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## To view Dr. Ladson Billings' work please read the following:

IS THE TEAM ALL RIGHT? By: Ladson-Billings, Gloria J.. Journal of Teacher Education, May/Jun2005, Vol. 56 Issue 3, p229-234, 6p.

It's Your World, I'm Just Trying to Explain It: Understanding Our Epistemological and Methodological Challenges. By: Ladson-Billings, Gloria. Qualitative Inquiry, Feb2003, Vol. 9 Issue 1, p5, 8p.

Fighting for Our Lives: Preparing Teachers To Teach African American Students. Ladson-Billings, Gloria; Journal of Teacher Education, v51 n3 p206-14 May-Jun 2000.

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Just Showing Up. By: Ladson-Billings, Gloria; Gomez, Mary Louise. Phi Delta Kappan, May2001, Vol. 82 Issue 9, p675, 6p.

# IS THE TEAM ALL RIGHT?
## DIVERSITY AND TEACHER EDUCATION

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As an avid sports fan, I have sat through an incredible number of athletic contests watching the efforts of finely tuned athletes in competition. The athletes are supported by coaches, equipment, facilities, and of course, their fans. In high-profile sports such as football and basketball, the fans are encouraged by the enthusiasm and choreography of cheerleaders. As a teenager, I remember a call and response cheer that started with the cheerleaders yelling, "What's the matter with the team?" The fans would respond with an enthusiastic, "Oh, the team's all right!" We yelled this response to reassure our team that we were sticking by them despite their being down at any particular point in the contest. In this article, I am thinking aloud about whether the team I know as teacher education is, indeed, all right.

As I think about the challenges facing our society, I recognize that one of the powerful determiners of how we respond to challenges is economic. In times of economic downturn, we come to expect layoffs, job losses, reductions of services, budget cuts, and criticisms. Teacher education is not immune to these manifestations of economic uncertainty. During the past decade, teacher education has confronted a number of economically spurred challenges including the closure of one major school of education, the consolidation of several others (with programs in human development, public policy, liberal arts, or information sciences), and increased competition from alternative certification programs based in school districts, online colleges, and state departments of education. Along with these cutbacks and consolidations have come criticisms about teacher educa-

tion. These criticisms focus on the perceived lack of intellectual rigor and content knowledge in certification programs (Kramer, 1991). I want to suggest that the real problems facing teacher education are the disconnections between and among the students, families, and community and teachers and teacher educators. These disconnections emanate from differences in race, class, cultural background, and socioeconomic status. In this article, I discuss the demographic and cultural mismatch that makes it difficult for teachers to be successful with K-12 students and makes it difficult for teacher educators to be successful with prospective teachers.

Much of the discussion surrounding the challenges of teacher education focuses on the external attacks from politicians, federal bureaucrats, and educational "entrepreneurs" who have a vested interest in the dismantling (or at least the severe curtailing) of teacher education programs. However, this article is designed to be an examination from within. As a member of this community, I find a number of practices within the field disturbing, and I will direct my comments to the specific issue of diversity. Unlike our external critics, I do not want to destroy teacher education, I want to strengthen it; and I do not believe this can happen until we look honestly at what we are doing.

## SURVEYING THE LANDSCAPE

Today's schools are called on to serve a more ethnically, linguistically, and culturally diverse student population, representing about one third of the school population. Less than 50% of the school population in two states—California

and Texas—is White. Students of color compose at least half of the population in the largest 25 cities in the United States (Applied Research Center, 2000). Population projections suggest that our student population is increasing and that the nation's population of children age 18 and younger is approximately 70.2 million. Higher birthrates and increasing immigration in the Latino/Latina–Hispanic and Asian Pacific Islander populations guarantee a rise in the numbers of students of color.

