what students learn they learned on their own compared to European-American, African-American and East Asian teachers. A larger percent of African-American and Hispanic teachers agreed with the

statement what students learn is learned from other students compared to their European-American, East and South Asian counter parts. More South Asian teachers agreed with statement that what students learn they learn from their teacher. Likewise, more from other South Asian teachers agreed with statement that effective learning take place when students are working independent of one another.

Although the findings in the present study suggest that several significant differences exist among ACP teachers across ethnic groups, further correlational and experimental research is needed to verify these results. Other research issues that remain to be investigated in this area include examining; (a) teacher perceived ideal classroom learning environment that should exist in secondary classroom, (b) whether these perceptions are and should be consistent across all content areas, (c) how these perceptions relate to students of different cultures and, (d) extents to which gender factors may be associated with ACP teacher perceptions. Future studies should also attempt to examine ACP teacher perceptions and associate them with student achievement, especially in urban settings where many more students are at risk of dropping out and not furthering their education. These and similar issues should be examined so that practitioners and researchers may continue to understand the impact of teacher perceptions in order to improve ACP teacher preparation programs.

While the findings in the present study suggest research issues that remain to be investigated, they also suggest policy and practice that may result in meaningful learning experiences for students in urban schools. Our findings suggest that personnel placed strategically and appropriately would result in improved outcomes of schooling for urban learners. Teachers, for example, who do not believe in and do not practice cooperative learning or competition,

should not be assigned to teach urban learners who would benefit from these methodologies.

Three items found in Table 2, below, among others, suggest policy. Note the disparity between the responses of Black versus white teachers with respect to the following three items:

- Learning takes place most effectively under conditions in which students are in competition with one another.
- To do well in my class students must be assertive.
- Most of what students learn is learned from other students

Clearly urban students who are competitive, assertive and who learn from one another who are assigned to teachers who lack agreement with these three statements are in less supportive learning environments than would be the case if they are assigned to teachers who agree with these statements. Thus our results suggest policy that mitigates against mismatch between teacher and student proclivities and behavior such as those suggested by the examples pointed to here.

A third implication is related to the instructional program. If it is important for teachers to be responsive to the nature and needs of urban students, it follows that those teachers must align the pace, structure and content of instruction with the background, training and experience brought to the school by urban students. This necessarily means that teacher perceptions of student learning and effective teaching practices of some urban teachers may be in need of modification would they be prepared by training and experience to provide meaningful learning experiences for students in urban schools.

Summary

Alternative certification programs are changing the face of the teaching profession. Not only have these programs attracted individuals from different disciplines and educational backgrounds, they have also changed the ethnic and gender makeup of the classroom teaching population. This suggests an increase in point-of-view diversity in the teaching workforce which in turn suggests potential opportunities to effect planned variation in the educational experiences of students in urban schools. The current study examines the perceptions of teachers who come from these non-traditional programs. The study also addresses cultural issues related to teacher perceptions of effective classroom learning environments. The results in the present study suggest that a majority of the teachers surveyed perceived that a classroom that supports cooperative or group activities is an effective classroom environment. Additionally, there were significant differences in teacher perceptions of effective teacher practices across teacher ethnicities. These differences, if viewed as resources, may manifest themselves in the form of pathways toward enriching the educational experiences of students in urban schools.

Table 1
Teachers Perceptions of Student Learning and Effective Teaching Practices

Most of what students learn, they learn on their own.	**Yes** **No**	**26.3%** **73.7%**
Students learn more by working on their own rather than working with others.	**Yes** **No**	**18.2%** **81.8%**
Learning takes place most effectively under conditions in which students are working independently of one another.	**Yes** **No**	**18.3%** **81.7%**
Ideas of other students are useful for helping students understand the content of lessons.	**Yes** **No**	**92.5%** **7.5%**
Students can learn more by sharing their ideas rather than by keeping their ideas to themselves.	**Yes** **No**	**92.6%** **7.4%**
Learning takes place most effective under conditions in which students are working cooperatively with one another.	**Yes** **No**	**93.5%** **6.5%**
Learning takes place most effectively under conditions conditions in which students are in competition with one another.	**Yes** **No**	**22.5%** **77.5%**
To do well in my class, students must be assertive	**Yes** **No**	**54.8%** **45.2%**
Most of what students learn is learned from other students	**Yes** **No**	**38.8%** **61.2%**
Most of what students learn is learned from their teacher	**Yes** **No**	**38.2%** **61.8%**
Most of what students learn is learned from books	**Yes** **No**	**13.4%** **86.6%**

Table 2
Teachers Perceptions of Student Learning and Effective Teaching Practices

		AmericanEuropean	AmericanAfrican-	Hispanic	East Asian	South Asian	Chi-Sq
		N=243	N=158	N=81	N=94	N=48	
Most of what students learn, they learn on their own.	Yes No	13.2% 83.8%	32.0% 68.0%	50.0% 50.0%	13.3 % 86.7 %	50.0% 50.0%	53.2***
Students learn more by working on their own than rather than working with others.	Yes No	21.4% 78.6%	4.8% 95.2%	8.3.0% 91.7%	45.5% 54.5%	20.0% 80.0%	54.2***
Learning takes place most effectively under conditions in which students are working independently of one another.	Yes No	7.1% 92.9%	15.0% 85.0%	00.0% 100.0%	27.3% 72.7%	50.0% 50.0%	65.5***
Ideas of other students are useful for helping other students understanding the content lessons.	Yes No	94.3% 5.7%	92.0% 8.0%	92.3% 7.7%	92.9% 7.1%	100.0% 00.0%	3.1
Students can learn more by sharing their ideas rather by keeping their ideas to themselves	Yes No	97.4% 2.6%	82.6% 17.4%	92.3% 7.7%	91.7% 8.3.%	100.0% 00.0%	30.6***
Learning takes	Yes	97.4%	87.0%	91.7%	92.9%	85.7%	17.5**

place most effective under conditions in which students are working cooperatively with one another.	No	2.6%	13.0%	8.3%	7.1%	14.3%	
Learning takes place most effectively under conditions in which students are in competition with one another.	Yes No	19.4% 80.6%	33.3% 66.7%	36.4% 63.6%	00.0% 100.0%	25.0% 75.0%	34.9***
To do well in my class, students must be assertive	Yes No	33.3% 66.7%	72.7% 27.3%	40.0% 60.0%	81.8% 18.2%	100.0% 00.0%	106.8***
Most of what students learn is learned from other students.	Yes No	22.6% 77.4%	52.0% 48.0%	63.6% 36.4%	27.3% 72.7%	42.9% 57.1%	52.7***
Most of what students learn is learned from their teacher.	Yes No	37.0% 63.0%	45.5% 54.5%	36.4% 63.6%	18.2% 81.8%	60.0% 40.0%	20.4***
Most of what students learn is learned from books.	Yes No	9.4% 90.6%	19.0% 81.0%	00.0% 100.0%	25.0% 100.0%	20.0% 80.0%	26.7***

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Cognitive and Affection Reform in Urban Elementary Schools: Listening to the Voices of Children

Jennifer Friend
University of Missouri, Kansas City
friendji@umkc.edu

Loyce Caruthers
University of Missouri, Kansas City
caruthers1@umkc.edu

This heuristic narratological inquiry used video-taped interviews and observations to explore the experiences of 145 urban students in grades one through six who also represented diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The goal of the study was to identify curricular and pedagogical strategies that enhance what students love about school, while diminishing factors they disliked. Digital video recording captured students' voices as "stories about school," which provided thick description for analysis and interpretation. Through heuristic inquiry, the researchers used their personal insights and experiences to identify themes that suggested elementary students in urban schools want instruction that is active and engaging, makes use of their strengths and talents, and involves them in making choices about what and how to learn. They want caring teachers who have high academic expectations and desire to know more about their individual cultures as well as the cultures of other people.

