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2012 Yearbook of Urban Learning, Teaching, and Research

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Teaching for Social Justice and Equity in Small Urban High Schools: Challenges and Possibilities

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Abstract

In this study, I explore the role of the “small schools” context on the development and learning of two first-year urban high school teachers with respect to equity-focused teaching. Analysis points to specific ways in which the small schools context fostered teaching for social justice: strong student-teacher relationships, interdisciplinary teaching, and curricular autonomy that allowed for infusion of social justice topics. On the other hand, equity-focused teaching was constrained by alternative conceptions of schooling, teaching, and learning; heterogeneously grouped classes; too much curricular freedom with lack of guidance; and out-of-subject-area teaching. This study highlights a tough set of dilemmas faced by the small schools movement in its efforts to close the achievement gap and presents implications for small schools designers and teacher educators.

Keywords: culturally relevant teaching, social justice, educational change, teaching context, urban education

Walsh (2006) called the achievement gap between White middle class students and poor and working class students of color “the foremost education challenge of our times” (p. 1). Many teacher education programs have responded to this imperative by focusing curriculum on culturally relevant, equity-oriented pedagogy and placing candidates in mentored, diverse field experiences to prepare candidates for closing this gap (Hollins & Guzman, 2005). However, more research is needed on the experiences of these “diversity-prepared” teachers once they are hired, such as how various contextual factors facilitate and constrain their ability to implement effective practices for culturally and linguistically diverse students and to work for equity and social justice in urban schools (Cochran-Smith, 2004).

Many K-12 schools and districts across the U.S. are also enacting various initiatives to address the achievement gap. The national “small schools movement” was launched to address perennial problems of large, impersonal schools, especially in urban environments, although reports of the effectiveness of these small schools are mixed (Hammack, 2008). The small schools movement is not just about size, however. Implicit in the move towards smaller schools are the goals of creating a more personalized learning environment and preparing students more effectively for life. As Benard (2003) asserted, “Small learning communities are an absolute must for closing the achievement gap” (p. 129), including lowering dropout rates (NRC, 2004). Nieto (2000) put forth that “small schools hold out the promise of equality in education because they can promote the demanding but affirming personal relationships essential for high levels of student learning” (p. 13). Small schools and class sizes have the potential to facilitate trust and

relationship development, central elements in equity-based pedagogy.

Many small schools embrace a particular whole-school reform philosophy that influences school culture and practices. A strong sense of mission (as part of school philosophy) is a key factor in increasing student achievement in urban schools (Louis and Ingram, 2003). Some small schools embrace a particular philosophy of helping students learn how to participate in democratic society. Even so, Noguera (2002) claimed that the quality of education and accountability in some small schools are lacking.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the role of the “small schools” context on the development and learning of two novice high school teachers with respect to equity-focused teaching. The participants in this empirical study are Cal¹, a White male career switcher who earned his licensure in secondary English and teaches at “Visions,” an 80-student school, and Kalina, a Latina who is licensed in Spanish and also teaches social studies at “Summit,” a 200-student school. Visions and Summit High are two small, public schools within the same predominantly Latino, low-income, underperforming district in the western United States. The school district is implementing system-wide reform in an effort to boost historically low student achievement and to offer choices in educational approaches to families, students, and teachers. The district’s large, comprehensive high school has been converted into a number of small schools, each one following a particular model of reform. Cal and Kalina both earned their licensure in a program that explicitly prepares teachers for success in diverse urban schools and focuses on culturally responsive pedagogical approaches.

The study’s research questions are: *What is the role of the small schools context in shaping Cal’s and Kalina’s ongoing development and learning as equity-focused teachers? Specifically, what are the roles of (1) the small school size and its related history/philosophy/mission/structures, and (2) curriculum, resources, and materials? How do these factors sustain and constrain the teachers’ ability to enact equity-focused pedagogy?*

Theoretical Framework

Several themes provide the theoretical grounding for this paper. First, literature on the small schools movement (e.g., Ayers, 2000; Ayers, Klonsky, & Lyon, 2000) frames the intended outcomes and goals of small learning communities in terms of equity and social justice. Second, from a sociocultural perspective, development and learning cannot be separated from the activities and social context in which they take place (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Putnam & Borko, 1997, 2000). From this theoretical perspective, individuals and the contexts in which they operate are not viewed as separate constructs. Activity theory directed me to examine the ways in which the philosophy, goals, resources, and structures of these small school contexts influence Cal’s and Kalina’s development and learning as equity-oriented teachers. Third, my analysis of how the teachers’ equity-oriented practice was influenced by context-specific curriculum, materials, and resources is informed by the work of Grossman, Thompson, and Valencia (2001) and Grossman and Thompson (2004) who have examined how curriculum shapes teacher practice. Finally, many publications describe the knowledge, dispositions, and practices that scholars have found to be central in teaching for equity and social justice. This vision of teaching includes demonstrating cultural consciousness (Davis, 2006; Nieto & Bode, 2012; Robins, Lindsey, Lindsey, & Terrell, 2002) and critical awareness (Banks et al., 2005; Cochran-Smith,

¹ All names of people, places, and reform models are pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality of the participants.

1999; Ladson-Billings, 1999, 2001; Moll & Arnot-Hopffer, 2005; Nieto, 2000; Nieto & Bode, 2012; Villegas & Lucas, 2002); maintaining rigorous expectations for students (Jordan Irvine & Armento, 2001; Darling-Hammond, 2000; Nieto, 2000; Nieto & Bode, 2012); teaching in an interactive way (Gay, 2000; Jordan Irvine & Armento, 2001; Villegas & Lucas, 2002) while also teaching requisite skills (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Delpit, 1995; Knapp et al., 1995); using alternative assessments and presentation of material to access students' multiple ways of knowing (Fadel, Honey & Pasnik, 2007); and developing strong relationships with students (Brown, 2002; Johnson, 2006; Jordan Irvine, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

Methodology

I used qualitative, interpretive case study methodology to investigate the research questions. My role as researcher was primarily that of observer. Data sources were drawn from a more comprehensive research project and included (a) field notes, digital audio files, and videotape transcripts from 29 combined hours of observation in the teachers' classrooms throughout a period of 6 months; (b) transcripts from 37 combined hours of semistructured interviews (27 hours with the teachers and 10 with their support providers, such as administrators and instructional coaches); and (c) relevant artifacts, such as school-issued documents, lesson plans, and student-produced work.

Analysis procedures were iterative and recursive and, for this portion of the larger research project, focused predominantly on specific ways in which elements of the small schools activity settings afforded and constrained the teachers' ability to enact equity-focused pedagogy. The process followed Spradley's (1980) domain, taxonomic, and componential analysis and LeCompte and Shensul's (1999) stages of first, isolating specific items and working to label them accurately; second, looking for and articulating patterns and structures; and third, clarifying meaning through "linking together or finding consistent relationships among patterns, components, constituents, and structures" (p. 177). I established trustworthiness of results through triangulation of data sources, adapting previously validated interview protocols (see Peressini, Borko, & Romagnano, 2004), member checking with study participants, peer debriefing, and prolonged observation.

Findings

This study set out to investigate how various factors of the small schools context affected Cal and Kalina's ability to enact equity-focused pedagogy. In this section, I first present what the data analysis revealed about how certain elements of the small schools models represented in this study facilitated teaching practices that focus on social justice and equity. Specifically, I examine teacher-student relationships, interdisciplinary teaching, and curricular freedom to incorporate social justice topics into lessons. Secondly, I discuss how aspects of these small schools models created challenges and tensions for Cal and Kalina as they attempted to enact equity-oriented teaching. Specifically, I examine alternative conceptions of schooling, teaching, and learning; heterogeneously grouped classes; curricular freedom with lack of adequate guidance; and out-of-subject-area teaching.

How Aspects of the Small Schools Model Facilitate Teaching for Social Justice Efforts

Teacher-student bonds and relationships. In alignment with intended outcomes, the small school and class size at Visions and Summit High Schools create an environment that fosters the development of personal bonds between teachers and students, a crucially important aspect of teaching for equity and social justice. The school structures at Visions and Summit allow for extensive teacher-student interaction. For example, at Visions, Cal supervises only 14 students in his advisory group, teaches them together for most subjects, and serves as their advisor for their four years of high school. Kalina's classes at Summit are not quite as small, but she, too, supervises a small advisory group and generally teaches fewer than 20 students per class. The focus on close teacher-student relationships and knowing students deeply as learners are key aspects of engaging students and keeping them in school.

Relationships between students and advisors reside at the core of every aspect of teaching and learning in the Visions model, given the design's philosophy. In an interview at the beginning of the study, Cal shared his view that "teaching for equity... is all about building relationships with kids," and he considered doing so a strength of his. He noted that the Visions "model has really driven home for me what building relationships can do and how those can tie kids to school much more so than they can at a bigger place." Furthermore, he expressed that part of teaching for social justice is "helping kids feel like the school is a welcoming place and a caring place and a place that they want to be in." Cal understands, though, that developing that atmosphere and the tight bonds with students takes a lot of patience. As he described,

I've noticed a lot of my students don't necessarily trust teachers. I mean there are just things that are going on that they're not going to give of themselves until they really feel like "I know this guy and I can trust this guy more than anything." We don't have to be friends, and they don't necessarily have to like me, but they have to know that I'm looking out for their best interests. And that takes some time to develop.

In an interview, when I asked Cal to name what he viewed as the most central features of teaching for equity and social justice, his first response was, "Based on my experience and where I teach, I think that kids just want to be known." Similarly, when I asked him what he thought was important for teachers to understand about the students they teach, he commented,

Geez, *everything*. God, *everything*. I mean, *really*. I mean, you've got to understand where they are academically. You have to understand what their strengths are, what their weaknesses are. In my context, you've got to understand what they're interested in, what they're excited about, what they've struggled with in the past. You've got to know what's going on at home in order to understand why maybe a particular student is acting a certain way. [...] So I mean, you have to know *everything* about your kids, I think. You don't *want* to know everything, but you have to.

An environment of caring and trust is created when students feel known. Cal stated that this safe atmosphere encourages—and is even necessary for—students who live in poverty to make an effort to be present physically at school. He shared several times during interviews that it took him awhile to realize that many of his students have not been socialized into the norm of having good attendance at school. He contrasted this with his own consistent attendance record

as a K-12 student in a predominantly middle class White school, saying,

I was motivated by grades, and I didn't really care if I had a good relationship with the teacher. But for a lot of my kids, the relationship piece is huge. I mean, if they don't make that connection, they're not going to even show up.

Cal's remarks in this section illustrate the ways in which the specific context of Visions' structures shapes the nature of advisor-student relationships, a central facet of equity-oriented pedagogy.

As for Kalina, her commitment and attentiveness to relationships with students and the ways in which the school structures facilitate these bonds are evident throughout many data sources. In many interviews, she expressed her view that relationships with students are at the heart of teaching for social justice and critical pedagogy and will "make or break a classroom." She acknowledged that urban teachers like her need to know "that you're going to be hearing emotional things from the kids, and things that are disturbing, things that are difficult to deal with that are happening in their lives." But, she said, "You're going to have to figure out a way to accommodate them." She continued,

You're going to have to work with second language learners. You're going to have to work with students who've just had a family member commit suicide, or a mother who just went to jail. I mean, these are issues that come up on a regular basis.

Kalina's willingness to work with all students, but to keep her expectations high, connects to Geneva Gay's (2000) characterization of culturally responsive teachers as "warm demanders." In her daily lessons, I witnessed many examples of Kalina demonstrating this disposition. Students know that she holds them to high expectations, but in every class session, I heard her joking around with students, making fun of herself with them, sharing aspects of her own life, using tools such as the *diario*² to give students an outlet to express themselves, and/or helping students make an explicit connection between the curriculum at hand and something they care about in their own lives. Kalina also noted that her relationships with students became stronger when she was able to visit with them and their parents at their homes (something she says she needs to do more often) and attend their extracurricular activities, such as concert performances or basketball games. The small school size and her relatively small student load make it easier for her to engage in these activities.