At the same time that we are experiencing increasing diversity among school-aged youngsters, the nation's teaching force is becoming less ethnically and culturally diverse. Nationwide, about 88% of teachers are White and in some areas, that figure soars as high as 99% (Applied Research Center, 2000). A variety of reasons—all plausible—have been offered as to why fewer people of color are choosing teaching as a career option. Some have argued that because of increased opportunities, fewer people of color opt to teach; that is, with accessibility to more lucrative professions such as law, medicine, and business, teaching becomes a less attractive choice. Others have argued that the increased licensing and certification requirements make it harder for teaching to attract people of color into the profession (Berlak, 1999). The one argument that rarely surfaces is that the dismal K-12 academic performance of students of color effectively cuts them off from postsecondary education opportunities. Despite the decrease in the number of dropouts nationally, the graduation rate remains flat and an increasing number of students are completing high school in alternative ways (i.e., general equivalency diploma and other high school equivalency programs). So, if high school completion continues to be a barrier for students of color, it is unlikely that we should expect to see more students of color in college or university preparing for teacher certification.

For those students of color who persist in high school, we know that they are less likely to have access to high quality curriculum. Those in large urban schools are more likely to have uncertified or unqualified teachers and less likely to have access to advancement placement or honors courses. Students of color are systematically denied the educational opportunities that would lead to college and university admission, and without admission to postsecondary education, there is no possibility of entering the teaching profession. This problem is rarely taken up in the debates on recruiting teachers of color. Typically schools, departments, and colleges of education lack a diverse group of teacher education students because they are located on campuses that have to contend with a small number of students of color because of the pipeline issue.

Our teacher education programs are filled with White, middle-class, monolingual female students who will have the responsibility of teaching in school communities serving students who are culturally, linguistically, ethnically, racially, and economically different from them. Our teacher education literature is replete with this reality (see, e.g., Cochran-Smith, 1995; Grant & Secada, 1990; Ladson-Billings, 1999; Zeichner, 1992). However, much of the literature on diversity and teacher education is silent on the cultural homogeneity of the teacher education faculty. Teacher educators are overwhelmingly White (Grant & Gillette, 1987), and their positions as college- and university-level faculty place them much further away from the realities of urban classrooms and communities serving students and families of color. Despite verbal pronouncements about commitments to equity and diversity, many teacher educators never have to seriously act on these commitments because they are rarely in situations that make such a demand on them.

In the past year, I have been privy to three instances on three different campuses where faculty have actively blocked the hiring of a "qualified"[1] candidate of color. The candidates were all graduates of highly regarded Research I institutions. The candidates all came with glowing recommendations from respected scholars. The candidates all were attempting to be hired onto faculties that badly need to diversify their programs. The discouraging aspect of this situation is that in each instance, the people working hardest to ensure that the candidate was not seriously considered were White

females. The very people who were in solidarity with people of color a few decades ago and are now finding a place in the academy seem to be working against inclusion of scholars of color. There is a disconnect between what people espouse and what they actually do. Thus, the circle is unbroken—White teacher educators prepare White teachers who teach children of color who fail to achieve success in schools and are unable to pursue postsecondary education where they might become teachers.

## IS IT REALLY AS SIMPLE AS CULTURE MATCH?

If the problems facing teacher education were only about matching teachers' and students' cultural, racial, linguistic, and ethnic backgrounds, we could find an almost mathematical solution to student learning and school achievement. Indeed, if having teachers of color teaching students of color fixed things, then Detroit and Washington, D.C., would be the most exemplary school districts in the nation for African American students. But we know that is not the case. The point of creating a more diverse teaching force and a more diverse set of teacher educators is to ensure that all students, including White students, experience a more accurate picture of what it means to live and work in a multicultural and democratic society.

For some reason, teacher educators have had limited success in promulgating diversity as a value-added factor. Instead, much of our rhetoric, although having the veneer of diversity, is actually an updated version of the 1960s and 1970s cultural deficit discourse. From their first course in professional education—School and Society or Introduction to Teaching—students begin to hear about the "dangerous" and "extraordinary challenges" of teaching "urban" children. We draw close attention to student lack—"high percentage of free lunch eligible," "at risk," "single parents"—and pay little attention to student strengths—resilience, eagerness, energy, and creativity. Just imagine if prospective teachers came into our programs and we described the teacher education faculty in terms of their lack—divorced, recovering alcoholic, bankrupt, struggling parent, unreliable, lazy scholar. To what degree would we expect stu-

dents with that kind of information about us to trust that we would be capable of preparing them to be successful teachers?