> Most educational reform has devoted more attention to cognitive initiatives that purport to increase the learning outcomes of students with less attention given to affective reforms that seek to listen to the voices of children and their stories about schools. The persistent focus on policies and programs that emphasize thinking ignores the role of emotions or relationships in the educational process. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) federal legislation (2001) with its emphasis on scientifically based research interventions (United States Government Accountability Office, 2006) increases the federal responsibility for student achievement with states responsible for utilizing scientifically based research to develop curricula and assessments reflecting their specific standards. The message in the legislation is clear – schools will be held more accountable for cognitive reform rather than affective reform. We posit that this message translates to: children should be seen (in the context of following instructions and completing academic assignments) but not heard (in the context of value for their authentic voices and lived experiences).

Quality education and improved academic achievement for students must also be supported by policies and practices that encourage educators to connect to the lives of their students, to have high expectations of them, and to interact

with them in ways that build mutually supportive relationships which promote learning. Learning is impacted by both cognitive and social constructions, and becoming instructionally effective requires embracing more than a student's thinking:

> Feelings and actions are also important. We must deal with all three forms of learning. These are acquisition of knowledge (cognitive learning), change in emotions or feelings (affective learning), and gain in physical or motor actions of performance (psychomotor learning) that enhances a person's capacity to make sense out of their experiences. (Novak, 1998, p. 9)

Additionally, pedagogical issues related to affective learning entail understanding the sociocultural nature of learning, or the understanding that cultural context and content impact teaching and learning (Foster, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 2001; Lee, 2006; Pang, 2005; Trumbull, Greenfield, & Quiroz, 2003). Most educators agree that connecting new learning to the prior knowledge of students is a way to acknowledge and value the knowledge and experiences they bring from home and community. Lee (2006) suggested that if we understand that learning increases from making use of prior knowledge, then we must also acknowledge the possibilities of the generative nature of learning and development.

While educators have made some progress in learning about how young people learn, we still face the challenge of including what students bring with them to school in educational reform efforts. Mitra (2005, p. 521) stressed the rich possibilities that undergird reform initiatives that use the voices of students, "partnering with students to identify school problems and possible solutions reminds teachers and administrators that students possess unique knowledge and perspectives about their schools that adults cannot fully replicate.

Therefore, as professors in the academy – representing different cultures, backgrounds, and experiences – we came together in the midst of the current political environment to explore the possibilities of using student voices that reflect experiences and attitudes, often couched in the expressions of what they 'love' and 'hate' about school, in order to explore the value of collaboration with students in the school improvement process. Holfve-Sabel (2006) stated that:

> Attitudes serve as stabilizing factors in understanding similar situations, and also in creating and maintaining the expression of one's identity in the environment. The attitude concept is, in practice and in investigations, often judged as being as important as cognitive variables: the conclusion is that student attitudes may be investigated independently of student achievement. (p. 57)

We both recalled the painful memories of not being heard in schools and actions of educators that promoted our disengagement. The goal of our work was to find a way for children to be seen and heard by adults in schools.

The purpose of this heuristic narratological study was to use video-taped interviews and observations to explore the experiences and attitudes of urban students in grades one through six in order to identify curricular and pedagogical strategies that enhance what students love about school, while diminishing factors they disliked. The central question that guided the study was what do kids love about school and what do they hate about school? The theoretical framework draws upon knowledge, experiences, and experimental studies of affective factors related to academic achievement and high expectations, narrative and storytelling in the school reform process, and voice in the context of school experiences of students in urban elementary school settings.

Theoretical Framework

Suppression of the Personal

Most educators agree that affective factors are important dimensions of the teaching-learning process. However, the suppression of personal experiences within schools and teacher education often contributes to the absence of reflective practices, relationships, and overall caring which reproduces technocratic and corporate ideologies that sustain the official narrative of culture (e.g., Gay, 2003; Irvine & York, 1995; McLaren, 2003). Within such an environment, low expectations for academic success and deficit thinking are likely to influence educators' decisions about policies and instructional programs. We expect to teach students who are pliable and manageable; and, when students do not meet our expectations, they are often viewed as difficult to teach. Seelye and Seelye-James's (1995) study of classrooms in the United States revealed a hidden agenda of five rules that are consistently embedded into teachers' management plans: (1) Do what the teacher says, (2) Live up to teacher expectations for proper behavior, (3) Stick to the schedule, (4) Keep busy, and (5) Keep quiet and keep still.

The expectations of teachers frequently are based on the initial achievement of students or knowledge of their past performance. High expectations of teachers are correlated with student achievement and, in some cases, intelligence quotient scores (Ferguson, 1998; Good & Brophy, 1995; Good & Nichols, 2001; Rosenthal, 1994). Expectations for the achievement of culturally diverse students are often depicted in teachers' behaviors toward students. For example, Casteel (1998), analyzing the behaviors of 16 teachers, concluded that these teachers displayed different degrees of approach and avoidance when interacting with culturally diverse students. White teachers called on Black students more often using direct questions, and they received fewer process questions than their White counterparts. A process question requires an extended answer and is often described as a "why" question. Additionally, teachers gave more clues to White students compared to Black

students. White boys received more praise than any other group, while Black boys received less praise than any other group.

> Levine (1995) provided a concrete example of how the hidden curriculum marginalizes students and renders them as "more challenged to teach." He noted that the achievement and exclusivity of the dominant mono-culture lies in a "hidden curriculum," where one has to be White to know the hidden rules for success. The hidden curriculum consists of structures of power and authority, teacher expectations of how students will behave and achieve, and student tracking designed to maintain the dominant culture or status quo.

In schools where educators and community members endeavor to reconstruct their work around children's diverse needs, students' voices are heard and their experiences are supported and expanded by skilled professionals who link affective factors to outcomes such as achievement and behavior. In essence, learning is viewed as a socially constructed act that involves establishing relationships with learners, valuing their diverse backgrounds, and helping learners use their voices to construct meaning of the world.

Narrative and Voice

Narratives focus on voice, testimony, autobiography, memory, and other forms of textual possibilities and "carve out spaces for the embodied voices of the silenced (the stress on the last two letters is important here, since it signifies an active process of control, regulation, and policing) to be articulated" (Apple, 1998, p. x). In this study, we treated the students' interviews as narratives because their responses to

the questions constituted short stories (Chase, 2005; Grbich, 2007) about what they loved and hated about schools; the presumption is most of our conversations are considered stories. Narratology or narrative inquiry allows the researcher to capture the realities of people's lives and the meanings they attached to these experiences. Often associated with the stories people tell of their lives in communities, organizations, schools and other spaces in which they may occupy, narrative might be both a method and the phenomenon of study (Chase, 2005; Clandinin and Connelly, 1994; Creswell, 2007). The similarities and differences between narrative inquiry and stories are explained by Clandinin and Connelly:

> It is equally as correct to say inquiry into narrative as it is to say narrative inquiry. By this we mean that narrative is both phenomenon and method. Narrative names the structured quality of experience to be studied, and it names the patterns of inquiry for its study. To preserve this distinction, we use the reasonably well-established device of calling the phenomenon story and the inquiry narrative. Thus we say that people by nature lead storied lives and tell stories of those lives, whereas narrative researchers describe such lives, collect and tell stories of them, and write narratives of experience. (1994, p. 416)