One thing that Kalina consciously does is to help her students—especially those who might lack social capital, such as her Latino kids—understand how to "navigate through systems" that can create barriers to social mobility. She noted in an interview that especially for her immigrant students, "They know that there are supposed to be better opportunities out there, but they don't know exactly how to get them." So, she makes the effort to explicitly teach them some skills to achieve what they want. The close teacher-student relationships formed within the small schools context makes this possible. As she explained,

² The *diario* is similar to a journal in which students write or draw about things that are important to them, things that are happening in their lives. Kalina collects the *diarios* and responds back to students in writing. Kalina learned this strategy in her pre-service year through observing a veteran teacher.

It's about showing them what the doors are and teaching them, "This is what you're going to face when you get there, and this is what's going to happen when you get there. This is how you answer it, and this is how you deal with it. This is where you can go."

Since Kalina herself benefited from "having a network," she tries to provide some of that for students, giving them her e-mail address, telling them about various resources and people to consult. In this sense, Kalina overtly teaches students some ways to get access to and operate in the dominant culture of power, as Delpit (1995) also describes. Supporting students in this way and helping them build their social capital in a society that typically marginalizes them is one strategy that helps Kalina fight back against what she calls "the system." Analysis of several data sources illustrate that the small school size and student load help make this possible.

Even so, this role comes with an emotional burden, as Kalina described in a number of interviews. As noted before, she is the only Latina on the relatively small Summit High School faculty, and the only fluent Spanish speaker. In that sense, she feels alone in shouldering the responsibility of serving as an ally and a resource from the same linguistic and cultural background as these students. About this struggle, she reflected,

It was tough. It was tough to handle all the emotion and balancing everything else that I was trying to balance at the same time. And I really realized that I need more help in supporting the kids and being there to listen to them. [...] I'm just going to end up exhausting myself even more and I just—my personal life and my family is too important to me, you know? So you just have to make those priorities.

Kalina wants to be there for her students, whom she wants to support in their efforts to navigate through and fight "the system." But she feels torn, because even in the small schools context where she has a fairly small student load, there does not seem to be enough time, energy, and emotional wherewithal to do everything important: attend to her students as the only teacher of color on the faculty; make sure her voice of social justice is heard in faculty decisions; manage the challenging demands of her multi-level classes; and take care of herself on a personal level.

Opportunities to create interdisciplinary connections in the classroom. Within the respective philosophy of their small school models, Kalina and Cal both have the opportunity to create interdisciplinary connections in their classrooms. Helping students understand how subjects are related to one another and relevant in the real world is part of teaching for social justice. Spanish teacher Kalina frequently weaves in social studies content and literacy into her curriculum. For example, with the intention of helping students understand the ways that Chicanos have protested discrimination and fought for civil rights in American history, Kalina showed the movie *Walkout*, timed to coincide with national rallies, boycotts, and student walkouts, protesting anti-immigration legislation and sentiment. This film depicts the events of March 1968 in Los Angeles, where approximately 40,000 Chicano high school students walked out of their classrooms in protest of anti-immigration legislation. The students were also fighting for bilingual education, updated and accurate textbooks, curriculum that included Latin American history, the ability to speak their native Spanish language in school without being reprimanded, improved facilities, and the elimination of janitorial work as punishment. The walkouts turned into riots when overzealous police began beating and arresting the unarmed students. After leading her students in a whole-class deconstruction of what specific steps the

Walkout students had taken to meet their goals, Kalina then had them create action plans to articulate what steps they could follow to take social action on a topic of their choice.

Autonomy in curricular choices, leading to frequent equity-oriented lessons. Framed by the respective philosophical approaches of their small school models, Kalina and Cal both have much autonomy in terms of deciding what content to teach. Drawing from their own interests and what they learned in their urban-focused teacher education program, they both frequently implement lessons about equity, culture, and social justice designed to develop students' critical awareness and skills in democratic participation. In fact, 70% of the lessons I observed in Cal's classroom focused on some aspect of these issues.

Although Cal was trained and certified as an English/language arts teacher, in the Visions model, he is a generalist rather than a content specialist. Within the open-ended nature of curriculum in this small schools model, Cal can essentially teach whatever he wants, and takes advantage of this to bring in his own interests. Cal frequently engages students in activities to explore the origins of prejudice, the power of language, and various meanings of culture. Guiding students to reflect critically on their own beliefs, assumptions, values, and experiences and how these can influence their perceptions of self and others and their behaviors is one of Cal's strengths as a teacher. Common questions that he posed to his students throughout the lessons included: "How do you form your opinions?" "Where do we get our standards for talking?" and "Where do our ideas and perceptions come from?" He also encouraged students to consider the implications and effects of various beliefs and perceptions—on themselves and others—and to not just blindly accept them as truth.

As for Kalina, on a scale of one to ten, she rates her freedom in designing her own curriculum and selecting resources as between an eight and a ten (ten representing complete choice). Shaped by her small, reform-oriented school's philosophy of infusing the curriculum with topics on equity and democracy, she has a lot of autonomy—and responsibility—in deciding what to teach, how she will teach it, and how to assess it. This freedom allows her to "put in everything that I know should be [in the curriculum], in terms of themes, topics, and concepts about social justice and equity." Specifically, she commented in an interview,

I have a lot of freedom to teach topics that I really want to teach, and to teach things that I'm passionate about, and to teach in the way that I am comfortable with. I know that in most typical public schools, they have everything all set out and aligned for you departmentally, the way that they want you to teach. And to me that's so restrictive. I don't feel like I would be as effective in an environment like that, especially in terms of teaching for social justice. It seems almost cookie-cutter.

She often mentioned the pressure she feels as a graduate of this particular urban-focused teacher education program to teach in what she calls a "liberatory" way. This interview excerpt captures some of her thinking and shows the high standards she maintains for herself:

I could take this Level 1 Spanish textbook, and I could teach chapter by chapter by chapter for every student, whether or not they're new Spanish speakers—which is what I know some teachers do. I could get an assessment book and pull out the assessments from there and give that to them, and I could give them pages from the workbook to do, and my life would be much easier. But somehow that just feels wrong. It feels like I'm

cheating them out of what they really need, so I just don't think that's an option.

Instead of teaching in what she calls a “cookie-cutter” way, Kalina finds many different and creative ways to infuse her Spanish and social studies curriculum with social justice-related topics, as evidenced in observations, interviews, and artifacts. For example, she often brings in elements of popular culture such as bilingual songs to engage students in discussion about issues of race, skin color, and privilege. She regularly asks students to consider multiple perspectives, such as “Who wrote our textbook? What perspectives might be absent in this particular text?” She asks students to weigh evidence as to whether certain historical figures (such as La Malinche, companion of Hernán Cortés) should be considered heroines or betrayers. The curricular freedom at Visions and Summit allow both Cal and Kalina to integrate social justice issues frequently into their lessons.

Challenges and Tensions of Teaching for Social Justice in These Small Urban High Schools

Visions and Summit High Schools are both relatively new schools. They are based on national school reform design templates that are intended to personalize learning, help students develop the skills and dispositions of being lifelong learners, and prepare them with solid skills for the world. However, there appears to be a “loose coupling” (Orton & Weick, 1990) between the theory of action of these small schools and what actually happens concretely.

Alternative conceptions of schooling, teaching, and learning. Visions and Summit High Schools are both driven by alternative conceptions of schooling, teaching, and learning. At Visions, where students develop and implement individualized learning plans based on their interests and passions, the model is radically different from that of most schools. Visions teachers like Cal coach the students and also lead some content-oriented ongoing “workshops.” In the Visions model, “learning is talking and teaching is listening,” as the school coach noted. This comment succinctly captures a major difference between the Visions approach to schooling and that of most traditional schools. Such alternative roles for teachers affect Cal’s development and learning as an equity-focused teacher in several ways. Because of the school’s focus on “one-on-one interaction with kids” and “facilitation” rather than teacher-led classes, he does not have much opportunity to practice many aspects of pedagogy that he learned in teacher education, such as explicit, direct, whole-group instruction and management. Cal lamented that “the one thing that’s really suffered in this model is my classroom teaching.” Data sources reveal very little opportunity for Cal to engage in direct instruction designed to build students’ skills explicitly in writing, for example, even though Cal is a licensed English/language arts teacher.

Heterogeneously grouped classes in the name of equity and democracy. At Summit High, the philosophy drives heterogeneously grouped classes in the name of equity and democracy. While this sounds laudable, it results in Kalina being forced to teach Spanish classes in which beginners, intermediates, and native speakers are all mixed together in the same class period. This situation necessitates sophisticated planning skills as Kalina generally must develop a different lesson plan for each level within each class, and then she needs to differentiate for individual student variation within each level. It also entails well-organized and well-thought-out instructional and classroom management skills, since having up to three different lessons going on simultaneously is, in Kalina’s words, “like orchestrating a three-ring circus.” As one might

imagine, this scenario also calls for socializing students into high levels of self-directedness if it is to work well. Furthermore, to exacerbate the tension, the only available and district-approved textbook is inadequate from multiple perspectives.

Too much curricular freedom with lack of guidance. Guided by the small schools philosophy, the curricular freedom at Visions and Summit allows Cal and Kalina to infuse their curriculum with social justice issues and to select relevant and appropriate materials. However, for new teachers, this curricular freedom can be overwhelming. As Cal explained in an interview, “Beyond underwater spelunking or whatever, I can do anything I want with my kids...as long as lives aren’t put in danger.” Although the Visions organization provides a website with some suggested activities, Cal typically relies on Google searches to find teaching ideas and materials suited to his students’ interests and passions, sometimes just minutes before his students arrive. Cal expressed feeling overwhelmed by having “almost too much” freedom with little structure: “Especially as a first year teacher, that range of choices is almost paralyzing.” This kind of “decision overload” also constrains his long- and short-range instructional planning.

At Summit, Kalina has access to Spanish textbooks, but they are only geared towards beginners, and she teaches intermediates and native speakers as well, in some cases all within the same class period. She is not satisfied to simply teach out of the inadequate textbook. Developing her own curriculum, assessments, and resources for students at so many different levels consumes enormous amounts of time and energy and is “overwhelming,” as she described repeatedly. As noted earlier, she often mentioned the pressure she feels to teach in what she calls a “liberatory” way, because she is a graduate of a social-justice-oriented teacher education program and an instructor at a school where the mission focuses on democracy and equity. Even though Kalina feels she is constantly “reinventing the wheel,” because of “the lack of curriculum support” and the high standards she holds for herself, she remarked, “I would rather have it this way than the other way.” Designing her own curriculum allows her to express who she is as a person and teacher and have more of a chance to meet students’ wide-ranging needs—although it comes at the price of sheer exhaustion—mentally, emotionally, physically.

Out-of-subject-area teaching. Because of the design and philosophies of their particular small school models, Cal and Kalina both teach subjects in which they are not licensed and have not been formally prepared (in addition to subjects in which they hold licenses). At Visions, teachers (called “advisors”) serve as generalists more than subject-specific experts. For example, in addition to leading his advisory class, Cal—who was prepared and is licensed as an English teacher—is responsible for teaching a math workshop several times per week. Furthermore, when his advisory students expressed a desire to learn more science, he borrowed curriculum ideas from another teacher and taught a unit on genetics. Teaching subjects in which he does not have deep content expertise creates additional tension in Cal’s practice. For example, he said in an interview that he struggles to teach in a culturally responsive manner when teaching subjects in which he lacks content knowledge and has no pedagogical preparation. In fact, during my observations of his Algebra II class, the lessons focused much more on algorithmic procedures than on conceptual understanding of the content. In one interaction, when a student asked Cal for help understanding a problem, Cal responded, “Dude. I have NO idea how to do that.” Cal acknowledged that was not the only time he had had to respond to a student’s question in that way. This example illustrates how the Visions practice of expecting advisors to teach subjects in which they are not well-prepared content-wise or pedagogically appears to detract from the

quality of education the students receive.

Cal shared that one of his colleagues believed that the practice of advisors teaching outside their primary area of subject expertise was acceptable because “good teaching is good teaching, no matter what the content area.” However, he expressed concerns about that generic approach. By the end of the school year, though, Cal had become more optimistic about developing into “a good teacher” of subjects in which he is not formally prepared. Nevertheless, he noted that he was still somewhat skeptical about the notion that “good teaching transcends curriculum and transcends content area.”