Although teacher education has improved in its recruitment of White females into the field, it has fallen short regarding scholars of color. The percentage of students of color in doctoral programs in education is less than 10%, and as Ducharme & Kluender (1990) observed,

> The overwhelming "maleness" of faculty is likely to decrease, but the "whiteness" factor will continue to grow. . . . Those concerned about the lack of correlation between the makeup of teacher education faculty and the nation's ethnic and racial makeup will find no comfort in [the RATE] study. (p. 46)

The point of having a more diverse pool of teacher educators is to demonstrate that our actions are consistent with our rhetoric. We claim that having a diverse classroom makes for richer and more complex perspectives, but as Sleeter (2001) pointed out, we do our own work in the "overwhelming presence of Whiteness" (p. 101). We insist that prospective teachers demonstrate that they can be successful with a diverse group of students, and we demonstrate no such success in our own professional lives. We, for the most part, are teaching students whose backgrounds are similar to our own, and we work with colleagues who also have similar backgrounds. I am impressed with Thompson's (2003) argument about the construction of "good" White people in which she pointed out that White professors "pride themselves on 'getting' race issues [and] congratulate themselves on being exceptional Whites" (p. 7). Thompson further argued,

> Like White students, White professors make self-congratulatory assumptions about our antiracist credentials. But because our own investments in whiteness are far less visible to us, we often write and talk as if racism and whiteness were problems we could solve through pedagogy: they are our students' problems. Strictly speaking, we may not *believe* we are exempt—we may know better—but we tend to act as if we believe it. (p. 10)

It is not unusual for White colleagues in teacher education to proudly exclaim how their courses and seminars include the "right" texts and the right names. So enamored do they become of

certain iconic scholars of color that they literally forget the context in which they are extolling them. One of the funnier experiences I have had was with a colleague who told me how I needed to read something by bell hooks because she so powerfully explained the Black woman's experience. As I stifled my laughter, I reminded my colleague that I was a Black woman. I have experienced it firsthand. Again, I quote Thompson (2003) who asserted,

> White academics who take up the texts (and lives and projects) of people of color for progressive purposes risk exploiting them for our own insufficiently examined ends. . . . When White scholars strategically quote material by scholars of color to "support an already-conceived idea," we colonize the work of the Other to enrich our writing and enhance our authority. (p. 11)

The late poet and activist Audre Lorde (1984) best expresses my frustration with my colleagues in teacher education in her open letter to Mary Daly when she said, "The history of White women who are unable to hear Black women's words, or to maintain dialogue with us, is long and discouraging" (p. 66). In that same letter, Lorde voiced her doubt that many White women "ever really read the work of Black women" (p. 68) and other women of color but instead, "finger through [their work] for quotations" (p. 68) that they think will "support an already-conceived idea concerning some old and distorted connection between us" (p. 68).

Unfortunately, most of my colleagues of color across the nation have learned to live with racism and inequity within teacher education. They have learned to take on the responsibility of being the sole (or one of a few) advocate for diversity in their teacher education programs. Some of the challenges scholars of color in teacher education learn to live with are "being the diversity expert . . . except when it matters" (Ladson-Billings, 2001, p. 6), being told we are "not like the others . . . [we] just speak for them" (Ladson-Billings, 2001, p. 7), and being told our "work is too narrow . . . but really it's too Black" (Ladson-Billings, 2001, p. 9). Below is a brief explanation of these challenges.

Teacher educators of color often are called on to take leadership or sole responsibility for teaching courses dealing with issues of equity and diversity. Many times we are excited to teach such courses, but we sometimes mistakenly assume that our work is a part of a larger project of equity and diversity embraced by our entire teacher education program. Instead, we become the excuse our colleagues use for not taking up these issues in their courses. In conjunction with our course responsibilities in this area, we also become the primary support system for students of color and the face of diversity for our institutions. These additional responsibilities make it difficult for scholars of color to accomplish the scholarship goals we set for ourselves. The paradox of all of the institutional push for scholars of color to be diversity experts is that in the arena where expertise really counts—research and scholarship—we often are told that this work is not particularly significant. Even in the programmatic realm, our findings are not incorporated as part of change strategies for teacher education. We can systematically document the need for additional faculty of color while having to sit through search committee meetings where potential candidates of color are given little or no consideration.