Shuman (2005) further described storytelling as "an aspect of the ordinary . . . . touted as a healing art . . . a means for transforming oppressive conditions by creating opportunity for suppressed voices to be heard or for creating opportunities to listen to those voices" (p. 5). Storytelling, according to Hollingsworth (1994), is not new, and can be traced to origins such as the:

> ancient methods of teaching and learning from the Greek era of education, . . . in recent theoretical work which suggest that

> personally meaningful knowledge is socially constructed through shared understandings (Vygotsky, 1978); in cultural feminism which emphasizes a holistic and collective orientation to world and work experiences (Gilman, 1988); in feminist epistemology which values considered experience as knowledge (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986). . . and in the critical and contextual relevant nature of the social use of knowledge (Lorde, 1984; Zeichner & Gore, 1990). (p. 6)

Voice enables educators to use their constructed meanings for active engagement in community and to hear what children have to say about school as a foundation for school reform. Voice implies, according to Britzmean (1990), "the individual's relationship to the meaning of her/his experience and hence, to language, and the individual's relationship to the other" p. 14). McWilliam (1994) in her work with pre-service teachers emphasized the importance of legitimizing individual voices, stating, "what is important here is that the pre-service teacher is silent not in the sense of 'having no voice,' but rather in the sense of having no context in which the dissenting voice is legitimated" (p. 71). Similarly, voices of children must be legitimated; their voices must become authentic and valued within the school. Hollingsworth (1994) viewed voice as also linked to an "emerging feminist consciousness" (p. 7) common to feminist research which values the lived experience of others rather than an objective view of experience. Hence, valuing the experiences of children allows educators and community stakeholders to eradicate the attitude that children should be seen but not heard. In this project, the lived experiences of

elementary students were expressed through their diverse voices and captured using video-taped interviews. Schools are one of the few remaining places where people can come together and make meaning of their lives and "the use of narrative, according to Phillion, He, and Connelly (2005) is in response to the recognition of the complexity of human experience in increasingly diversified society" (p. 9). Through listening to the voices of children, we hear their stories.

Storytelling and School Reform

Storytelling is currently viewed as an important tool for professional development, research, and teaching. Hollingsworth (1994), drawing on Michael Connelly and Jean Clandinin's work on narrative inquiry, used collaborative conversation to help teachers understand their common stories about learning to teach culturally diverse students. Wallace (1996) incorporated storytelling as a strategy for broad-based leadership development. Storytelling and dialoguing with colleagues enable them to "explore their feelings, emotions, situations, and events that vividly evoked various aspects of their professional work . . . . through reflection, they constructed meaningful insights based on the shared themes found embedded within their stories" (p. 16). Other educators have used stories to help change the culture of schools and indoctrinate new teachers to the values and norms of the institution (e.g., Jalongo & Isenberg, 1995, Stolp & Smith, 1995; McWilliam, 1994).

As Gruenewald (2003, p. 284) suggested, "my hope is that reading poems and stories about school can help teachers, and others entrusted with the education of children, to begin asking, and living, some fundamental questions, and to rethink the entire proposition of what does, and does not, happen within 'the shutter'd room.'" Becoming an insider in a culture

means learning the cultural stories and the story frames that define it. From this perspective, culture is the master storyteller. Culture influences the telling of our inner stories and how we respond to the stories of others. Unless we are able to adopt the important stories and scripts as our own, we remain outsiders. We used this project to become insiders in the midst of the political rhetoric of No Child Left Behind to apprehend the voices of urban elementary students and the stories they tell about school in order to inform key reform initiatives.

Methodology

Design of Study

The purpose of this heuristic narratological study was to use video-taped interviews and observations to explore the experiences and attitudes of urban elementary students in order to discover common themes that reflect what students love and dislike about school. "Heuristics is concerned with meanings, not measurements; with essence, not appearance; with quality not quantity; with experience not behavior" (Patton, 2002, p. 7). While we self-reflected on the experiences that emerge, we also realized that our own experiences were equally important in that "the other can be understood only as part of a relationship with the self" (Vidich & Lyman, 1994, p. 24). Hearing the voices of participants as they seek to make meaning of their experiences in urban schools is essential to this inquiry. Guided by the theoretical framework and research questions, the study led to the telling of students' experiences which served as data, leading to what Polkinghorne (1995) described as "analysis of narratives" (p. 12) to identify themes to inform the work of educators and other stakeholders in the school improvement process.

Identification of the participants was accomplished through the purposive selection of three elementary schools in a Midwest urban community: one charter school (School A), one traditional urban elementary school (School B), and

one African-centered elementary school (School C). This sampling procedure, generally indiscriminate, was open to schools that provided, explained Strauss and Corbin (1990), the "greatest opportunity to gather the most relevant data about the phenomenon under investigation" (p. 180).

School A is a Title I public charter school emphasizing performing arts that serves 187 students in grades K-8 in the heart of a Latino community in the urban core. Student demographic data for 2007 included 91.4% of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, and racial enrollment percentages of 6.4% Asian, 17.1% Black, 63.1% Hispanic, and 13.4% White. There was a 94.7% attendance rate in 2007. There are 14 teachers and one administrator in the school, with 64.7% of classes taught by 'highly qualified' teachers according to *No Child Left Behind* criteria. State assessment results for 2006 and 2007 demonstrated that all students and subgroups within the school met 'Adequate Yearly Progress' for both mathematics and communication arts (State Department of Education, 2007).

School B is a Title I elementary school that offers a traditional structure and curriculum to 417 students in grades K-5 in an urban region that borders a rural / suburban community. Student demographic data for 2007 included 64.5% of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, and racial enrollment percentages of 6.1% Black, 17.3% Hispanic, 56.1% White, and 10.5% 'Other'. There was a 94.2% attendance rate in 2007. There are 24 teachers and one administrator in the school, with 84% of classes taught by 'highly qualified' teachers. State assessment results for 2006 and 2007 demonstrated that for both mathematics and reading, the school did not met 'Adequate Yearly Progress' and was identified as a 'Title I School on Improvement' for the past two years (State Department of Education, 2007).

School C is a Title I public school with an African-centered curriculum that serves 240 students in grades K-5 in the urban core. Student demographic data for 2007 included 90.6% of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, and a racial enrollment percentage of 100% Black. There was an 89.4% attendance rate in 2007. There are 16 teachers and one administrator in the school, with 100% of classes taught by 'highly qualified' teachers. State assessment results demonstrated that all students and subgroups within the school met 'Adequate Yearly Progress' for both mathematics and communication arts in 2006, and that the school did not meet AYP for mathematics and communication arts in 2007 (State Department of Education, 2007).

All students in grades 1-6 the charter school and in grades 1-5 in the traditional urban elementary school were invited to participate in the videotaped interviews through a letter and consent form that was signed by the parents of the participants. The invitation to participate in the African-centered school was shared with all fourth-grade students, due to a new reading program in the school that did not allow the possibility of scheduling interviews school-wide. Every student in each school site who returned the consent form was included in the interview process. The number of students from each grade level who were interviewed included the following: 20 first-grade, 21 second-grade, 11 third-grade, 38 fourth-grade, 23 fifth-grade, and 31 sixth-grade for a total of 144 student interviews.