As for Kalina, she is expected to integrate social studies content into her classes. Officially, her classes are called Spanish/World Cultures, and students earn a quarter credit of social studies for the whole year in addition to their Spanish credits. Although Kalina is very enthusiastic about the opportunity to bring her deep knowledge base of social issues, history, geography, sociology—especially about the local and global Latino community—into her classes, she expressed concern a number of times during interviews that teaching both Spanish and social studies takes away from the depth of understanding that she could cultivate if she were just concentrating on one or the other subject. Also, she said that her social studies teaching feels sporadic and inconsistent to her, and that she doesn’t really understand how to teach social studies in a “best practice kind of way.” Instead, she tends to rely on mini-lectures using the overhead projector but said she isn’t sure what alternative methods to use. Her concerns about her social studies instruction exacerbate the constant struggle she feels about not teaching in a way that matches her vision for what she calls “liberatory education,” in other words, powerful, equity-focused, learner-centered, active, reflective pedagogy. In short, when asked to teach subjects in which they have neither deep content knowledge nor pedagogical expertise, Cal and Kalina display a lack of confidence in being able to facilitate student learning effectively.

Discussion, Conclusions, and Implications

Much of the literature on the small schools movement (e.g., Ayers, Klonsky, & Lyon, 2000) touts how well the small schools philosophy and model facilitate teaching for social justice. For instance, the small class and school size is intended to create an environment that fosters the development of personal bonds between teachers and students, a crucially important element of engaging students and keeping them in school.

The findings presented previously do reveal evidence of these affordances in Cal’s and Kalina’s settings (Visions and Summit High Schools, respectively). However, it is clear that some aspects of the small school contexts illustrated in this study constrained teachers’ equity-oriented instruction and their general approach to teaching. For Cal, the most significant example is that the philosophy and model of the school require him to teach subjects (especially mathematics) in which he does not have adequate content preparation and pedagogical knowledge. The fact that he cannot answer students’ questions about the more advanced math content severely limits students’ opportunities to learn robust mathematical skills and ways of thinking and represents a glaring practice of inequity on the part of Visions as an institution. Similarly, the lack of any curricular guidance for Cal as a brand new teacher represents another way in which the philosophy and structural features of Visions hinder teaching for equity, detract from the general quality of education available to students, and contribute to Cal’s sense of being overwhelmed. Cal is, essentially, “lost at sea” (Johnson & Kauffman, 2004) in terms of trying to figure out what to teach his students and what to use for materials. The lack of curricular

guidance (in addition to the other responsibilities of being an advisor that require so many hours each day) leads to his having to throw together lesson plans at the last minute. He does not have the time or energy to attend carefully to long-range planning or to ensuring that his lessons display a tight progression towards enduring understandings and specific learning objectives. These constraints lead to lessons that tend to stay at a general conceptual level without developing students' specific academic skills geared towards clear learning targets. With more curricular guidance, Cal might have been able to concentrate more on practical strategies that would have created more robust opportunities for students to develop important academic skills.

At Summit High, where the philosophy drives heterogeneously grouped classes in the name of equity and democracy, Kalina has to teach beginners, intermediates, and native Spanish speakers together in the same class period without adequate curricular materials. Kalina's situation goes beyond what should be expected of teachers in terms of differentiating for students at various levels. Furthermore, partly because of lack of resources at the school, Kalina is expected to teach social studies, although she earned her teaching license in Spanish and doesn't have a broad base of pedagogical content knowledge in social studies. These constraints generally appear to detract from the quality of education available to students as well as Kalina's ability to teach for equity, ironically, in a school where a major focus of the philosophy is democracy and equity. They also contribute to Kalina's sense of being overwhelmed, which she described metaphorically as "feeling like a hamster on a spinning wheel."

These scenarios illustrate a set of tough dilemmas faced by the small schools movement and the schools that implement its philosophy and structures. The potential benefits of creating small, personalized learning environments are many, especially for economically disadvantaged students (NRC, 2004). Small schools do have the potential to create "more just and more humane power relations" (Ayers, 2000, p. 99) in school contexts. Furthermore, the focus at Visions and Summit High Schools on helping students learn how to participate in a democracy, identify their passions, and take responsibility for their learning has the potential to prepare students well for a meaningful life after high school.

However, when teachers are expected to teach subjects in which they do not have well-developed content or pedagogical knowledge, develop their own curricula completely from scratch, and scramble to find appropriate teaching resources to supplement inadequate or nonexistent materials, it is likely that the quality of teaching will be compromised and that students, therefore, will be shortchanged.

Furthermore, the small schools approach of having teachers play multiple roles and attend to the close teacher-student relationships that are central in the small schools model can lead to teacher burnout and, potentially, attrition (see Keller, 2007). The case stories of Cal and Kalina illustrate some of the reasons for potential burnout in small schools where teachers have many responsibilities on their shoulders beyond "traditional" teacher roles.

The present study raises important implications for designers and implementers of small schools reform models. In order to maximize the potential of small schools for closing the achievement gap, certain issues need attention. First, teachers—especially novices—need adequate curricular guidance and access to appropriate, engaging materials. This is not to say that curriculum should be scripted or "canned." Teachers certainly need to have the freedom and agency to adapt content and materials to their particular students' needs and interests to create relevance. However, students are much more likely to meet specific learning targets if the objectives are explicitly stated for learners and instructors alike. Second, teachers' primary teaching assignments need to match their content competency and professional preparation, so

that students have access to the highest quality professional guidance possible. Third, teachers need coaching in how to work responsively with groups of students whose skills and developmental levels vary widely. To complement this support, small schools need to implement sensible, flexible grouping structures that facilitate effective differentiation.

As small schools based on reform models become more prevalent across the United States, teacher educators might also consider how to prepare candidates for future opportunities in these settings, which often look completely different from traditional schools. Guided clinical experiences, such as mentored field placement rotations in schools with various reform models, would allow teacher candidates to experience firsthand various small schools contexts and then decide whether those settings fit their own teaching identity and interests. Hiring principals might also consider whether the reform-based small schools model is an appropriate setting for a brand new teacher.

By implementing ideas such as these, small schools may increase the likelihood of realizing their full potential, including teacher retention and students' robust opportunities to learn. The reform-based small schools model is an innovation that should not be overlooked in the important work of closing the achievement gap.

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Preparing White Preservice Art Educators to Teach in Urban Classrooms

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Abstract

Within a two-year mixed method action research study, two cohorts of White senior preservice Art Educators reflected on anti-racist and anti-classist course materials and attended field experiences within urban schools. A majority of both cohorts identified systemic racism within social systems and language after engaging in course materials. Urban teaching intentions, teaching efficacy and urban teaching attitudes did not show a significant change within the first cohort while the second cohort demonstrated a significant change in teaching efficacy. Both cohorts showed a positive shift in urban teaching intentions. Both cohorts reflected positively on the urban field experience site. The second cohort exhibited greater empathy for urban student concerns and a greater appreciation for urban teachers' efforts. More time spent in schools with urban teacher mentors and students, along with a shift in the urban field experience to later in the semester may have contributed to the positive change in results.

Keywords: preservice art educators, urban education, race, social class, white privilege

Approximately 78% of the students who comprise urban classrooms are of minority groups (U. S. Department of Education, 2009), while a majority of the teaching population is White (National Education Association, 2010). Candidates in teacher preparatory programs also reflect this dynamic (National Education Association, 2010). Teacher training is mainly directed towards the teaching of White, middle-class children (Delpit, 2006). Within a mixed-method action research study, a White university Art Education professor and preservice Art Educators examine the effects of race and class within educational environments and chart their attitudes towards teaching in an urban environment. This study's findings offer suggestions for teacher preparation programs that are prepared to meet the needs of public education's urban demographic.

Conceptual Framework

Teaching is a political act. When done unreflectively, it can maintain power structures that privilege dominant social groups (Wise, 2008). Teacher training programs shape these beliefs and practices, along with the teacher candidate's prior educational experiences. Many of these experiences have not included a discussion of race or class (Delpit, 2006). When unexamined for racial and class biases, White educators view their actions as being normative, expecting all students to behave in a similar manner (Ferguson, 2001).

Discussing race in the preservice classroom can be a difficult task for White educators and for White students. According to Desai (2010), most White teachers claim that they do not see race in the classroom, denying the part that race systemically plays within our society. Whites are taught not to recognize White privilege (McIntosh, 1992). When teachers are unaware of their students' identities and histories, it is difficult to create a climate for learning (Davis, 2009). Therefore, it is imperative for the White preservice educators to critically reflect upon their own attitudes towards race, class, and privilege before entering the classroom, particularly the urban classroom (hooks, 1994).

The responsibility of owning and evaluating one's values and beliefs while encountering the Other creates a climate for potential change, empathy, and respect. It is important that this encounter is on equal terms and that one group does not take a position of racial superiority. Teachers must ask themselves how their cultural perspectives color their views of the world (Hidalgo, 1993). Talking and listening with respect to school children about their experiences (Davis, 2009, Ladson-Billings, 1994), respecting student silence (Delpit, 2006), and engaging with community (Daniel & Drew, 2011) are all as much a part of the educational experience as is relaying information. Listening with the intent of believing is a powerful tool for learning as well as a moral obligation (Noddings, 2003). Anti-racist education examines power relationships and equity issues, and gives voice to people who are frequently silenced (Lee, 2009). University educator researchers are increasingly finding ways to enable preservice educators to critically address race and class in their teaching praxis (Davis, 2009; McIntyre, 1997; Lenski, Crumpler, Stallworth & Crawford, 2005). Students interpret present experiences according to past encounters, scaffolding new knowledge onto previous analyses. The content of prior knowledge affects the way that students extract new information. Faulty prior knowledge interferes with learning; it can be more difficult for students to unlearn inaccurate knowledge than it can be for them to learn new information (Daniel & Drew, 2011). Therefore, it is imperative that preservice educators openly reassess their own assumptions about urban populations. Often, these assumptions are based upon a deficit model of education in which urban students of color represent a sense of "lack," rather than one of resiliency and knowledge (Davis, 2009, Ladson-Billings, 1994, Evans-Winters, 2005). Critical class readings and discussion, reflective journaling, and urban clinical experiences create a climate in which White preservice educators may begin to reverse this idea of urban inadequacy.

Methods

Over the course of two years, the researcher engaged her preservice Art Education students in a mixed method action research study that asked the following research question: "Does anti-racist and anti-classist instruction shift preservice Art Educators' attitudes towards urban education?" Educators use qualitative action research to assess and reflect upon their pedagogy with the primary intention of improving their own practice (Daniel & Drew, 2011). The study encompassed two separate Art 307: Art for Diverse Populations classes consisting of 35 White senior preservice Art Educators in total over two semesters, Spring 2010 and Spring 2011. All students participated in the same class activities, but 29 self-selected to be a part of the study.

Quantitative Measurement

At the beginning of each semester, students completed a university College of Education Urban Education Survey consisting of 56 questions that included four measures: urban teaching intentions (UTI), urban teaching attitudes (UEA), multicultural attitudes (TMAS), and sense of teacher efficacy (TSES). “All measures were scored along a 5-point Likert-type scale. The UTI measured students’ intentions of teaching in an urban school. The UEA measured participants’ endorsement of stereotypical beliefs about urban schools” (College Teacher Education Pipeline™, 2010). The 20-item TMAS survey measured multicultural awareness for K-12 teachers and was slightly adapted for teacher candidates (Ponterotto, Baluch, Greig, & Rivera, 1998). Six items relevant to urban education were added to the 12 item TSES short-form, which had an alpha of .90 (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). The TSES measured potential effectiveness of preservice educators within the classroom. Students completed the same survey at the end of the semester and a paired-samples t-test was conducted for each of the four scales to determine changes between administrations (College Teacher Education Pipeline™, 2010).

Qualitative Methods

The researcher collected corresponding written assignments, reflective journals, and clinical reflections to discern and code reoccurring themes (Cresswell, 1994; Maxwell, 1996). Reflective journals were personal vehicles of expression. Students shared their contents with the class at their own discretion. Often, the researcher was the only other participant aware of student attitudes. While the quantitative survey results provided a slight shift in preservice Art Educators’ attitudes towards teaching in an urban environment, qualitative data revealed a more articulate and nuanced positive change in attitude towards race, social class, and White privilege.