Scholars of color find themselves being praised for their exceptionality yet are expected to speak for all members of their group. Rarely are we permitted to have individual opinions, and we are never supposed to disagree. This peculiar position reminds me of one of my Letters and Sciences colleagues, who was being wooed away from my university by Harvard. When the chancellor got wind of this, she called my colleague to her office and asked, "What will it take to keep you?" Instead of the typical requests for salary, course reductions, and grant support, my colleague replied, "I want there to be enough Black colleagues on this campus that I don't have to like them all!" From time to time I have had my opinions challenged on the "authority" of some other scholar of color, and I have talked to other scholars of color who have experienced the same thing. Lisa Delpit and I laugh about the way, when people do not like what one of us has to say, they invoke the name of the other as if to negate our position. We are

not interchangeable parts. We may share similar commitments to equity and diversity but are comfortable expressing very different perspectives toward those commitments. My respect and admiration for Carl Grant is without equal, but we do disagree on some things and we resent colleagues trying to use our disagreements against us to further their own agendas.

Our colleagues often choose us because they see us as somehow separate and apart from the masses of people in our racial, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic categories, but they want to make us the "authentic" voices of those communities. As scholars of color, we have as much (if not more) to learn about contemporary communities of color. So much of our lives have been submerged in Whiteness that we too risk losing touch with what is happening in communities of color. One of the purely scholarly reasons for teacher education to work for more diverse campus environments is to ensure that those of us whose intellectual interests are in this area have a reasonable work space. There is something very wrong with recruiting someone to a campus for the cause of diversity and not continuing to push hard to create that diversity.

Finally, I have to address the issue of the assessment of our work. Scholars of color have the potential to blaze new epistemological and methodological grounds. Their work may push them to break down some old paradigms and create new forms of knowledge. Unfortunately, if the old guard serves as the arbiter of who gets to stay in the academy, scholars of color can be greatly constrained in their work. The notion that our work is "too narrow" is a curious one. In the case of African American elementary and secondary education, we are talking about a population universe of 12.2 million. If we look at the experiences of African Americans in general, we can draw from a universe of 38.2 million. Our colleagues who do "poverty" work are not seen as doing narrow work. A careful examination of the plight of African American learners holds promise for all students who are struggling. I see my own work as akin to the work of a medical researcher who is studying a single virus, disease, or syndrome and who experiences breakthroughs that benefit the work of other researchers investigating other viruses, diseases, or syndromes. The specificity of our work does not mean it is narrow, and we need the support of our White colleagues to make sure we are not forced into doing work that neither excites nor interests us.

## WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH THE TEAM?

I began this article with a sports metaphor. I invoked an old school cheer with the call and response motif. I return to this metaphor as I close. I see myself sitting in the stands with many teacher educators—those of color as well as committed White teacher educators. We are looking with anticipation at the team we have fielded. We are nervous because the clock is running out and we cannot seem to score. We know that the referees and officials are not on our side. They set up rigged and arcane rules that keep us from reaching our true potential. From time to time they change the rules and declare other players eligible even though they lack the credentials we have. We know the opposing team is gaining strength and seems to be able to score at will. We are desperate for our cheerleaders to rev us up to inspire our team. They yell with a loud and clear voice, "What's the matter with the team?" and we respond, "The team's all White!"

## NOTES

1. I place the term *qualified* in quotations because there often is a blanket claim that we cannot hire candidates of color because we cannot find any that are qualified.

2. This refers to the RATE study of teacher education.

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# It's Your World, I'm Just Trying to Explain It: Understanding Our Epistemological and Methodological Challenges

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I presume that one of the reasons I have been invited to speak to the Qualitative Inquiry Special Interest Group is the fact that I contributed a chapter to the second edition of the *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. But perhaps if the program planners realized I came kicking and screaming into that assignment, they may have thought twice about the invitation. When Norman Denzin first approached me about contributing a chapter to the *Handbook*, my first response was an unequivocal "no." I explained to him that I had just accepted the editorship of the *American Educational Research Journal*, I was a member of my university's athletic board, I was woefully late on several major writing projects, and I was attempting to have some semblance of a life. There just was no room in my schedule for another major writing task. But Norman was wise in the way those who have endured the academy almost always are. He suggested that I take a look at the current chapter he was asking me to replace and then get back to him. I went back and reread that chapter, and although it was indeed a good chapter, I knew that there was something else I wanted to say. Thus, my ego led me into yet another challenge for which I had no time.