Data Collection

The digital video footage captured during the semi-structured interview sessions became the source for qualitative examination of diverse perspectives and description of affective factors related to the students' educational experiences. Semi-structured interviews began with four questions and allowed for more focused, conversational, two-

way communication between the researcher and informants (Merriam, 1998): (a) *What do you love about school?* (b) *What do you hate about school?* (c) *What would you change if you were in charge of the school?* and (d) *What would you like to say to teachers?* As conversations evolved the interviews became more contextualized and reflected the experiences of individual participants.

Additional data included observations in the three schools conducted during functions such as all school activities, recess, and academic programs. The researchers also observed in gathering places for students, such as before- and after-school programs, in the hallways, and in the cafeteria during lunch. The purpose of these observations was to understand the context of urban schools and to validate emerging findings from the interviews. We observed interactions between teachers and students, students and peers, administrators and students, and others. Our observations were guided by the following: (a) What is going on? (b) Is there a definite sequence of activities? (c) How do people interact with each other? (d) How are people and activities connected or related? (d) What do these observations reveal about students' attitudes toward school?

Data Analysis

Guided by the research questions and theoretical framework, we utilized open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) and socio-cultural analysis (Reissman, 2003) to analyze 144 interviews and observations in three urban elementary school sites. Questions were (a) *What do you love about school?* (b) *What do you hate about school?* (c) *What would you change if you were in charge of the school?* and (d) *What would you like to say to teachers?* The coding sequence facilitated the processes of: (a) noticing interesting patterns in the data, (b) marking patterns with code words, and (c) retrieving them for further analysis. Using a conceptual framework, themes emerged

through the theoretical sampling of categories and incidents in the data. Voice, instructional experiences, multicultural content, relationships, and teacher expectations for academics and behavior were the categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) to propose relationships that suggested causal conditions, phenomenon, context, intervening conditions, action/interactional strategies, and consequences. While this process is often viewed by qualitative researchers as a grounded theory approach, the use of the socio-cultural approach and grounded theory helped us explore the "broader interpretive frameworks that people use to make sense of particular incidents in individuals' lives (Grbich, 2007, p. 124). The categories of the conceptual framework, which was expanded in the data analysis phase, were defined as follows:

1. Voice consists of the cultural grammar and background knowledge that students use to interpret and articulate their experiences related to school.
2. Culturally congruent instruction refers to cognitive and affective classroom and school activities that use the knowledge students bring from their homes and communities to extend their learning and to encourage collaborative learning.
3. Multicultural content includes instructional pedagogy and materials which reflect the diversity of cultures within a pluralistic society involving both local and global culture.
4. Relationships, characterized as interactions between teachers and students, students and peers, administrators and students, and others.
5. Teacher expectations for academics and behavior are defined as verbal and nonverbal messages and interactions, originating from the teacher's assessments of students, which may have an impact on the student's expectations about self and learning.

The heuristic nature of this study led to our active engagement in reflecting, discovering, and sharing life experiences; "the researcher then comes to understand the essence of the phenomenon through shared reflection and inquiry . . ." (Patton, 2002, p. 108). In other words, "What is the nature or essence of the experience of learning so that I can now better understand what this particular learning experience is like for these children?" (Manen, 1990, p. 10).

Findings and Discussion

Many students who volunteered to be interviewed were struggling academically and behaviorally. These were students who were challenged by the school's demands, and through their responses to the interview questions they often revealed a greater insight into what is really going on in a school, such as specific stories about bullying, negative relationships with teachers, and instructional practices that seemingly perpetuated students' inability to understand the concepts being taught. Stories about what they loved about school included recess, competitive learning games, reading self-selected books from the library, and fun and challenging math and science activities. Overall, their stories were focused more on affective constructions related to learning than cognitive constructions. Subtle and sometimes overt themes in the observation scripts were similar to those found in the interviews. Our findings have been organized according to the themes of lack of voice, traditional instructional experiences, limited multicultural content, relationships, and teacher expectations for academics and behavior. Surprisingly, there were also individual events and actions of teachers that depicted the theme of transformation, as McLaren (1989) suggested, "a critical and affirming pedagogy . . . constructed around the stories that people tell, the ways in which students and teachers author meaning, and the possibilities that underlie the experiences that shape their voices" (p. 229).

Lack of Voice

Voice is defined in this study as cultural grammar and background knowledge that students use to interpret and articulate their experiences related to school. To be included is to be heard and know that one's opinion counts. Taylor (1994) points out that it is a necessary human need for people to be recognized: "Nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being. Due recognition is not just a courtesy we owe people. It is a vital human need" (p. 26). Our findings suggested there are few opportunities for students' knowledge, thoughts, desires, and opinions to be heard in school reform. The theme of lack of voice countered by expressions of desire to be listened to and heard, were apparent in the interview scripts.

School A:

Sometimes you get in trouble when you didn't do anything…the teachers misunderstood you and you get in trouble until they figure out that you didn't do it. (Fifth-grade student)
The things that I wouldn't keep are the uniforms. I would let kids wear what they want to wear. (Sixth-grade student)
I want chocolate milk every day. (First-grade student)

School B:

Sometimes I don't like how much work they give us. They give us a lot of work, and it over-do's us, 'cause we have a lot of stuff to do at home as well. (Fifth-grade student)
What I don't like about school is when people boss you around. (Second-grade student)

School C:

I don't like other children gettin' yelled at. I don't like me getting' yelled at. (Fourth-grade student)
I don't like wearing uniforms. We want to wear our own clothes. (Fourth-grade student)

Our observations in the three schools yielded similar results. In before and after school programs, the hallways, the

cafeteria, posted documents and artifacts, student programs, and other places students gather within the school we did not observe activities designed to capture or share the voices of students. In the African-centered school, an activity called "Harambee" was conducted each morning which encouraged the students to stand in a large circle in the gymnasium, and clap their hands and share their voices in unison:

> *What I love about school is that every morning we get to have Harambee. Harambee means that we're pulling together, trying to get the day started. The first thing that we say in Harambee is, 'Would you please join me in Harambee,' then we count to three in Swahili. 'I pledge today that I will seek to open my mind, and I will seek and learn new knowledge. I will not harm, fight, or disrespect my fellow brothers and sisters. My body, mind, and the words I speak are clean. I respect my parents, my teachers, and myself. I will use my knowledge to stay in school and make a new and better world. I am great. I am great. I am great. My education will make me even greater.' (School C, Fourth-grade student)*

While we heard the voices of students during Harambee in the African-centered school, the scripted recitation did not provide opportunities nor context, as McWilliam (1994) would say, to legitimize the "dissenting voices" of students.

Traditional Instructional Strategies

The diversity of students in schools calls for culturally-mediated instruction (Hollins, 2008) that consists of the use of culturally mediated cognition, culturally appropriate social situations for learning, and culturally valued knowledge in curriculum content" (p. 148). In other words, according to Hollins (2008) "culture is viewed as the guide for feeling, thinking, and behaving, culture is central to school learning" (p. 14). However, in these three schools the students often spoke of instances of instruction which appeared to be more traditional, characterized by "transmission rather than agency, or mutual discovery by students and teachers" (Nieto, 2002, p. 5).

You have to follow along with your teacher and you can't just do it on your own if you already know what you're doing. (School B, Fifth-grade)

We discovered that many of these urban children liked having choice and expressed a love for learning. Many students spoke of having free choice for reading and going to the library instead of being given books to read.

I just love to learn! (School A, First-grade)
I love to learn new things. (School B, Second-grade)

Student engagement with classroom assignments often depends on the extent to which teachers integrate students' personal ideas and concerns with teaching and provide them more choices (Strong, Silver, & Robinson, 1995). Students expressed a desire for learning activities in the form of games, such as competitive learning activities like spelling bees, spelling baseball, math baseball, or holding up the answer to science questions to see who gets the most points.