The researcher triangulated the data from the two methods to derive meaning from the experience (Creswell 1994). Students’ journals illustrated rich internal dialogues of self-exploration that occurred on several levels of social awareness. This paper examines these dialogues, using student voices, to make recommendations for future anti-racist and anti-classist education within the university classroom.

Participants

Art 307: Art for Diverse Populations met once a week for three hours. The average age of the participants was in the early twenties. All participants were middle class. Participants roughly reflected the university student demographic. Approximately 60% percent of the students were from the Chicago area, while almost 21% were from the county in which the university was located (University Planning and Institutional Research, 2011). Thirteen participants took part in the study in Spring 2010, and 16 participants took part in the study in Spring 2011.

Setting

The study took place in a large Midwestern university within driving distance of Chicago. All study participants elected to take a one-day field experience to visit two Chicago public high school art departments located in a predominately Mexican-American working class Chicago community. The high schools were partners within the university’s College Teacher Education

Pipeline™ initiative. Both schools contained populations that were approximately 81% Hispanic and 19% African American. Ninety-eight percent of the students in one school came from families of low income. Eighty-seven percent of the students in the second school came from low-income homes.

Class Structure

Assignments. Both classes received the same readings and the same assignments. The first half of the 16 week semester consisted of reading and discussing anti-racist literature, the second half of the semester focused on inclusion of students with disabilities, English as Second Language learners, and students of diverse genders. The researcher made no claim to be an expert on racism, but stressed that course activities were meant to open a discussion about race and class in which everyone, including the teacher, was involved; everyone would learn from each other (McIntyre, 1997).

Both cohorts read a chapter from Tim Wise's (2008) *White Like Me* in which Wise articulated the inherent nature of racism and American White assimilationist policies. Students viewed and discussed the Doll Test as shown on MSNBC's *A Conversation About Race* (2008), along with a portion of Wise's (2010) *Pathology of Privilege* lecture which put race and class within a historical perspective. Students read and reflected upon a chapter of Ferguson's (2001) *badboys* that exposed the way in which some teachers pathologized young boys of color and penalized student voices. Students viewed a video of artist Kerry James Marshall talking about his work, and listened to a podcast of Marshall (2006) relating his experience as a person of color who successfully negotiated the White art world. After reading an account of how activist artist and Art Educator, Olivia Gude (n.d.), worked with middle school students to deconstruct racial roles within Disney's *The Lion King* (1995) and evaluate attitudes associated with colors, students found and reflected upon visual examples of color stereotypes and counter stereotypes. After class discussion students viewed the documentary, *Meeting David Wilson*, in which filmmaker, David Wilson (2008), sought out and met David Wilson, a descendant of the family that once owned his. The film made a case for interracial dialogue and called for educators to teach children about the power of their ancestors. An urban field experience, in which students were placed in the position of the Other, provided another level of awareness.

Urban field experience. Both cohorts of preservice Art Educators observed urban public school art classes and went on a scavenger hunt of the community's main shopping street. Groups of four to five university students teamed with high school students to visit local bakeries, shopping malls, and groceries. The 2010 cohort observed for three and one-half hours within the local schools and then toured the National Museum of Mexican Art. The 2011 cohort observed five and one-half hours within the schools, and did not visit the museum. Both cohorts ate in local restaurants, but the 2011 cohort hosted their high school guides for a meal. The 2011 cohort spoke with the urban teachers about their jobs.

The preservice students wrote clinical reflections about their urban field experiences according to a specified rubric that valued insightful comments. Students in the 2010 cohort were not required to link these reflections to class materials. Students in the 2011 cohort were required to link clinical reflections to class materials and to write double the amount for each clinical hour. Weekly journal expectations remained the same for both cohorts.

Findings and Discussion

Quantitative Results

In 2010 the Urban Education Survey found little change in the already positive preservice Art Educators' multicultural attitudes, a slight, but not significant, decrease in attitudes towards urban education, and a slight, but not significant, decrease in attitudes towards teacher self-efficacy. The Survey indicated a slight, but not significant rise in intentions to teach in urban schools. In 2011 intentions to teach in urban environments also rose, only to a slight degree, along with urban teaching attitudes. However, 2011 analyses demonstrated a significant increase in teaching efficacy; at the conclusion of the course students were more confident in their ability to become urban educators.

The College Teacher Education Pipeline (2010, 2011) analysis ranked data on a scale from one to five to mark course effectiveness and student engagement. A ranking of one meant that the course had no significance on student attitudes and intentions, and the students were not engaged. A ranking of three meant the course had moderate influence, and the students were moderately engaged, and a ranking of five meant that the course had a very significant influence, and the students were significantly engaged. Within both cohorts students came into the course moderately engaged with the material and remained that way at the course's end (B. Showalter, personal communication, August 3, 2012).

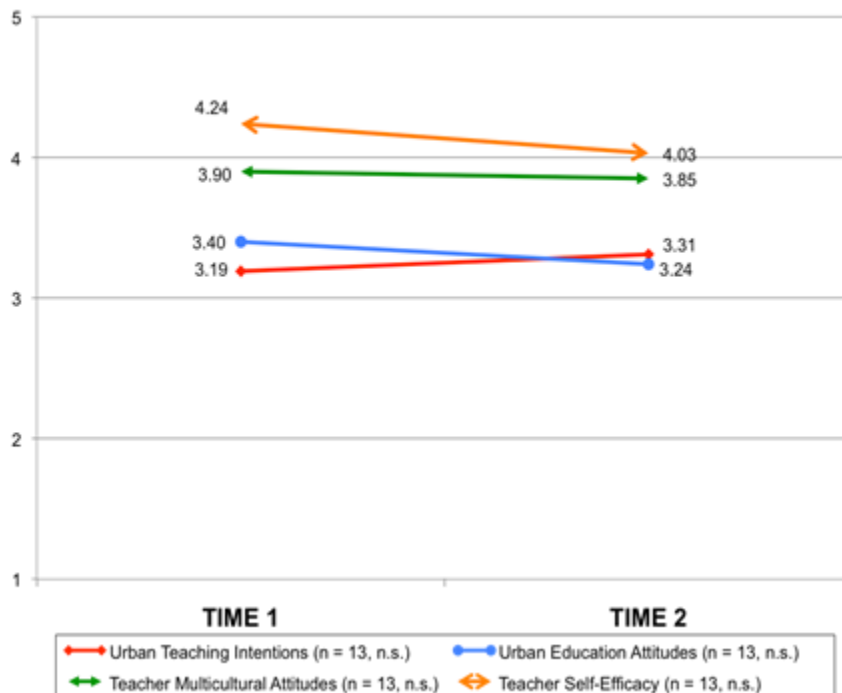
Table 1.

Full data (both pre and post) were available for 13 students from Spring 2010 ART 307

Average Age:	24.54 years (SD = 6.08)
Gender:	11 women (85%); 2 men (15%)
College Year:	13 Seniors (100%)
Race/Ethnicity:	13 White (100%)
High School Setting:	9 attended a suburban high school (69%) 2 attended a rural high school (15%) 1 attended an urban high school (8%)

Figure 1.

Art for Diverse Populations 2010: College of Education Urban Education Survey



College Teacher Education Pipeline™ 2010.

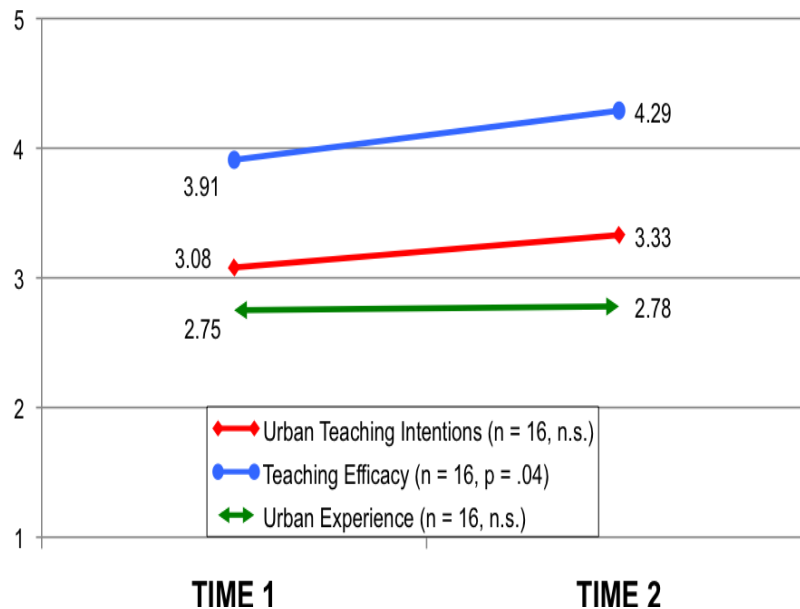
Table 2.

Full data (both pre and post) were available for 16 students from Spring 2011 ART 307

Average Age:	23.44 years (SD = 6.08)
Gender:	5 men (31%); 11 women (69%)
College Year:	14 Seniors (88%); 2 Graduate Students (13%)
Race/Ethnicity:	16 White (100%)
High School Setting:	2 were from urban high schools (13%) 8 were from suburban high schools (50%) 6 were from rural high schools (38%)

Figure 2.

*Art for Diverse Populations 2011: College of Education Urban Education Survey**



College Teacher Education Pipeline™ 2011.

*Due to the lack of nuances within the 2010 Multicultural Attitudes (TMAS) part of the survey, the College Teacher Education Pipeline dropped this portion and revised the Urban Teaching Attitudes (UTI) portion to have students reflect upon their Urban Experiences (B. Showalter, personal communication, August 3, 2012).

Qualitative Results

A majority of students within both cohorts identified systemic racism within social systems and language, which was a reoccurring theme within their writing. A few students expressed resistance through written journals and within class discussion. A few students used their journals to express surprise at their peers' inherently racial attitudes. However, student written reaction to racial and class difference within the post urban field trip clinical reflections was positive and transformative.

After noting 2010 students' generalized, descriptive clinical reflections the researcher revised clinical expectations to require students to critically connect their experiences with course material on race, class, gender, and physical, cognitive, and emotional ability. As a result, students in the 2011 cohort wrote more explicit, insightful comments than did students in the 2010 cohort. The 2011 cohort spent more time with the urban high school students, allowing for more preservice/student interaction and dialogue. The 2010 cohort completed their urban field experience in March, whereas, the 2011 cohort completed their urban field experience in late April after experiencing most components of their course work. Students also had more time to integrate and reflect upon course materials before visiting the schools. Three themes emerged

from the students' clinical reflections: (1) the 2011 cohort demonstrated a greater sense of appreciation of the challenges faced by urban students than did the previous cohort; (2) Students in the same cohort noted the importance and the effectiveness of caring urban teachers; and (3) Students in both cohorts wrote positively about the Little Village environment, indicating a respect for cultural difference.

Positive mentoring by urban teachers and dialogue with urban students helped to dispel the deficit model of urban education among preservice students. After participating in an urban field experience, slightly more students within both cohorts imagined themselves teaching within an urban community. An urban field experience enabled preservice Art Educators to witness effective urban teaching in action, a process that is dialogic, empathetic, respectful, and involved

Preservice students' encounters with urban Art Educators as role models may have influenced their own efficacy for teaching in urban schools. Students asked these Art Educators about their teaching priorities within an urban environment and were impressed with the high school art teachers' caring and respectful culturally relevant pedagogy.

Having the experience of being the Other also shifted students' preconceived notions about race. A preservice student reflected:

The feeling of people looking at me as an outsider ... based on my skin color frustrated me. The experience of spending time with the students taught me that there needs to be a balance of sensitivity [of] being an observer with camaraderie and trying to relate. These issues have always been presented to us via class discussions and textbooks, but to actually experience these issues and try to resolve them was beneficial.

A second preservice student, who had been resistant to reflecting on White privilege in class, put a face on a population to whom he previously could not relate:

Just days after visiting, the news reported that there had been a number of gang related deaths right around where we were. One of those that died was only 16 years old, and the notion that I might have spoken with him just hours before weighed heavily on my mind.