But even the writing of that chapter, titled "Racialized Discourses and Ethnic Epistemologies," takes on a different set of meanings in our current sociopolitical context. The events of September 11, 2001, have colored almost all public discourse in this country. There is no way to ignore it or minimize the way it has shaped the material and symbolic world we inhabit. But this shaping of our world is a perfect example of what this talk is about. First, let me be clear: Nothing can excuse the horrific acts perpetrated against the people in the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and the three airplanes that were hijacked and turned into weapons. But how we have shaped that event and the subsequent public conversation are perfect examples of the epistemic panic (Gordon, 1997) I tried to capture in the handbook chapter.

There are three epistemological themes that were made manifest as a result of the attack. One theme is that of defining humanity. The second theme

is that of defining importance, and the third theme is that of determining the future. In this discussion, I will attempt to draw parallels between these themes and the knowledge construction process that governs the academy.

From the very moment of the attack, the official rhetoric told us we were dealing with madmen, lunatics, and evildoers. We also learned that there were two choices available to us—either to be with "us" or to be with the "terrorists," and clearly, because the terrorists were "deranged" fanatics, the only humanity available was that which was associated with the moral, civilized "us." Next, the images that accompanied the "them" were from a premodern era. Without the trappings of the West—modern dress, daily conveniences, and reason-governed institutions—configuring the "them" as other than human was fairly simple. Such an us-them paradigm makes sense in a cold war reality. However, in a new world configuration, such binaries are useless. According to Huntingdon (1996) in his book, *The Clash of Civilizations*, affinities are less related to nation-states and more related to cultural or civilizational ties. Thus, the lack of humanity we have ascribed to those who are half a world away is also mapped onto those who share their cultural and/or religious ties. Americans of Muslim, Arab, and/or Middle Eastern descent no longer can lay claim to the same humanity as those of us wrapped in this new national "we."

The creation of the inhuman "them" is a very old ontological strategy. Indeed, my handbook chapter is about the way the Enlightenment thinkers defined humanity—as those for whom knowledge was, first, scientific and, second, absolutely knowable and truthful. The human is he (and he is deliberate and definitive here) who understands that "natural science could be summarized by its laws and employs an experimental method to seek truth" (Ladson-Billings, 2000, p. 259). Thus, those who subscribed to an epistemology that conjoined the seen and unseen, the flesh and the spirit, this world and the next were either religious fanatics (if they were White) or primitive, unevolved, and not yet human. Yet scholars such as Ani (1994) suggested that if you "rob the universe of its richness, deny the significance of the symbolic, simplify phenomena until it becomes mere object, [then] you have a knowable quantity. Here begins and ends the European epistemological mode" (p. 29).

Now it is important to be clear that there is nothing wrong with this mode of thinking. What is wrong is the imposition of this mode on all people and the dismissal of modes of thought that conflict with it as untrue, biased, ideological, and/or superstitious. The real challenge of this current era is to understand as Geertz (1983) pointed out that all cultures are local—not universal and, as Pandian (1985) further elaborated, that the Judeo-Christian culture of the West is a local culture, not a universal, transcendent, supraculture under which all others must be subordinated. However, the combination of opportunity, economics, military might, and technology has afforded the West unique and powerful influences in the world—first through the indus-

trial age and the rapid manufacturing capabilities and next through the information age where ideas, symbols, and whole cultural systems can be transported and inserted into other cultural systems in an instant. Scholar Sylvia Wynter (1992) cited Eritrean ethnologist Asmarom Legesse in pointing out that