In School B, we observed a program called "Rocket Math," where the students competed against themselves. It was a situation where they could chart their own progress and the students were trying to improve each time. A lot of the students at that particular school, when asked what they love about school, would say, "*Rocket math*!" These findings are contradictive of the pervasive stereotypes that often depict urban children as unmotivated and unengaged (Williams, 2003).

An area that NCLB has affected is the amount of time devoted to recess and other areas such as the arts, viewed often as non-essential to the 'academic core.' According to a study by the Center on Education Policy (2007), schools reduced allocated time for recess from 184 minutes per week prior to NCLB, to 144 minutes per week in 2007. Many of the

students in this study said that they didn't like the "*short time of recess*" and mentioned having only five or ten minutes to eat lunch. Students in the older elementary school grades remembered having more time for recess in the primary grades, and were becoming more and more burned out by reform initiatives in their schools that communicated purely cognitive approaches that focused on "drill and kill." They talked about changing school so that there would be more time for daily recess:

> *Sometimes, well this year, we've started to stop having recess, which is kind of like a time to let your brain go and just talk to your friends. Now we only have it at lunch and at the end of Fridays, so now we're just constantly in education. I mean, it's pretty cool, but then it's also a thing that you really just want to kind of take a break from learning for a little bit. (School B, Fifth-grade)*

Valuing Diversity and Multicultural Content

Current research suggests that culturally responsive teaching with its emphasis on home, school, and community connections not only helps students understand the school curriculum, but also promotes literacy development (Hollins, 2008; Leftwich, 2002; Moll, 1992; Nieto, 2002; Schmidt, 2005; Tharp & Dalton, 1994).

Our findings in this area suggested most students, with the exception of the African-centered school, were not exposed to multicultural content. However, students made connections to affective dimensions of learning --- who they were and what they learned in their homes and communities and desired to see elements of this identity reflected in the school's curriculum and pedagogy.

> *I would play games with kids so they can understand. 'Cause when my mom was younger, she said that they had spelling games and math quizzes class against class to help us with our math test. I think that helps them learn better. (School C, Fourth-grade)*

In the African-centered school, students connected multicultural content to cultural identity. We were particularly impressed by the perspective of a fourth-grade female student in the African-centered school related to multicultural content:

> *Yes we are learning about ourselves and feeling good about our own cultural identity, but I also want to learn more about other cultures*.

We observed a project at this school where students were asked to investigate an Egyptian historical figure, and then dressed as this person to give a presentation for the class. The principal explained that in curriculum related to ancient history of the western world, Egypt is typically taught as part of the countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea along with Greece and the Roman Empire. In the African-centered school, the curriculum presented Egypt as a part of a unified history of Africa. She stated that often students in the United States who are of African descent do not identify with the pharaohs of Egypt and the rich cultural and linguistic traditions, and that the intent of this project was to encourage the students in the school to see this as part of their proud heritage. An absence of multicultural education in preparatory programs may contribute to teachers and principals who are "less aware of the connection between affirming diversity and student achievement" (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006) which serves to continue to widen the achievement gap in schools.

Relationships

The importance of having positive relationships with teachers and other adults in school was especially valued by students. A male fifth-grade English Language Learner (ELL) student talked about "*getting in trouble when you didn't do anything*". He struggled to express his frustration with getting in trouble, and the teacher finding out later that "*you didn't do*

anything," and never being heard when he tried to explain his perspective of the incident.

We cannot communicate this finding of the critical need for positive relationships with teachers any better than it was expressed by students:

> *Some kids…they struggle, like I struggle in a lot of things. And, it's just that the teachers, sometimes they want everything to be perfect. But kids…can't…always…make…everything…perfect. (School A, Sixth-grade)*
> *In our school we have good teachers…(*pauses*)…well some. (School A, Fifth-grade)*
> *In our class, we like giving the teacher advice and ideas. And she'll be like (*smiling*), "Yeah!"(School C, Fourth-grade) I don't like when kids get in trouble in the cafeteria and they have to stand up against the wall. And they have to let their teacher see them be embarrassed. (School C, Fourth-grade)*
> *Sometimes the teachers, if you be nice to them, they'll be nice to you. (School A, Third-grade)*

The skills needed for teaching are the same skills needed for parenting. Teachers must believe that other people's kids are worthy of teaching. Lisa Delpit's (1988) work is instructive here in that educators must value other folks' kids like they would value their own kids, and teach other people's kids like they would teach their own.

Students also wanted to have positive relationships with their peers. They hated to see kids fighting with one another and bullying in school. Listening to the voices of children demonstrated that at one of the three school sites, a higher percentage of students shared that they disliked bullying, signifying that there was an issue of concern on the part of the students that needed to be addressed by the adults in the school.

> *I don't like it when people be mean to me. (Fourth-grade)*

People calling me names, like people last year called me fat on the bus and stuff. (Fifth-grade)
Last year there was this one kid who kept calling me ugly and it really did not make me feel good. (Fourth-grade)
I don't think that people should be left out just because they're different, and then get made fun of for it. And I know how it feels, because ever since the end of first-grade people started picking on me. And I don't want other people feeling that way, after knowing how it feels. (Fifth-grade)
We even have a no bullying pledge, but that's not helping much because a lot of people are still getting bullied. (Fourth-grade)

Teacher Expectations for Academics and Behavior

Older students, fourth and fifth graders, did not feel that teachers had high expectations for academics and behaviors and felt that differentiated instruction and active engagement would lead to higher academic expectations:

We should have things happen more, like different kinds of projects that we can do that would make us happy. Like activities - like science experiments. Well, we do experiments, but sometimes they're not as fun as we think they're gonna be. (School B, Fifth-grade)
We did a science project about cells. The boys had to make a plant cell and the girls had to make animal cells by theirselves. I made mine out of clay and brown sugar with different parts of the animal's body. (School B, Fifth-grade)
I think that teachers should sometimes throw in lessons that are more interactive to make them more interesting. Like, say, in science class, you could do more experiments. (School A, Fourth-grade)

Some students described the desire for individual work and respect for the individual with regard to behavioral expectations:

The teacher wants everybody to do the same paper at the same time. Even if you want to get on with it, you have to [complete the task] with the teacher and class as a whole. (School B, Fourth-grade)

> *What I don't like is that sometimes the teacher treats the whole class as a community if somebody acts bad. (School A, Sixth-grade)*

We heard the strong desire in their voices to move forward, rather than to be held back, and to continue with their learning, rather than be involved in consequences for the behaviors of a particular student or group of students.

A chronic problem in the three schools related to the completion of homework assignments by all students. They hated homework and shared concerns about being assigned to work they don't understand. Students readily pointed out that they get help from their parents, but sometimes the parents get it wrong, too. A fifth-grade male student expressed his concern this way:

> *Sometimes my sister be helping me, and my mom – I mean my step-mom, and my dad be helping me. But sometimes…well, they're wrong. (School B)*

During our observations and discussions with the educators in these schools regarding homework, they stated kids in urban schools are "three years behind" already or more. The teachers felt that without drill and practice, such as learning their multiplication tables, the students were going to fall further and further behind. The consensus was that there are not enough hours in the school day for teachers to do what needs to be done to "catch these kids up."