A third student shifted her thinking after a student and teacher dialogue:

It was unbelievable to me how hard some of these students had to work just to support their families at home. This was an insight I had clearly overlooked. Although I believe I am conscious of the needs of others, and hopefully my students in the future, I probably would not have considered these types of circumstances.

Another preservice student demonstrated a politically active consciousness that refuted the deficit model of urban education:

If anything, I don't want to teach these kids and be a part of their community because I can bring to them something that they *lack*, it is because I want to be a part of what they already *have*...I saw class after class of bright, intelligent, and critical thinking students. As we discussed in [class], some of the most important things for a teacher to do are: make the material relatable to their lives, respect them as individuals that can think for

themselves, understand what might be going on in their life before judging, and create an environment that is safe for true dialogue and expression. I observed all of these qualities in [the urban art teacher's] classroom.

Conclusion

In 2010 and 2011 two university Art for Diverse Populations classes White Preservice Art Educators reflected on anti-racist and anti-classist course materials and interacted with students and teachers, and became the Other during urban field experiences. A qualitative review of student writing indicated that a majority of both cohorts could identify systemic racism within social systems and language. A quantitative review of student's multicultural attitudes, urban teaching intentions, teaching efficacy and urban teaching attitudes did not show a significant change within the 2010 cohort. The 2011 cohort demonstrated a significant change in teaching efficacy. Both cohorts showed a slight positive shift in urban teaching intentions. Qualitative data indicated that both student cohorts reflected a positive attitude towards the urban field experience site, students within the 2011 cohort exhibited greater empathy for urban student concerns and a greater appreciation for urban teachers' efforts. More time spent in the school and with teacher mentors, along with a shift in the urban field experience to later in the semester may have contributed to the change in results. After participating in an urban field experience, more students imagined themselves teaching within an urban community. An urban field experience enabled preservice Art Educators to witness effective urban teaching in action, a process that is dialogic, empathetic, respectful, and involved.

Recommendations

First, teacher preparatory programs should enable all students to explore what it means to be of their race and their social class within a society. Ideas of race and culture are often delegated to ethnic minorities. Analyzing the idea of Whiteness and White privilege enables students to deconstruct communication patterns, educational expectations, and social values.

Second, teacher preparatory programs must eradicate the deficit model of urban education. Viewing urban students, neighborhoods, and schools as lacking in the components of success neglects the critical thinking, determination, and sense of connectedness that exists among urban youth and within urban communities.

Third, enabling preservice students to ground their education in experience puts faces to statistics, helps to break stereotypical thinking, provides educator mentoring, and encourages students to become urban educators. Urban field experiences, however, must be prefaced by reflective dialogue in order to avoid a power imbalance that naturally arises amongst privileged people.

Teacher preparatory programs that enable preservice educators to develop a critical consciousness of the roles that race, class, and privilege play within educational and social structures promote the creation of future urban educators. Self-reflection and dialogue are a part of this process. Preservice urban experiences that demonstrate sensitivity and respect for difference and build a sense of connectedness with urban students and the community are effective tools in this process.

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Community Partnerships: Working Across Institutions to Support Parent Advocacy and Education

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Abstract

In this article, the authors analyze the evolution of parent advocate education standards that illustrate what parents need to know and do to effectively support their children's learning in 6th-12th grade. Focus groups conducted with parent participants revealed that parents were often unaware of the distinction between helping their child graduate from high school and helping their child prepare for college. Our analysis includes a discussion of how the language used to convey these standards could either build or breakdown communication essential to distributing critical information to working, immigrant parents in urban public school systems. The article has three objectives: (1) to highlight the responses of principals, teachers and parents to parent advocate education standards; (2) to highlight the participants' critique of the written language used to convey those standards; and (3) to uncover the disconnect between what parents, principals and teachers believe parents should know and what parents actually know about school systems and classroom instruction.

Keywords: parent advocacy, parent engagement, secondary education, academic achievement, college preparedness

Decades of research have shown that parent involvement positively affects student achievement (Epstein et al, 2002, Quezada, 2003). Further research confirms that when parents know the role schools need them to play and feel they can effectively play that role, they are more likely to become involved in their children's education (Hoover-Dempsey, 2005) The impetus for this study was to provide information to families, school staff and community organizations that would help them set academic goals for students in grades 6 through 12. More specifically, it was a collaborative effort between representatives from a university and a community based organization to develop parent advocate, education standards (6-12th grade). To write the standards, we reviewed parent engagement literature and the workshop objectives of a community organization; then we asked parents, teachers and principals what they thought parents should know and do to effectively support their child's academic success.

Conceptual Framework

There has been a range of research pointing to a positive correlation between parent involvement and student achievement (Epstein, 1991; Hoover-Dempsey, 2005; NMSA, 2000; Valdez, 1996; Vaden-Kiernan, 2005). This correlation initiated the research that led us to develop parent advocate education standards. As our project progressed, however, we increasingly relied on scholarship that outlined the socio-economic challenges working, immigrant parents face in order to frame both our research and the standards themselves.

Scholars documenting parent involvement have highlighted the social networks that working-class, immigrant parents activate in order to exchange resources (Bolivar & Chrispeels, 2011; Jackson & Cooper, 1989; Moll, 1992). Through ethnographic analysis, Luis Moll identified the cultural wealth in Latino communities, conceptualizing it as “funds of knowledge.” His work became an impetus for educators willing to acknowledge the biases often found when teachers and principals work with low-income parents. Those biases include the assumption that working-class parents’ homes are void of the culturally significant resources that educators claim contribute to a well-rounded learning experience. Moll’s critique of “accepted perceptions of working-class families as somehow disorganized socially and deficient intellectually” ultimately served as a lens through which we viewed our own language (1992, p.3).

Moreover, when discussing the difference between what parents know about the school system and what teachers and principals want them to know, the authors examined the factors that often lead to knowledge gaps for working-class, immigrant parents. Smith (2008) states, “the true differences are created by possession or absence of information about college and substantial experience with college” (2008, p. 3). He implies that experience enhances one’s understanding of crucial information. Based on this perspective, the authors questioned how to distribute critical information to parents who had little experience with the American public school system, college course requirements and collegiate scholarships. Ultimately, our revision of the parent advocate education standards came from a belief that the action needed to implement these standards would be “based on a model in which parents help other parents to create individual action plans to address parent complaints that are sensitive to cultural contexts” (Carter, 2007, p. 6).

A socio-cultural perspective helped us create a document that was both informative and responsive to the needs of the parents for whom it was intended. Sociocultural theorizing emerged from the work of L. S. Vygotsky (1978), who argued that learning did not occur in isolation within an individual, but rather took place in socially mediated contexts. Socio-cultural theory focused our attention on the beliefs and practices of working-class, immigrant communities. Specifically, it enabled us to identify how information traveled through social networks and the necessity of activating those networks in schools and communities where finances are low. Moreover, a socio-cultural perspective reinforced a belief that parent advocate education standards are best created through negotiation and co-interpretation.

Methods

Participants

Thirty-five parent participants [6 fathers and 29 mothers] came from working class neighborhoods in a large urban area. Most were first generation immigrants from Mexico; nearly all were Latino. Their backgrounds varied with respect to immigration status, years of education and years spent in the United States. Parent focus groups were conducted in Spanish.

All ten of the principal and teacher participants taught in schools that served a working-class, and predominately Latino population. According to one middle school teacher, 20 to 30 percent of the parents who have children in the school “recently crossed the border,” and a majority work for a well-known clothing manufacturer or other factories in the area surrounding the school. All teacher and principal participants had been working in their respective schools for five years or more.

Data Collection

Our method for this study was to conduct focus groups with samples that were comprised of parents, teachers and principals. The focus group sample data ranged anywhere from ten to twenty participants.

Drawing from the work completed by local high schools and community based organizations on the development of standards and guidelines for parents, we created advocate education standards that fell into seven categories:

- Understand Your Child’s Academic Status
- Know How the School System Works
- Choose and Evaluate Schools
- Support College and Career Pathways
- Know About Adolescent Social, Emotional and Physical Health Issues
- Access an Academic Environment at Home & in the Community
- Be Your Child’s Educational Advocate

Once standards were created, the authors ran focus groups and subsequently relied on qualitative analysis to evaluate the discussion that emerged from open-ended questions.

After translating the standards into Spanish, we sought feedback from parents, teachers and principals on what parents need to know and do in order to support adolescents in schools. The feedback was obtained from four focus groups convened in distinct locations: a high school, a middle school, a reading clinic and a community based organization. We began each focus group with the following open-ended questions:

- What do you think parents need to know to help their secondary children be successful in school?
- What do you think parents need to do to help their secondary children be successful in school?

The open-ended questions led to a discussion that enabled us to document information that was not included in our list of standards. This data came directly from participants before we distributed the standards. Consequently, it was never influenced by

information provided through a pre-conceived document.

We then distributed standards we had devised and told principals and teachers to read them and make notes. After they read, we asked the following questions.

- Which standards do you have questions about?
- Which standards within the groups are most important?
- What is missing?

After distributing the standards, we elicited a discussion around what information was missing and how language use affected understanding.

We varied the parent protocol to accommodate parents who were not literate in their first language. With each focus group, we asked if parents preferred us to read the standards to them, or if they preferred to read the standards individually. All of the parent groups decided they wanted us to read the standards. By reading them, the document became an oral\aural one—enabling both researchers and parents to experience it collectively. Hearing the language of the original standards influenced our analysis of the standards, specifically the use of language in each category.

Data Analysis

Given that the goal of the research was to elicit information from distinct groups, we reviewed each session after it occurred to capture fresh impressions. These review sessions were recorded and transcribed. Each focus group session was transcribed. Two researchers then developed analytical notes that captured the common themes that emerged within and across the four distinct focus groups: two parent groups, one teacher group and one principal group. We began analysis by highlighting comments that appeared repeatedly. We noted all comments that triggered strong responses, either in agreement or disagreement, and we noted comments that yielded additional comments from other participants.

Recursive reading of the data led to a reevaluation of the term standard. The process of translating group discussions and the repeated analysis of the document exposed how the language that is often used to communicate between teachers, administrators and parents can be problematic. In addition to the critical feedback we received from parents, reading the standards to parents, and hearing the document, affected our conception of it. Reading forced us to hear the language repeatedly which made us aware of the actual tone that syntax established. For example, the following “standard” erased the economic reality that working class and working poor families face and left no room for parents to discuss their concerns: “Parents need to know that financial aid is available for most students attending college...money is not an obstacle.” The declarative statement—money is not an obstacle—left no room for parents to express a fear of debt or a fear of losing their homes. The finality of the statement denied parents the opportunity to seek and interpret information that would be useful to them.

The oral\aural rendering of the document drove home the necessity of interaction. Consequently, the term standard came to be viewed as a guideline rather than a set of norms upon which parents would be assessed and ultimately judged. We argue that this conception of the term standard will enable the document we created to “live and breathe” within a number of diverse parent networks that exist in one of the

largest, immigrant cities of the United States. The term guideline lends itself to flexibility, discussion and active exchange.

Results

Critical Information

Findings can be distinguished according to two categories: 1. What parents need to know and 2. How that information might be best conveyed. An analysis of the responses to open-ended questions across parent, principal, and teacher focus groups revealed that parents need to distinguish between college preparation coursework and general education requirements. The following interaction exemplifies the kinds of questions parents asked us and each other during focus groups:

- Parent 3: This one [points to a standard] that says if your child has completed Algebra and Pre-Algebra, what does this one mean?
- Parent 4: Is this the same as the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE¹)?

Principals validated our analysis by strongly stressing the need for information that distinguishes general education requirements from the college access sequence. All stakeholders [parents, teachers and principals] pointed to the need to be familiar with the college course sequence, but each focused on distinct aspects of the sequence. Principals noted the importance of providing information about extra-curricular activities. “And extra curricular activities, that isn’t the end all to itself, it’s what the kids learn being in those extra curricular activities; discipline, persistence, sticking with something for four years, friendships, team work, initiative that the kids learn, and that’s what colleges are looking for when they’re asking for those things.” Another principal suggested “a podcast or a video or something that you could just download or access on a website and then have the assessments or descriptions of the assessments and do it all there” to be used as an online interactive tool at schools.