> as Westernized scholars, we invariably see the "models of the universe" native to this specific "local culture" (even if one that is now secularized and globalized), as if they were models of an in-itself reality. So rather than being aware of the fact that we too conceptualize and know our social reality *through* the prescriptive categories of a "local" world view, we have come to believe that the knowledge we have of our social reality is a *supra-cultural* rather than a culture-specific order of knowledge. (pp. 8-9)

Today, we continue to grapple with a cultural logic locked in binaries. It understands dichotomy and opposition and has little room for complexity. It cannot hold two competing thoughts at once and imposes on us a "regime of truth" that makes it impossible to confer humanity on anyone outside of its system of thought and mode of behavior. Stanley Fish (2001), in his *New York Times* editorial following the September 11th attacks, pointed out that like Edward Said, we must reject "false universals." He further asserted,

> How many times have we heard these new mantras: "we have seen the face of evil"; "these are irrational madmen"; "we are at war against international terrorism." Each is at once inaccurate and unhelpful. We have not seen the face of evil; we have seen the face of an enemy who comes at us with a full roster of grievances, goals and strategies. If we reduce that enemy to "evil," we conjure up a shape-shifting demon, a wild-card moral anarchist beyond our comprehension and therefore beyond the reach of any counterstrategies. (p. A-19)

Fish's point is that without an understanding of the basic humanity of an opponent, there is no opportunity for worthy confrontation and real resolution to our problems. Rather, we continue to chase ghost, always presuming the Other to be without reason, rights, or rationale.

The second theme is one of determining importance. Over and over, people in this country describe the world as pre–September 11th and post–September 11th. Yes, this is a significant date, for now, but it takes history to determine whether it will become a teleological fault line. For me, time and chronology can be divided in an infinite number of combinations—pre–April 4, 1968 (assassination of Martin Luther King) and post–April 4, 1968; pre–summer of 1963 and post–summer of 1963 (bombing of the little girls in the Birmingham church); pre–summer of 1955 and post–summer of 1955 (murder of Emmett Till). Each of these events made me feel less safe, less secure, less able to lay claim to any notion of myself as American. But now I am learning that September 11th is the dividing line I must use if I am ever to claim "real" citizenship. All other notions of what is or is not important become subjugated to this new indicator that is reinscribed in every newspaper, every

broadcast, and every popular media outlet. For instance, on December 20, 2001, we learned that the economy of Argentina was collapsing. There was rioting and looting in the streets, and the president had announced his resignation. On the CBS *Nightly News* that evening, Dan Rather devoted almost all of his coverage to the 100-day "anniversary" of 9-11. We learned that Liberty Island was reopening to the public (but not the Statue of Liberty itself), the government had come up with a plan for compensating the victims of the attacks, and the Pentagon was being rebuilt. The story about Argentina's literal collapse was inserted on the 2-minute "world wrap" section of the news. This is a glaring example of how our "local culture" creates significance and insignificance. September 11th as a declared date of significance negates all others in the same way 1066, 1492, 1776, and December 7, 1941, are supposed to stand in high relief against all other dates, times, and places.

A friend and colleague, Hassimi Miaga, has developed a sociocultural chronology we use with preservice students, in which he examined a series of events that occurred at the same time. For example, in 1492, his chronology states,

> After 800 years of occupation by Africans, the edict of expulsion forced thousands of African Muslims (Moors) and Jews to flee Spain. Sonni Ali Beer, the great Malian conquerer, died. Columbus made his way to the Americas and the Renaissance began in Europe.

All of these things were happening simultaneously, and their importance was specific to the people who were directly affected. This is not meant to minimize the arrival of Europeans in the Americas so much as it is to place it in the context of a variety of human events. The dominance of European or Western science and technologies has made Western worldviews the valued worldviews. Again, my Malian friend shared with me that growing up in Mali he sang a song that swore allegiance to "our ancestors the Gauls," and his school calendar included a Christmas holiday for a Muslim nation with built-in snow days in a country that does not experience snow.

Thus, our penchant for fixing a point in time as the point in time for everyone to reverence reflects our continued misunderstanding of the ways our epistemological biases shape the realm of possibilities for everyone.