The principal of one of the schools said there is tremendous pressure from parents right now to make sure that the school keeps assigning homework, so kids will be occupied, or engaged, or to help them to learn. Nieto (2002) describes the high risk of academic failure for minority students and students from poverty backgrounds that may motivate such 'drill and kill' daily homework requirements:

> Research over the past half century has documented a disheartening legacy of failure for many students of all backgrounds, but especially children of Latino, African American, and Native American families, as well as poor European American families, and, more recently, Asian and Pacific American immigrant students. (p. 120)

Such practices may accelerate frustration and burnout, and for many kids may contribute to later decisions to drop out of school. As Haberman (1991) would say we feed these kids a constant diet of low level skills and by the time they reach middle school and high school they expect this pedagogy of poverty.

Yet, many of these urban elementary school students, when asked what they would change about school, said they wanted '*harder math'*. This desire for more challenging math and science was heard repeatedly during the student interviews. They wanted to do experiments, and they wanted to do the scientific method.

> *What I like about school is I love to get good grades…I like learning harder math and science. (School C, Fourth-grade)*
> *I like when we do activities, and I like when the whole class is quiet and they're paying attention. And I like when I'm making good grades and being on principal's honor roll. (School C, Fourth-grade)*

Transformation

Our findings also pointed to the theme of transformation, listening to and really hearing the voices of children and identifying possibilities for change or school reform. A few students revealed stories about schools that valued knowledge from home and community which tends to reflect culturally-mediated instruction, a blending of cognitive and affective dimensions of learning. This finding suggests the transformation of traditional schooling practices. A sixth-grader quietly spoke about his experiences with math and a more personalized connection to writing --- which he viewed as a special talent:

I like math, because I am sometimes good at math; sometimes I am not. And I like writing, and my teachers be saying that I am really talented at writing, 'cause sometimes the writing comes from my heart, and I express stuff. (School A)

The principal of School A was interested in following up on many of the students' suggestions from the interviews, and she added permanent student roles to the board of directors which governs the school.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of the study reflected the meaning and biases of our personal and professional experiences. As researchers, representing difference cultures and backgrounds, we viewed this project as a way to incorporate self and narrative for school reform. Yet, at the same time, we were both involved in the other discourse of changing schools using the old story, one with a predominant focus on the cognitive tasks related to standards, curriculum, and "fixing the children" in urban schools. Semi-structured interviews, "an extension of constructions developed by the inquirer" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 185), peer examination, and outside the field review verified emerging themes in the data, contributing to inter-coder reliability (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

We used our constructed and contested meanings of the terrain of urban schools to understand the participants. However, it is only through ongoing meaningful dialogue with the children that the acts, meanings, intentions, motives, contexts, situations, and circumstances of actions become real for both the researcher and the participants. We also acknowledge the oversimplification of the assumption that listening to the voices of elementary children will promote substantial changes in schools, specifically the urban schools

comprising this study. All stakeholders, including state and local policy groups, higher education institutions, community members, administrators, teachers, parents, and students will have to collaboratively work with others to dispel the attitude that children should be seen but not heard. Using the voices of children, especially younger students, in school reform requires structural changes that value learning as consisting of both cognitive and affective constructions.

Conclusion and Implications

Findings suggested that elementary students in urban schools want to be seen (in the context of following instructions and completing academic assignments) and heard (in the context of value for their authentic voices and lived experiences). They want instruction that is active and engaging, makes use of their strengths and talents, and involves them in making choices about what to learn and how to learn. They want caring teachers who have high academic expectations and desire to know more about their individual cultures as well as the cultures of people. Urban elementary students in this study hated homework, especially when homework was given as new learning instead of reinforcement of information and skills previously taught. In addition to these findings, the following recommendations for urban elementary school reform that includes students' perspectives were generated from this study:

1. School reform initiatives must involve collaborative opportunities that involve significant numbers of students who are representative of the larger community; an approach that also involves educators, parents, community members, and a variety of other stakeholders to plan and develop programs that are grounded in what we know about learning and human development. Classroom instruction and enrichment or tutorial experience needs to be learner-centered, and access to the learners' diverse perspectives must be systematically implemented to better understand the effectiveness of instruction.

2. Differentiated instruction should be planned for the regular classrooms as well as after school programming. When students feel successful and believe that their needs are being met they are likely to become more engaged in school and out of school. There was little evidence that students' attitudes toward school benefit from 'drill and kill' approaches. More active and project-based learning that meet the developmental needs of kids is required to promote critical thinking skills, problem solving skills, and creativity.
3. Teacher preparation programs and school district staff-development efforts should be closely aligned in order to prepare teachers to implement instruction that values cognitive and affective learning, giving attention to instruction that is culturally-mediated (Hollins, 2008). Teachers must constantly assess student learning, and involve them in planning and delivering instruction. This does not abdicate the teachers' responsibility for teaching and learning, but rather the teacher becomes the facilitator, which involves more complex skills. A reorientation of working relations and values for teacher preparation institutions and school districts would require less time for teacher educators to engage in traditional activities of research and publications and more time for school districts to design programs that provide ongoing collaboration and dialogue with those who prepare teachers --- teacher educators.

Listening to student voices provides the unique opportunity for teachers, school and district administrators, higher education faculty who work in teacher and administrator preparation programs, and other community stakeholders to connect the diverse experiences communicated through the voices of the participants to policies and practices related to both community and school-

based programming. As Cook-Sather (2002) stated, "It is time that we count students among those with the authority to participate both in the critique and in the reform of education" (p. 3). In an age of scientific inquiry, a study such as this also serves to make meaning of research findings conducted utilizing qualitative paradigms. The long-term significance of such research may include policy recommendations for urban elementary schools to improve academic achievement of students from diverse, lower socio-economic backgrounds through inclusion of students' voices in their own educational process, and enhancement of factors that positively influence students' attitudes toward schooling.

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What Happens to Dropouts Who Reenroll?

BethAnn Berliner
WestEd
bberlin@wested.org

Vanessa X. Barrat
WestEd
vbarrat@wested.org

Anthony B. Fong
WestEd
tfong@wested.org

Paul B. Shirk
San Bernardino City Unified School District
paul.shirk@sbcusd.k12.ca.us

This study follows a cohort of first-time ninth graders over five years in San Bernardino City Unified School District (SBCUSD) to describe the magnitude of its dropout problem and the numbers, characteristics, and graduation outcomes of the dropouts who subsequently reenrolled in the district. Additionally, it documents reenrollment issues expressed by district staff and reenrollees. In 2001/02, there were 3,856 first-time ninth grade students enrolled in SBCUSD high schools. By 2005/06, 45.0 percent earned regular high school diplomas, and 35.1 percent dropped out at least once during the five years. Notably, dropping out is not necessarily a permanent outcome, and among the dropouts, 31.0 percent eventually reenrolled in district high schools. The enrollment data show that the majority of reenrollees dropped out in their first year of high school, and that nearly half returned to school for only one year. It also shows variation in student characteristics with ninth grade, Black, non English Language Learners, and female dropouts reenrolling at higher rates than others. The evidence

also indicates that while reenrollees fared better academically before dropping out than permanent dropouts, most, upon reenrollment, did not earn enough credits to graduate. Nevertheless, 18.4 percent of reenrollees earned a district high school diploma by 2005/06. The study also documents what district staff and reenrollees say about policies and practices to improve graduation outcomes for dropouts who return to school. By focusing on reenrollees, this study contributes to shaping policy responses to address the broader dropout challenge.