The third point that generated a general consensus related to the need to know how the system works, specifically, information on how the school hierarchy is structured. Our data showed that parents did not always understand how the school hierarchy functioned, which impeded communication. For example, many could not identify the channels of communication that impacted decisions regarding student achievement. This resulted in parents’ inability to access those channels needed, which in some cases caused missed opportunities.

Discussion

Findings point to the ways effective communication might occur. Principals mentioned the need for active versus passive language that would indicate what parents should do to support the academic achievement of their children. Teachers noted that an interactive tool should accompany the standards. Principals also noted

¹ The CAHSEE tests students English and math skills. Students begin taking the test as sophomores and can retake it five times by the end of their senior year. The class of 2006 was the first required to pass the exam for graduation.

that an interactive tool was necessary, and recommended that it should be located at the school site where resources and parent liaisons were readily available. One principal has instituted a partnership program that entailed parents touring the school with a template that they fill-out while observing interactions in classrooms and school corridors. After the observations are completed, parents are invited to discuss what they saw with the principal. Another principal suggested “ a podcast or a video or something that you could just download or access on a website and then have the assessments or descriptions of the assessments and do it all there” to be used as an online interactive tool at schools.

Parents, on the other hand, focused on how communication should occur. They were specifically critical of the way standards were framed in the category entitled “Create an Academic Environment at Home.” One standard in the category stated, “parents need to nurture a family that highly respects literacy.” Several described the ways that literacy existed. The criticism led to an assessment of the entire category, as we began to consider whether the phrasing of a standard conveyed a unilateral directive or a guideline for assertive action. Parents openly questioned a standard in the category labeled “Support the College Pathway,” which indicated money was not an obstacle. Many wondered how they would pay back loans while maintaining a home.

The beliefs of each group of participants and the collective reading of a written document reminded us of the need for authentic communication. Language that indicates what parents should do must be conceived in a context that acknowledges what they can do and already do on an ongoing basis. Ultimately, our analysis revealed that educators and community based organization staff should assess how language reinforces relationships between educators (teachers, principals and CBO staff) and parents. That assessment requires interpersonal interaction and a continuous evaluation of how information is received. The principal who encourages parents to visit classrooms and then invites them to discuss what they see demonstrated one way to access parent interpretations of the school environment. We developed a document that should be used to initiate discussion and elicit questions regarding what parents should know and do to support their children’s learning. Similar to an invitation to talk about what parents see in classrooms, the document stands as an open invitation to raise questions regarding critical information on how parents can help their children be successful.

Conclusion

Extant research documents the fact that parent involvement is linked to student achievement (Delgado-Gaitan & Trueba, 1991; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). However, there has been less discussion around how to communicate critical information to parents. Parent standards that validate the knowledge, sensibilities and needs of multiple stakeholders remove the barriers that prevent effective communication and move educators toward a practical application of scholarship. This research yielded an important tool that can be used in both parent education curriculum development and in school staff professional development programs.

Finally, the model for the research, cross-institutional collaboration, lends itself to the development and maintenance of an interactive network that supports parents. This

work has been disseminated through numerous partnerships [university credential programs, public schools, and community based organizations] to enhance parent involvement and student achievement.

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The Possibilities and Challenges of Developing Teachers' Social Justice Beliefs

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Abstract

This study examines the impact of a course that focused on social equity teaching, and particularly, teachers' attitudes toward the capacities of students in culturally nondominant communities. Findings from surveys and written documents reveal that course participants were better able to recognize students' inherent abilities and knowledge traditions than non-participants. The course was less effective in helping teachers recognize English language learners' abilities and teachers' own role in challenging school inequalities and making a positive difference the life trajectories of students. Results indicate a need for greater emphasis on challenging language stereotypes and promoting teacher activism.

Keywords: teacher education, social justice, teacher attitudes, beliefs

The majority of teachers educated today come from mainstream backgrounds, and their dominant status relative to growing numbers of students from nondominant cultural communities leaves them susceptible to underestimating these students' literacy abilities. This is because many hold naive and uncomplicated views about schooling, race, and literacy (Lazar, 2007). They often subscribe to the meritocratic view that achievement depends solely on one's merits and work habits (Castro, 2010) and tend to blame students and their caregivers for "failing" at school rather than recognizing "the system of failure embedded in institutional practices that disfavors and disenfranchises minority groups" (p. 207).

It is possible to challenge deficit perspectives through teacher education programs that infuse social justice goals (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Examining inequalities, engaging in personal reflections of self and others, and participating in action research within schools and communities have helped teachers develop understandings about student capacity and their own responsibility for teaching (Zeichner, 2009). Programs have also focused on developing teachers' understandings about relationships between race, class, culture, literacy, and language (Ball, 2009; Lazar, 2007) and developing understandings about students' cultural capital and building on students' existing knowledge through culturally responsive teaching (Gutierrez & Lee, 2009; Gonzalez, Moll, & Amati, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 2009). It is especially important that teacher education occur in the context of inquiry communities and focus on developing intellectual, political, and critical stances (Cochran-Smith, 2004).

While social justice goals are considered vital to promoting social activism among teachers, they are threatened by the current political climate that focuses on the evaluation of teachers on the basis of students' standardized test scores (Zeichner, 2009). Teachers are not encouraged to advocate for students and challenge programs and policies that undermine student

achievement; rather, they are criticized for failing to raise test scores. In such a climate, social justice education takes a back seat to professional development programs that focus on test preparation and skill development. While social justice teaching is a fundamental goal of many teacher education programs, it is still not a core value across all programs (Zeichner, 2009). Without compelling research that shows the significance of social justice goals in teacher preparation, there is little hope that they will universally prioritized in these programs.

Teacher educators need to evaluate how their programs prepare teachers to serve students from nondominant cultural communities. Toward this goal, I will explore the impact of a course called “Sociology of Literacy” on teachers’ social justice beliefs, and particularly, their views toward the capacities of students.

Method

Participants and Course

Set in an urban-based university in the mid-Atlantic region of the U.S., 41 teachers participated in the Sociology of Literacy course. I compared the responses of this group to 46 teachers who did not take the course. Ninety-five percent of the teachers in both groups were white, five percent were African American, and almost all considered themselves middle class. All but three were women. The majority were novice teachers with less than five years of teaching experience.

The Sociology of Literacy course involved reading and responding to research on the following topics: the complexity of culture, issues related to social inequality, institutional racism, poverty, white privilege and racial identity, language variation and identity, emergent bilingualism, cultural capital, and culturally responsive instruction. Teachers wrote reflectively about these topics and shared their insights in small and whole group discussions.

Teachers also participated in the ABC Model of Cultural Understanding and Communication (Ruggiano-Schmidt & Finkbeiner, 2006). This involved writing an autobiography that includes information about family, beliefs, values, traditions, racial/ethnic identity, and their ways of being privileged or subordinated based on race, class, gender, or other affiliations. Teachers wrote about their access to school-valued literacy practices and mainstream language communities. Teachers also wrote a biography of someone culturally different from themselves after interviewing this person about key life events, similar to those addressed in their own autobiographies. They also addressed topics related to culture, power, or privilege, based on their level of comfort in discussing these issues with interviewees. For the cross-cultural analysis, teachers compared their autobiographies to the biographies and generate a list of similarities and differences between themselves and the person they interviewed.

Data Sources & Analysis

Surveys

Both teacher groups were asked to respond to twelve statements on the survey, *Learning to Teach for Social Justice – Beliefs (LTSJ-B)* (Enterline, Cochran-Smith, Ludlow, Mitescu,

2008; see Appendix). This instrument is designed to measure key beliefs associated with social justice. These include: 1) high expectations and rich learning opportunities for all pupils; 2) an asset-based perspective on the cultural, linguistic and experiential resources pupils and families bring to school; 3) the importance of critical thinking in a democratic society; 4) the role of teachers as advocates and agents for change; 5) challenges to the notion of a meritocratic society; 6) teaching as an activity that is related to teachers' deep underlying assumptions and beliefs about race, class, gender, disability, and culture; and 7) the idea that issues related to culture, equity, and race ought to be part of what is visible in all aspects of the curriculum.

Participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each of the survey statements using a Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=uncertain, 4=agree, 5 strongly agree). Seven of the 12 items (3, 5, 6, 9, 10, 11, 12) are negatively worded such that low scores (1 or 2) on these items are associated with a stronger social justice orientation. These were reversed scored (e.g.: negatively worded statement receiving a score of "1" was changed to a "5") and consequently the statement was reversed in my analysis (e.g.: Statement #10, "it's not their job to change society" was changed to "it is their job to change society"). This allowed for consistency in scoring as all high (4 or 5) scores were aligned with a social justice orientation.

Means for each item were calculated and compared using independent sample t-tests. The central question of the study is the degree to which the Sociology of Literacy course could challenge teachers' deficit attitudes toward students from nondominant communities. For this, I focus the analysis on those items and responses that relate to teachers' understanding of student capacity. These include the negatively worded Items 6: *It's reasonable for teachers to have lower classroom expectations for students who don't speak English as their first language* and 9: *Economically disadvantaged students have more to gain in schools because they bring less into the classroom*.

Written Statements

Teachers were asked to write in response to the following statement: *Please describe how you would approach teaching students in urban high poverty communities*. Thirty-six "Course" teachers and 33 "non-course" teachers chose to participate. Teachers were given 20 minutes to write a response. These papers were read and open-coded for themes and patterns (Charmaz, 2006). Statements were coded as either an "assertion" or "assumption." Assertions were either recommendations for instruction (28 codes) or statements about urban school conditions (11 codes), or the impact on teachers (1 code). Assumptions were generalizations about students' homes/caregivers (7 codes) or students (10 codes). All of the codes were displayed with the identification numbers of the teachers who wrote them. Percentages of statements from course and non-course teachers were calculated. The most salient differences between the two groups are reported, as well as central trends among the items, especially as they relate to teachers' beliefs about student capacity.

Analysis involved examining consistencies within and between data sets. Based on general trends across these sets, I generated assertions about the course impact, and lack of impact, on teachers' understandings.

Findings

Surveys

Course teachers scored higher on all 12 LTSJ-B survey items, and significantly higher on four of the twelve items than teachers who did not take the course. Findings from the survey show that the course had a significant impact on teachers' understandings about the need to examine one's own attitudes and beliefs about race, class, gender, disabilities, and sexual orientation (Item 1; Course: 4.82, No Course: 4.29; $p < .01$). There were also significant differences between three of the negatively worded items: 1) *For the most part, covering multicultural topics is only relevant to certain subject areas such as social studies and literature* (Item 3, Course: 4.46, No Course: 2.65; $p < .001$), 2) *Economically disadvantaged students have more to gain in schools because they bring less into the classroom* (Item 9, Course: 4.34 C, No Course: 3.61; $p < .01$), and 3) *Although teachers have to appreciate diversity; it's not their job to change society* (Item 10, Course: 4.02, No Course: 3.45; $p < .05$). Based on these four items, the course helped teachers recognize the importance of: 1) examining one's own attitudes toward several dimensions of cultural diversity, 2) addressing multicultural topics not just in social studies and literature, but throughout the curriculum, 3) recognizing that economically disadvantaged students bring something value (presumably knowledge or understandings) to the classroom, and 4) that teachers' role is to not only appreciate diversity, but to also change societal views to be more accepting of diversity.

The finding that course teachers recognized student capacity, based on their higher rates of disagreement to Item 9 (*Economically disadvantaged students have more to gain in schools because they bring less into the classroom*), was not matched by their responses to a similar Item, #6 (*It's reasonable for teachers to have lower classroom expectations for students who don't speak English as their first language*). While course teachers disagreed with Item 6 at a higher rate than non-course teachers (more consistent with a social justice orientation), the difference was not significant.