The third theme that has devolved from September 11th is that of determining the future. This theme is more interesting because it is imbedded in a national narrative that we all realize is a persistent myth. In this narrative, we say something like, "We'll never be the same because of what happened to us on September 11th." Actually, that would be a comforting thought—that we would never be the same. Unfortunately, this notion of a differently oriented America is one that will not materialize. No sooner than the events of September 11th sank in, the nation took up a rhetoric about the need to place Americans of Arab/Middle Eastern descent under strict surveillance and to restrict their freedom. There have been a number of proposals aimed at curtailing

civil liberties—military tribunals instead of civilian courts, restricting access to presidential papers, coercion of national loyalty. These kinds of things reflect not how we are different but rather how easily we retreat to old patterns of behaviors and old discourses that almost always lead to bad results. The same kinds of responses were apparent after Pearl Harbor. The difficult issue is that we are more likely to be exactly like we were (and even more so, if that is possible) because of September 11th. Before the attack, the very concept of an American was being contested. It was a fluid concept that was being made and remade in a myriad of ways. In some places, it included a variety of language groups—English, Spanish, French Creole, Vietnamese, Hmong. In other places, it included a variety of religious practices. In still other places, it included race, class, gender, sexuality, and ability differences. However, it was not a settled or definitive concept. Soon after September 11th, who and what constituted an American became a fixed and rigid image. And that concept has little room for dissent or challenge. I fear there will be a retreat to nativist and parochial thinking about who we are and who or what the "Other" is.

A local example of this narrow construction of "American" and "patriot" came into play in Madison, Wisconsin—the place some call the last bastion of communism in the western world. Well before the events of September 11th, some state legislator inserted a rider into the upcoming state budget agreement. This rider required all schools in the state to have students recite the Pledge of Allegiance or sing the "National Anthem" every day. Typically, such rulings would have little or no impact on Madison schools. However, after September 11th the newspapers constantly reminded the public of the new state requirement. When the pledge/anthem edict went into effect, several parents from the elementary school with the most international student body appealed to the school board about the coercive nature of the ruling. Three of the five board members present at that meeting voted to have the district play the "National Anthem" only. Their decision set off a firestorm. Before long, Madison's "anti-American," radical, left-leaning sentiments were made fodder for conservative voices throughout the country. Specifically, the decision was the topic of Rush Limbaugh's radio program and had city officials fearful that conferences and other business interests would desert Madison. Before long, a recall effort was put into motion and a special school board meeting was held at the largest high school auditorium. More than 1,000 people showed up at the school board meeting. People stood up singing the anthem and reciting the pledge. Although speakers were given only 3 minutes to share their views, the school board meeting lasted until 3 a.m. Two of the school board members rescinded their votes. One stood firm. Hate and vitriol spewed out of the mouths of the audience members. One man, a local radio "shock jock," told the newly elected Hmong member of the board to "go back to Vietnam!"

After some discussion, the recall proponents decided to just try to recall the one board member who refused to change his vote because the other two members would be standing for reelection in the spring anyway. In the meantime, one of the local newspapers (that generally supported the recall folks) did a feature on the school board member. He was a former English teacher in the district and devotes his free time to assisting non-English-speaking immigrants with acquiring English so that they can prepare for the citizenship examination. In the article, he was quoted as saying that he would never change his vote about the pledge because you could not coerce people to be patriotic. "Patriotism is what you do, not what you say."

The current end of this story is that the recall movement failed to garner the 30,000-plus signatures, and the democratic process allows the duly elected school board member to remain in office. But think about what this has meant to the community. A school district that has an abysmal track record educating Black and Latino students cannot get anyone to a board meeting on the achievement needs of students of color, but not saying the pledge brings people from miles around. The attack has not made us different; it has made us predictably more like ourselves.

## WHAT THIS MEANS FOR RESEARCH

The ability to define humanity, to determine significance or importance, and to determine the future has an important impact on research and scholarship. Not too long ago, a colleague attended a meeting where the president of a major philanthropic foundation commented, "I don't know why we keep receiving all of these critical theory proposals. We're not going to fund any of them." The attitude of the funder is shocking, not because the funder has predetermined what she or he will fund—foundations do that all the time—but that it is the basis for this decision. This funder has mapped out the epistemological landscape and decided what is worth knowing. I think we could agree that if a funder decided that she or he was willing only to fund mathematics- or science-related proposals, that is her or his privilege. We might disagree with this strategy, but at least we could understand the funder's position on prioritizing what to fund. However, when a foundation decides that an entire epistemological stance is illegitimate, it is not merely stating a priority but rather determining what does and does not count as knowledge.