In 2005/06 an estimated 1.2 million American students did not complete high school with their classmates (National High School Center, 2007; Pinkus, 2006). While there has been considerable recent research (for example, Orfield, 2004) on this national education crisis, much less is known about the number and characteristics of those students who drop out and then reenroll but face nearly impenetrable barriers to graduation. This study focuses on reenrollees in one of California's largest school districts – the San Bernardino City Unified School District (SBCUSD). It combines secondary analyses of student demographic, enrollment, and course-history data with interviews of reenrollees and district staff to reveal the magnitude of the dropout problem and the characteristics and graduation outcomes of the dropouts who reenrolled in district high schools between 2001/02 and 2005/06.

California's graduation rate mirrors the national rate. According to the most recent National Center for Education Statistics data available, the averaged freshman graduation rate of public high school students in 2003/04 was 73.9 percent in California and 75.0 percent nationwide (Laird, DeBell, Kienzl, & Chapman, 2007). In California low graduation rates are especially troubling among American Indian students (49.7 percent), Black students (55.3 percent), and Hispanic students (57.0 percent). In many urban districts, including San Bernardino, these groups have a less than 50 percent chance of graduating (De Cos, 2005).

The extensive literature on dropouts has focused largely on calculating dropout and graduation rates, predicting high school failure and dropout, and evaluating prevention programs. Critical information gaps still exist (Orfield, 2004). As the Waymans studies (2002, 2001) report, there is little research on returning dropouts, their rate of on-time diploma attainment, and the challenges districts face when student dropouts return to school. Data limitations largely account for this information gap and restrict longitudinal investigations of individual students as they entered and exited schools. A further complication was tracking reenrollees as they transferred between schools, districts, and even education systems, including adult education and community colleges.

Currently, there is no national or California accounting of the number of dropouts who reenroll in high school in either their district of origin (where they dropped out) or another district. Some studies on returning dropouts estimate reenrollment and graduation rates based on retrospective survey data. For instance, Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack, and Rock (1987), using the High School and Beyond dataset for 1980-82, found that 17 percent of their sample returned to an education institution. Chuang (1997), using the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth dataset, estimated that nearly 50 percent of the dropouts in the sample for 1979-86 reenrolled by 1986. Using the National Education Longitudinal Study dataset, Hurst, Kelly, and Princiotta (2004) reported that 40 percent of dropouts earned a high school diploma or alternative certificate within eight years of their cohort's expected graduation year.

By examining reenrollees, this study better enables educators and policymakers to understand the dropout problem. It describes the 2001/02 grade 9 cohort in SBCUSD by tracking student dropout, reenrollment, and graduation over five years, adding the increasing common fifth year to the conventional on-time four-year timeframe. Additionally, it

documents the issues the district confronted in reenrolling students who missed weeks, months, even years of schooling. SBCUSD provides a large, urban, high poverty and diverse setting for exploratory research, and this study of one district offers findings on which future research can build.

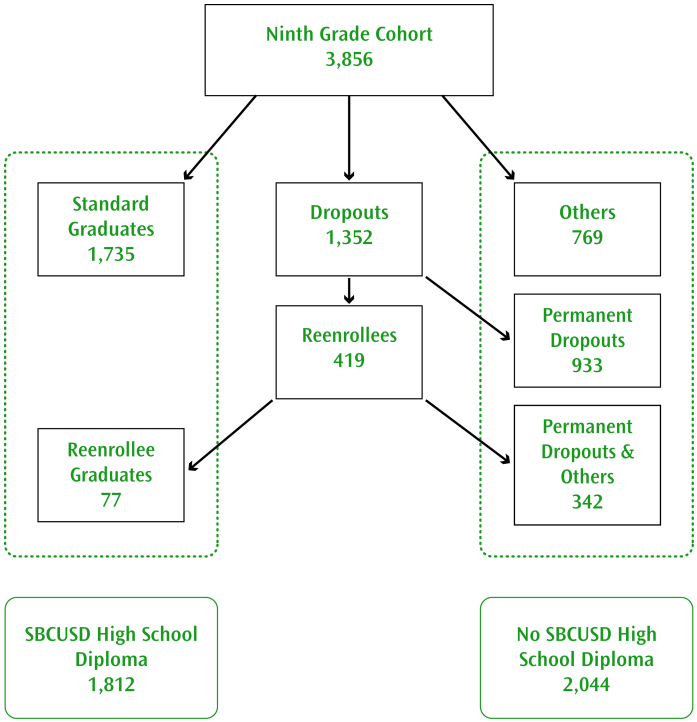
Five research questions guided this study of the reenrollment of dropouts in the SBCUSD between 2001/02 and 2005/06.

1. What is the magnitude of reenrollment?

In 2001/02 there were 3,856 first-time grade 9 students enrolled in SBCUSD high schools (figure 1). Five years later, 1,735 of these students (45.0 percent) had been continuously enrolled in district high schools and had earned regular high school diplomas. But for 1,352 students, more than one third of this grade 9 cohort (35.1 percent) high school was interrupted by at least one dropout event.

Dropping out of high school was not necessarily a permanent outcome (Wayman, 2001; Chuang, 1997). Among the dropouts, 419 (31.0 percent) eventually reenrolled in a SBUCSD high school, and 77 (5.7 percent) graduated from a district high school by 2005/06.

A. Figure 1. Student trajectories



2. What are the characteristics of reenrollees?

This study reports on the personal and academic reasons why students dropped out and reenrolled in high school. In interviews reenrollees described both "push" and "pull" factors that motivated their dropout and return to school. They told of school experiences that push students out of school before graduation—academic struggles, boredom, and limited ways to make up failed course credits—or life circumstances that pull them in directions that stall completion—family crises, employment, pregnancy and gang pressure. These factors were documented in the research literature (Bridgeland, DiIulio, & Morison 2006; Lehr, Johnson, Bremer, Cosio, & Thompson 2004; Rumberger, 2004; Jordan, McPartland, & Lara 1999). In contrast, the literature does not document the reasons why dropouts reenroll in high school. The reenrollees in this study recounted

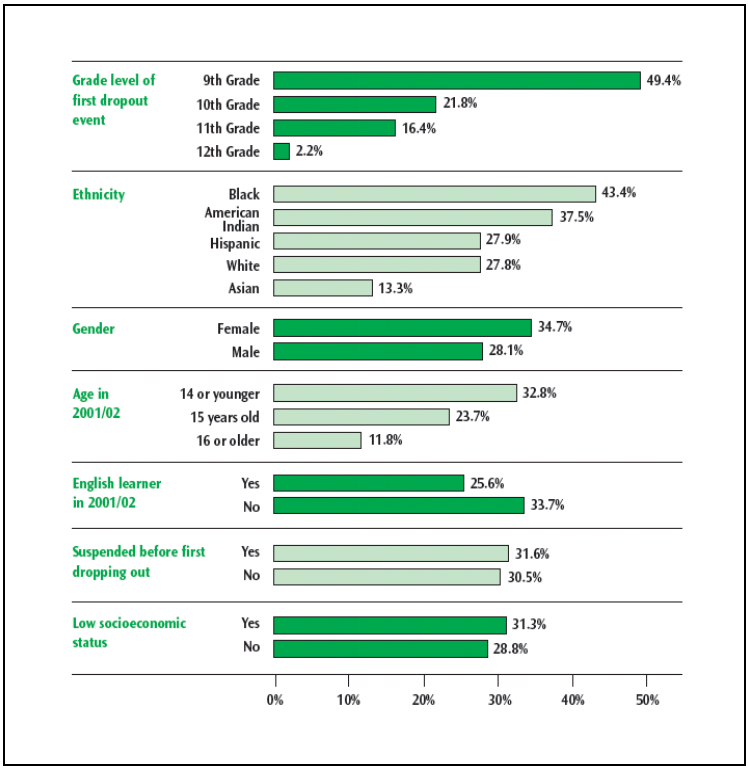
that without a diploma dropouts are often pushed out of the labor market, motivating them to reenroll in school. And principals, teachers, sports coaches, and counselors helped to pull dropouts back to high school by offering to immediately reenroll them in school and by providing counseling and academic assistance on their return.