Course teachers' significantly higher rates of disagreement with statement #10 (*Although teachers have to appreciate diversity; it's not their job to change society*), reflected their tendency to identify as change agents. Yet there was no significant difference between the two groups in their response to other statements that related to teacher advocacy. Both groups tended to agree with statement #7: *Part of the responsibilities of the teacher is to challenge school arrangements that maintain societal inequities* (Course=4.21; No Course=4.15). One explanation is that statement #7 may have been interpreted as more reasonable than #10 because it includes the qualifying phrase "part of the responsibilities of the teacher." In other words, "challenging school arrangements" could be *one of many* teaching responsibilities and therefore it is plausible that even those who do not have strong social justice views would agree with this. Yet there was no significant difference between the groups in response to statement #12: *Realistically, the job of a teacher is to prepare students for the lives they are likely to lead*. Both groups tended to be fairly uncertain about this statement (Course=2.82; No-Course=2.76). Those who felt that teachers could change the life trajectories of students would disagree with this statement.

Written Comments

There were some consistencies between survey responses and teachers' written comments in the area of recognizing student capacity. An analysis of the two teacher groups' written comments shows very distinct patterns of response to the prompt: *Please describe how you would approach teaching students in urban high poverty communities.* Table I below indicates that statements written by course teachers were more focused on recognizing student capacity than those who did not take the course. Course teachers wrote much more consistently about teachers' need to know students and value their knowledge:

Table 1.

Teachers' Assertions about Capacity of Students in Urban High Poverty Communities

"Teachers should/must..."	Non-Course Teachers N=33	Course Teachers N=36
Treat each student as a valuable resource.	3	36
Recognize students' "funds of knowledge."	0	19
Build on students' prior knowledge.	0	14
Learn about students' communities.	0	14
Recognize students' home literacies.	0	11
Validate students' home language.	0	11

More than a third of the course teachers indicated that teachers should recognize students as valuable resources in the classroom, and almost one-fifth stated specifically that students' funds of knowledge should be recognized. Course teachers who included either type of statement account for 55.5% of the group. Further 66.6% (24 out of 36) of teachers who participated in the course included at least one or more of these statements in their written response. None of the non-course teachers recognized urban students' knowledge as valuable. The trend of course teachers recognizing students' capacity is matched by their relative absence of negative commentary about students and their caregivers. Table 2 shows that none of these teachers made negative comments about students or their caregivers:

Table 2.

Teachers' Assertions about Students and Their Caregivers

I feel that...	Non-Course Teachers n=33	Course Teachers N=36
1. Caregivers do not care about their children's education.	24	0
2. Students do not care about their education.	6	0
3. Students come to school with little/no prior knowledge.	6	0

Table 2 shows that nearly a quarter of those who did not take the course indicated that caregivers did not care about their children's education. Additionally, several teachers in this group wrote certain kinds of statements about students that were not shared by course teachers. These include: 1) students could not put as much effort into school because of outside responsibilities, 2) students must be employed to help pay the bills, 3) students do not develop at a normal rate, 3) low literacy abilities exist at home, and 4) students have few highly educated role models.

These tables reflect salient differences between the teacher groups in the area of recognizing student capacity. About two-thirds of course teachers acknowledged student capacity in some form, where only one of the non-course teachers did. Additionally two of the teachers who did not take the course indicated that students brought little to no prior knowledge to school. Written statements indicate that teachers who did not participate in the course tended not acknowledge students' intellectual or academic capacities.

Consistencies/Inconsistencies across Data Sets

Two-thirds of the course teachers recognized student capacity in their written statements and this finding matched these teachers' higher level of disagreement that economically disadvantaged students brought less to the classroom. Additionally, none of the course teachers commented negatively about students or their caregivers, as did some non-course teachers. While not a significant difference between the two groups, more course teachers disagreed with statement 6: *"It is reasonable to have lower expectations for students who do not speak English as their first language."* Consistent with this finding, about one-tenth of course teachers recognized the worth of students' home language in their written comments yet none of the non-course teachers discussed the value of students' home language.

Findings were inconclusive about the impact of the course on strengthening teachers' sense of activism. More course teachers felt it was teachers' job to change society to appreciate diversity, but none wrote about this. There were no significant differences between the two groups regarding teachers' responsibility to challenge school arrangements that maintain societal inequities or the idea that the job of teachers is to prepare students for the lives they are likely to lead. No teacher from either group provided written commentary related to these items, as most focused on how they would serve students instructionally.

Significance/Implications

Teachers who took the Sociology of Literacy course conveyed beliefs that were more consistent with social justice goals than those who did not take the course. Findings also showed that differences between course and non-course teachers were robust in some areas, such as acknowledging students' capacity, although not as in the area of valuing students' linguistic capital or articulating understandings about the institutional and societal structures that advantage or disadvantage particular communities.

A generally acknowledged tenet in this body of research is that one course will not produce teachers who fully appreciate and own social justice perspectives. It is necessary, however, to define the possibilities and limitations of individual courses so that they may be improved. Having teachers complete the ABC project with emergent bilingual students might improve teachers' recognition of students' cultural and linguistic capital. More specific

explorations of how students' native language bolsters their acquisition of English would be necessary for raising teachers' expectations of emergent bilinguals (Garcia & Kleifgen, 2010). The findings also inform a more explicit focus on the roles of teachers as activists. This calls for course experiences that go beyond reflecting on inequalities, to actually being in the company of teachers who are involved in activist-oriented work in schools.

Conclusion

Findings from this study affirm that the Sociology of Literacy course made a difference in helping teachers acquire a social justice orientation, especially in the areas of valuing culturally responsive teaching practices and seeing students' capacities. These align with two of the dimensions of social justice teaching discussed by Cochran-Smith (2010): promoting equity in learning opportunities and outcomes for students and **respecting the knowledge traditions of students from all cultural groups**. The course might make an even greater difference if it was fortified by internship experiences with more expert teachers who see students' capacity and work as student advocates and activists in their schools. I believe these components would contribute to the value of the course for helping teachers acquire the social justice orientation they need to serve students in nondominant communities.

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Appendix

The *Learning to Teach for Social Justice*—Beliefs Scale (Enterline, Cochran-Smith, Ludlow, Mitescu, 2008)

Directions: Respond to the statements below using the following Likert categories:
Strongly Disagree=1, Disagree=2, Uncertain=3, Agree=4, Strongly Agree=5

1	An important part of learning to be a teacher is examining one's own attitudes and beliefs about race, class, gender, disabilities, and sexual orientation
2	Issues related to racism and inequity should be openly discussed in the classroom.
3R*	For the most part, covering multicultural topics is only relevant to certain subjects areas, such as social studies and literature.
4	Good teaching incorporates diverse cultures and experiences into classroom lessons and discussions.
5R*	The most important goal in working with immigrant children and English language learners is that they assimilate into American society.
6R*	It's reasonable for teachers to have lower classroom expectations for students who don't speak English as their first language.
7	Part of the responsibilities of the teacher is to challenge school arrangements that maintain societal inequities.
8	Teachers should teach students to think critically about government positions and actions.
9R*	Economically disadvantaged students have more to gain in schools because they bring less into the classroom.
10R*	Although teachers have to appreciate diversity, it's not their job to change society.
11R*	Whether students succeed in school depends primarily on how hard they work.
12R*	Realistically, the job of a teacher is to prepare students for the lives they are likely to lead.

*R: Statements are reverse scored.

The Community Teacher: Perspectives of African-Born Teachers

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Abstract

This qualitative study examined the question: How do African-born teachers in U.S. urban schools conceptualize the ‘teacher’ and his/her role and characteristics in an African school context? The data resulted in the conceptualization of the teacher as “the community teacher” who is intimately invested and integrated into the community, internalizes teaching as community service, believes and commits to collective responsibility, builds synergistic relationship with parents/families and the community, holds high expectation for students and self, and engages in social activism for community empowerment. The paper concludes with a discussion of implication for urban teacher preparation.

Key Words: community teacher, urban teaching, teaching as community service, pedagogy, culturally responsive education, African educational practice

Across the nation, the academic underachievement in many urban students is well documented and remains disturbing for educators, families, community leaders, political leaders, professional organizations, and even the government (Darling-Hammond, 2004; Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Obama, 2009). In 2012, in spite of numerous reform initiatives, only little and insignificant change has occurred. No one puts this educational travesty into perspective more profoundly than the late and renowned educator, Martin Haberman, who in numerous reports, urged us to be outraged by the educational realities of diverse urban and low-income students. As he illuminates:

Seven thousand youth drop out of school every day. The achievement gap between racial groups and economic classes continues to widen. The persistent shortage of teachers who can be effective in 120 failing urban school systems, guarantees that the miseducation of seven million diverse children in urban poverty will continue (Haberman, 2008, p.1).

Almost six decades after the declaration of the unconstitutionality of the “separate but equal” doctrine in *Brown vs. Topeka Board of Education*, many diverse urban students remain intellectually impoverished. Haberman (1991, 1995) has observed the pervasiveness of the “pedagogy of poverty” in teacher practice that is grounded in deficit thinking and theories of genetic inferiority. As one who immigrated to the U.S. from a so-called “Third World” country, where education works as the “great equalizer,” and all children are successfully educated and have a chance at upward social mobility, I continue to be baffled, concerned, and even outraged by the “third class” education U.S. urban students are provided.

Within the last two decades, much has been written about the theory and practice of culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009). However, much of this scholarship reflects Western perspective. For ages, in spite of limited educational resources, teachers in many African communities have successfully fostered the education and citizenship development of children from underresourced, non-literate families. Few children came from professional, affluent, and middle-class families, and most often, children from non-literate and underresourced families outperformed them. African immigrants have been headlined as “the new model minority” who surpass their native-born African American peers including White students and other immigrant subgroups (Kperogi, 2009; Page, 2007; Ogbu, 1978). The academic success of African/Black immigrant students demystifies the stereotype of Blacks as intellectually inferior and incapable of high academic performance. Herrnstein and Murray (1994) published the *Bell Curve*, which theorized a racial intelligence hierarchy with Asians on top as intellectually superior and Africans at the bottom and genetically inferior. African immigrant education success implies that when students have the right teaching, challenge, support, and more importantly, the right teacher, they can be successful. As a multicultural scholar, I have been actively engaged with the scholarship on culturally responsive teaching (CRT). My reflection on CRT reminds me about my homeland teachers and their empowering teaching practices. As I collaborate with my African-born teacher educator colleagues across the U.S., read their narratives, and reminisce with them about our homeland education, it has become very clear how culturally responsive, socially just, and empowering their pedagogical practices were. The purpose of this paper is to examine the concept and practice of “the community teacher” from an African perspective. Two theoretical constructs frame this study: the scholarship on teacher quality and culturally responsive teaching.

Conceptual Framework

Teacher Quality Matters in Urban Schools

Contrary to earlier studies, which link urban students’ learning and achievement to deficit theories—pathological disorder, inferior intelligence, family conditions and poverty (Murray & Herrnstein, 1994), today evidence suggests that the teacher is the most significant factor that affects student learning outcomes and achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2004; Haycock, 2001; Manning and Baruth, 2009; Marzano, 2003; Presley, White, & Gong, 2005). Katie Haycock of the Educational Trust has documented convincingly that it is not the kids, their parents or their backgrounds but the teacher that has the most effect on student learning. Margaret Haley (1938, 272-273) reminds us of the high call to the American school teacher, capable of sending out a generation of thoughtful children, able to think, able to change those conditions which must be changed for democracy to survive.

Sadly, Haley’s vision of the American teacher does not exist for urban students who are subjected to “banking education” (Freire, 1970) and pedagogy of poverty that foster low-level learning. Is it any wonder that many urban students 15- to 17-year-olds cannot perform basic mathematical tasks, demonstrate reading skills similar to White 13-year-olds (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2005), suffer high suspension and drop-out or push-out-rates, and attain lower college entrance and graduation rates (NCES, 2005)! Kunjufu (2002) points out that while the average SAT score for European Americans is 1054, it is 856 for African Americans. Ladson-Billings (2009) laments the dismal academic realities and writes, “African-

American children are three times as likely to drop out of school as white children [...], five times as likely as whites to be dependent on welfare [...]" (P. 2). Ladson-Billings (2000, p. 212) also reminds us that "while possessing a high school diploma is no guarantee of success in U.S. society, not having one spells certain economic and social failure." This educational travesty calls for urgent meaningful reforms. However, meaningful reforms will not occur unless those who are in charge of the day-to-day teaching of students are adequately prepared to be highly and culturally competent and able to enact effective practices.

Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT)

Within the last two decades, much scholarship has focused on the emerging research on CRT espoused by scholars who posit that teachers must become culturally responsive and competent in order to effectively teach diverse students (Gay, 2000; 2010; Hale, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1994; 2009). The rationale is that U.S. schools, including urban schools are hegemonic; they reflect the culture, curriculum, and pedagogies of the dominant culture that disadvantage urban students. These researchers argue that teachers often lack an understanding of how best to work with urban students and their parents and discount the role of culture in teaching and learning. While the concept of teaching for cultural responsiveness has been framed in various terms, all scholars agree that it is an appropriate approach to bridging the disconnect between students' cultural frame of reference and school learning in order to support their effective learning retention and successful academic performance. Gay (1997) aptly argues that CRT is not necessarily new; that it has been routinely used to make learning relevant for European American students and hence their academic success; that it is the absence of this for students of color that has placed them at a learning disadvantage and therefore academic failure (p.211). Ladson-Billings (1994) defines and identifies the characteristics of culturally relevant teachers: such teachers see themselves as artists, as part of the community and view teaching as giving back to the community; they believe that all students can succeed; view knowledge as a social construction and integrate student knowledge into the official curriculum; they build relationships and learning communities that are humanely equitable and extend to the community.

However, while the research on CRT is innovative, relevant and helpful, other frameworks have emerged that align with notions of community of learners, community of practice, learning community (Wenger, 1998) and "the community teacher" (Murray, 2001). Although scholarship about community of learners, learning community, teaching community, and community of practice exists, little is known about "the community teacher." Peter Murray's (2001) pioneering work is a rarity in this regard. He conceptualizes "the community teacher" as:

an accomplished practitioner who is culturally connected with students, families and communities, works to build a contextualized knowledge of culture, community, and identity of children and families as the core of his/her teaching practice; possesses a "multicultural competence" with a deep and sophisticated understanding of race, racism and the contemporary contexts of schooling by living and working in the same under-resourced communities as the students he/she teaches and understands first-hand the obstacles facing young people growing up in central city neighborhoods (pp. 4-5).

How have other world communities conceptualized the “teacher”? This study expands on the scholarship on preparing teachers for CRT by examining “the community teacher” from an African perspective.

Method: Procedures, Data Sources & Collection

This paper emerged as part of a larger qualitative study that explored the perceptions of African-born teachers in U.S. urban schools about education, schooling, and teaching. The study’s overarching questions were: (a) What are African-born teachers’ perspectives about education and schooling in the U.S.? (b) What are African-born teachers’ perspectives about education, schooling, and teaching in their countries of origin? Several sub-questions were developed including the one addressed in this paper: How do African-born teachers conceptualize “the teacher” and his/her role and characteristics in an African school context? Using a purposeful and network sampling design (Patton, 2002), fifteen participants were interviewed. The study used a convenient, criterion-based sampling: Teachers who (1) were born and schooled in Africa prior to immigrating to U.S., (2) taught in their homelands, and (3) taught or currently teach in U.S. urban schools at least for three years. Participants were diverse in country of origin, gender, age, and teaching experience. Three participants were from Cameroon; four from Nigeria; one from Congo; one from Ghana; two from Senegal; one from Togo; one from Sudan; one from Sierra Leone, and one from Burkina Faso. Six participants were elementary teachers, three middle school, and six high school teachers. There were 8 females and 7 males. Participants’ ages ranged from 27 to 75 years. Participants’ teaching experience in U.S. urban schools ranged from 5 to 35 years.

Data collected included participants’ demographics, one-on-one 60 to 90-minute interview, focus group conversations, and researcher’s field notes. The interview questions were open-ended. Among them were: Tell me about your teaching experience in your homeland. How would you describe the educational, schooling, and teaching practices in your homeland? How does teaching in your homeland compare to teaching in the U.S. (roles/ characteristics, practices, etc)? What similarities and differences do you see between educating children in your homeland and in the U.S.? Interviews were audiotaped, transcribed, and analyzed for emerging themes using content analysis (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). During the interview, participants were prompted to elaborate on their responses. For example, tell me more: what was the teacher like? Data sets were analyzed separately during and after the collection. Field notes were taken and used to summarize participant’s responses and read back to them. Data sets were analyzed separately during and after the collection. Data analysis involved reading and rereading interview transcripts, field notes, and using both inductive and deductive coding. First, the researcher thoroughly read each participant’s transcript to gain a sense of the responses, and identified reoccurring concepts and themes; then read and re-read to refine the themes, and then compared participants’ responses both within interviews and across interviews—and clarified meaning through “linking together or finding consistent relationships among patterns, components, constituents, and structures” (LeCompte and Shensul’s, 1999, p.177). The findings were organized according to the research question. Member-checking and clarification were obtained through emails, follow-up visit and telephone conversations. It is important to note that all participants’ responses were relatively identical even though they were from different countries of origin. This became even more evident during the focus group conversations. It is also significant that all participants’ responses were generally identical even though they were from

different countries of origin. This became even more evident during the focus group conversations as participants echoed and reinforced each other's experiences and perspectives. This is not surprising, given the similarities in the African culture, the colonial experience, and the educational systems. Pseudonyms were used to conceal participants' identities.

Findings

Defining the Community Teacher

How do African-born teachers conceptualize “the teacher” in an African school context? All participants painted an idolized and romanticized image of the African teacher and expressed deep nostalgic emotions that were captivating and inspirational, in some cases singing songs of praise they sang as children in their homeland. Various examples, phrases, and profound stories were used to convey the image of the teacher; the teacher “was in the community,” “everyone knew the teacher as ‘Teacher’ and ‘Miss.’” The teacher “served the community,” “was the community scribe,” “the voice of wisdom for family and community,” and s/he “organized community events, you know, like the adult night school.” Based on participants' comments, a broad definition was constructed, read back to the participants individually and during the focus group conversations. Participants agreed and accepted the definition of “the community teacher,” as one, who is intimately invested and integrated into the community; internalizes teaching as a community service, and acts in immeasurable and demonstrable ways to make a difference in the lives of the children and community in which he/she teaches.

Teaching as a Community Service

How do African-born teachers in U.S. schools conceptualize the role and characteristics of “the teacher” in an African school context? The data revealed that the role of the teacher transcended the traditional function of imparting knowledge to one that was encompassing and service-oriented. The following comments illuminate this role:

The [community] teacher understands teaching beyond the traditional teaching responsibility of teaching subjects to help students pass exams. The teacher provided a well-rounded education to students, even helped the parents/families. The teacher was in our church—organized the church choir, the harvest festival and read and wrote letters for our parents.

Philomena echoed and elaborated:

Teachers knew that parents and the community valued children who would care for them at old age and bring good things to the community—running water, electricity, good roads. Doctors, lawyers, and engineers were important but none compared to the high regard given to teachers. Teachers knew the high respect accorded them, internalized it, and felt obliged to teach well as if their own lives depended on it.

Commitment to Collective Responsibility

Participants conveyed that “the teacher” while recognizing and internalizing his/her individual responsibility, also believed in the African adage, “It takes a village to raise a child.” The teacher was committed to the collective responsibility toward educating all children. Participants conveyed that the teacher functioned in the context of the whole as exemplified in the adage. As Philomena noted, “Teachers were committed to student success. You all remember how teachers, for four months, each day, took turns prepping the matriculating class in the evenings from 4 pm-7 pm with no financial compensation. They were selfless.” Participants also described the close-knit relationship among teachers who knew what was going on with every student in the school and were in one accord when they “straightened” an unruly student. Consider this comment:

“Teachers always worked together, always seemed to be on the same page. A teacher, regardless of the grade level he/she taught, could discipline any student, anywhere. They took interest in all students, encouraged them and disciplined them when necessary.”

Ikechyi echoed a similar comment but also made a contrasting observation of the lack of collaboration that compounds discipline issues in U.S. urban schools:

In Africa, teachers had respect for each other, cooperated so well and literally spoke with one voice. Students could never pit one teacher against another. Here there is competition. Teachers compete among themselves and don’t embrace a team spirit to solve problems. They say and do different things and so students pit them against each other. The culture is, you do your thing and I do my thing. This is why there are so many discipline problems.

Teacher-Parent Synergistic Relationship

Participants expressed passionately how the African teacher cultivated mutually respectful relationships with parents/families, who were not literate or spoke English or French. Participants shared that the teacher demonstrated high regards for parents by curtsying when meeting and greeting parents/families, and addressed them as “papa/baba” and “mama/madam.” Fatima, originally from Nigeria, shared this:

It was common to hear the voice of a teacher saying hello baba/mama as we settled down to dinner.” The teacher came to the house when a student did not show up in school or was ill, or when the family was celebrating or in mourning.

Pedagogy of High Expectation & Possibility

Debbie Wei’s (2006) exchange with one African immigrant student illuminates the power of African teachers’ belief:

Here [U.S.] there are more things, it is true..., but two things are very different. One, in Eritrea, every one of our teachers believed in us. They believed not only that we could

learn, but that we had to learn for the future of the country (p. 121).

Participants were unanimous in their agreement about teacher belief in student learnability and how they challenged them, pushed them for high level work and talked about the tough-love approach they used to get them to their utmost best. Mosul recalls: “School was highly regimented, strict discipline, and failure was not an option. You were caned for missing one point on an assignment and you learned to not miss it next time but we knew they cared deeply for us and it paid off.”

Affirmed and Negotiated Students' Culture and Language

All participants expressed how teachers who came from different ethnic and language background quickly learned the language of the community so that they could interact and communicate with their non-English-speaking parents/families and integrated the culture—songs and stories of the community—into the curriculum. All participants expressed how the teacher welcomed children’s storytelling in their mother tongue. Vicki recalled how school was motivating because the teacher embraced their culture and language:

We had the storytelling period. The teacher encouraged us to tell stories in our language and sometimes in English. The best time was when we told stories with songs and the teacher and class sang along, clapped, and danced. Students loved school; cried if their parents required them to skip school due to family exigencies.

Conclusions and Implication for Urban Teacher Preparation

First, although the participants did not use the term “the community teacher,” their constant reference to “teacher” and “community,” made it clear that the African teachers they talked about were “community teachers.” This generated the broad definition of “the community teacher” as one who is intimately integrated into the community, internalizes teaching as community service, a community activist who acts in immeasurable and demonstrable ways to make a difference in the lives of children and the community in which he/she teaches. Second, for the most part, the finding about the African community teacher aligns well with some of the characteristics of the culturally relevant teacher discussed by Ladson-Billings (2009), Gay (2010) and Murray (2001). However, one distinguishing characteristic of the African community teacher that is absent from Ladson-Billing’s (1994, 2009) and Murray’s (2001) frameworks is the concept of teaching as community service and the identity development and socialization of the teacher to teaching as community service. The identity of the teacher as a “community teacher” is transcendental as the teacher internalizes his/her role as more than imparting knowledge to students. U.S. Urban students with challenging lived realities, need teachers who identify, integrate, and invest in the community and see teaching as a community service that is high-stakes; and accept teaching not merely as a “job” or “calling” but as one of service to the community.

To provide the kind of “African community teacher” for urban students, teacher preparation programs must be deliberate, systematic, explicit, and intentional in providing curricular experiences that socialize them to developing a communal orientation and teacher

identity of community service. This involves assisting teachers to make a paradigm shift in their worldview. Most teachers in urban schools are European Americans and middle class who were socialized to a worldview of individualism, loose relationships, valuing tasks over relationships, which contrasts with the African worldview of intersecting networks and deep relationships. This is the context for the African community teacher orientation hence teaching is not just for the individual student but for the larger community as well. If urban teachers are socialized to internalizing their role as community service, they will be more likely to invest and commit to the academic excellence and provide an all-round development for students; failure will not be an option as failing any child will mean failing the community. Preparing teachers to internalize teaching as community service is the best hope for reviving urban schools and their communities. Teaching as community service fosters teacher commitment to (a) collective responsibility for student success (b) engagement in the pedagogy of high expectation and possibility (c) sustainable synergistic relationship with parents/families, and negotiating students' culture, language and curriculum.

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3. The recommended manuscript length is approximately 1,500 to 3,000 words.
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