Reenrollment rates were assessed by various student background characteristics (figure 2). Of particular interest, low reenrollment rates were found for Hispanic students (27.9 percent), English language learners (25.6 percent), ninth graders older than age 14 (23.7 percent for students 15 years old and 11.8 percent for students 16 years and older) and male students (28.1 percent) even though these subgroups were also more likely to drop out than other students. For these subgroups, low reenrollment rates meant that dropout events became permanent exits from SBCUSD high schools during the period covered by the study.

In contrast, the highest reenrollment rates were found for grade 9 dropouts (49.4 percent), Black dropouts (43.4 percent), female dropouts (34.7 percent), and student dropouts not classified as English language learners (33.7 percent). The higher reenrollment rates, especially for grade 9 and Black student dropouts, demonstrate how dropout events can be a temporary interruption rather than a permanent high school outcome.

The reenrollment rates showed less variability by suspension and low socioeconomic status than by the other characteristics analyzed, staying close to the overall 31.0 percent reenrollment rate of the study cohort.

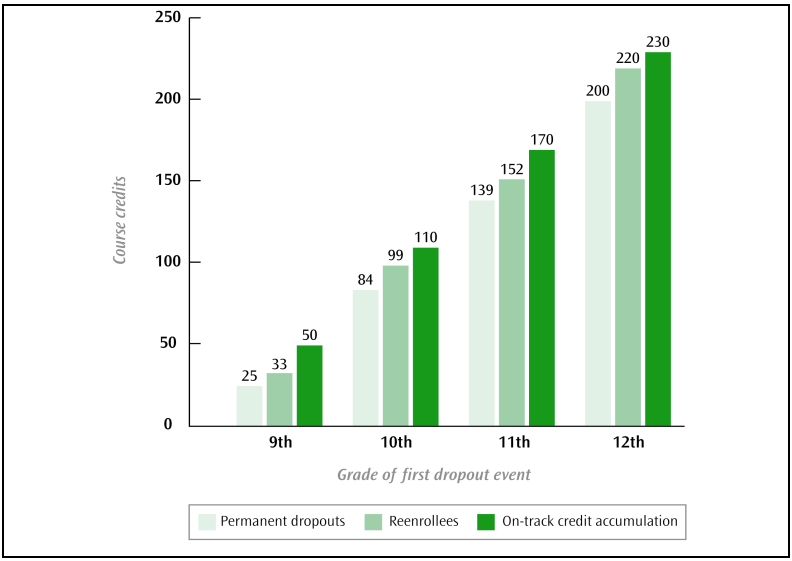
Figure 2. Reenrollment rates



3. What are the academic and graduation outcomes for reenrollees?

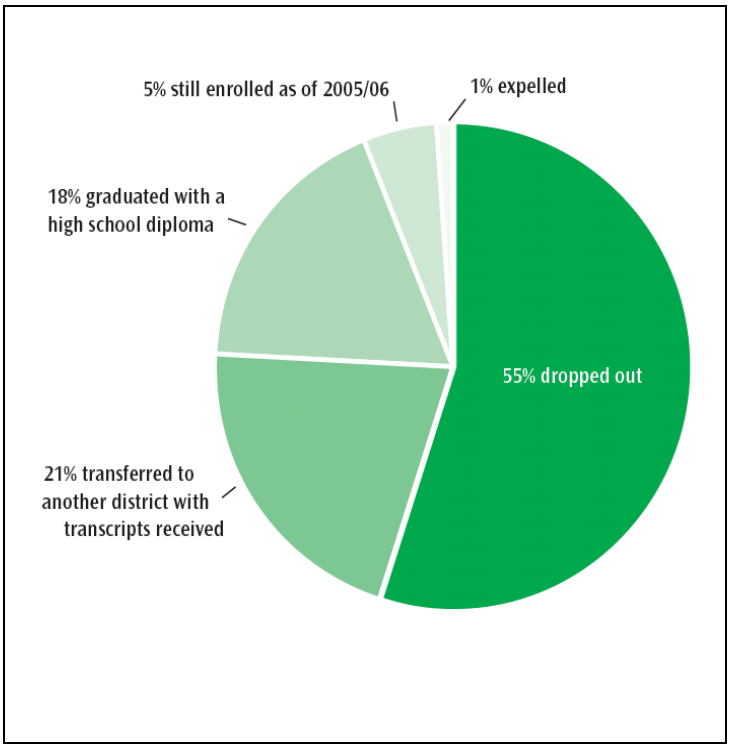
The evidence also indicates that while reenrollees fared better than permanent dropouts before the first dropout event, most did not earn enough course credits upon reenrollment to graduate within the five years of the study. At the time of the first dropout event students who later reenrolled in the district had accumulated more course credits than students who had dropped out permanently (figure 3). Specifically, among student who dropped out for the first time in grade 9, those who eventually reenrolled had accumulated an average of 33 credits at the time of the dropout event as opposed to 25 credits for permanent dropouts —50 credits are needed to advance to grade 10. This pattern remained consistent across all grade levels.

Figure 3. Credit accumulation



After reenrollment, one-third of reenrollees failed to complete even one course and most did not earn enough credits to graduate. Nevertheless, 419 (18 percent) of the SBCUSD reenrollees obtained a high school diploma within four or five years (figure 4).

Figure 4. Reenrollee outcomes



4. What issues did the district confront regarding reenrollment of dropouts?

District staff reported a strong commitment to reenrolling dropouts but cited practical challenges or disincentives to reenrollment. They noted the lack of credit-recovery interventions for credit-deficient students at traditional high schools. Interventions are needed to enable students to accumulate credits lost due to course failures, to accelerate credit accrual to advance grades, and to meet requirements for graduation. While these interventions were available at continuation high schools, demand to enroll in these schools exceeded the district's capacity to serve students requesting a transfer from traditional high schools or reenrolling following a dropout event. Funding concerns were

especially pressing on the district and high schools. State funds, tied to enrollment and attendance rates, were reduced as a result of the unstable enrollment and attendance of dropouts and reenrollees. District staff also explained that the poor attendance of reenrollees—and the likelihood that they will drop out again—made it difficult to meet specific testing, graduation, and other accountability requirements.

5. What do district staff and students suggest for changes in policies and practices?

There are no simple solutions to the dropout problem and reenrollment challenge. Among the considerations for changes in policies and practices identified by the district staff and students were:

- Increase district capacity to offer credit-recovery options at both traditional and continuation high schools;
- Enroll credit-deficient students early in rapid recovery interventions;
- Target additional funds and interventions to follow reenrollees to the schools where they return; and
- Adjust the dropout rate formula so schools are not penalized for students with multiple dropout events.

In conclusion, the research on high school dropouts is virtually silent on reenrollees. Assessing the magnitude of reenrollment and the characteristics of students who vanish from and then reenroll in the education pipeline will provide critical information about how well schools first retain students and then graduate them after they return. A more complete and accurate national description of reenrollees is needed to shape policies and practices that enable high school dropouts to reenroll and graduate.

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Lori Kim, Ph.D.
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