In my own work, I have used critical race theory (CRT) to explicate new epistemological perspectives on inequity and social injustice in education. Although some might consider a "racial" theory an essentialized approach to analysis and interpretation of social phenomena, CRT actually attempts to make plain the racialized context of public and private spheres in our society. It functions as a useful rubric for understanding the taken-for-granted privi-

leges and inequities that are built into our society. It employs narratives and counternarratives to add context and complexity to the micro-aggressions people of color experience daily.

CRT asserts that racism is normal, not aberrant, in U.S. society, and because it is so ingrained in our society, it looks ordinary and natural to people in the culture. Indeed, my students who are most taken aback by racism tend to be my international students because the racism seems so evident and explicit. U.S. students of color have grown accustomed to the exclusions, the surveillance, and the inequities.

CRT often takes the form of storytelling, "in which writers analyze the myths, presuppositions, and received wisdoms that make up the common culture about race" (Delgado, 1995, p. xiv). This means that CRT understands that our social world is not fixed; rather, it is something we construct with words, stories, and silences. But we need not cave into social arrangements that are unjust; we can write against them.

CRT calls for deeply contextualized understandings of social phenomena. Unlike the positivist tendency to strip down and sterilize social and cultural issues into distinct component parts, critical race theorists insist on providing a context to make sense of what transpires, to fully elaborate a story, and to make evident complexity.

CRT is informed by a notion of "interest-convergence," a concept developed by Derrick Bell. It argues that White elites will tolerate or encourage racial advances for people of color only when they also promote White self-interest. So, if you examine legislative and judicial changes such as affirmative action or school desegregation, you can see that the ultimate payoff went to Whites. In the case of affirmative action, the figures are clear that the biggest benefactors were White women, and because White women typically live in White families, the benefits accrue to entire White communities. In the case of school desegregation, the proliferation of magnet programs, school desegregation workshops, courses, and so forth all created work opportunities that often went to Whites. Indeed, as Foster reports, the greatest casualties of school desegregation were Black teachers and administrators.

Critical race theorists are willing to try out new forms of writing and thought. Some are postmodernists; some use biography and autobiography, stories, and counterstories. Others have been experimenting with humor, satire, and narrative analysis "to reveal the circular, self-serving nature of particular legal doctrines or rules" (Delgado, 1995, p. xiv).

CRT represents a space of both theoretical and epistemological liberation. It offers an opportunity to challenge the taken-for-granted theories and concepts that govern our disciplines and circumscribe our thinking. I would never suggest that CRT is the only way to theorize the racialized subject. I would never suggest that it is the only way to make sense of the ongoing inequity and social injustice that shape our society. Believe it or not, I might be the first to say that if you are working with thousands of data points, you may

want to quickly reach into your methodological tool kit for multiple regressions or structural equation modeling. But I ask that you reach with full knowledge of what those tools can and cannot do. I ask that you step back to look on what epistemological ground you have planted your feet. I ask you to recognize the "truths" your epistemology illuminates and what "truths" are simultaneously occluded by it. I ask you to keep open the possibilities of limitless thinking and innovation. I ask you to remember that in a society structured by dominance and subordination, it's someone else's world; we just try to explain it.

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# FIGHTING FOR OUR LIVES
## PREPARING TEACHERS TO TEACH AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

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*The quest for quality education is a part of the ongoing struggle faced by African Americans. Few, if any, teacher education programs design programs that expressly meet the needs of African American students. Although some teacher preparation programs are designed for "urban" education, the significance of African American culture rarely is a feature of such programs. This article addresses the uniqueness of the African American cultural experience and details a variety of pedagogical and programmatic strategies that have been employed to assist teachers in better meeting the needs of African American students.*

During the 1970s, school desegregation in U.S. northern cities became a national focal point. In Boston, a contested court order had parents, teachers, administrators, students, school committee members, and community members struggling with school busing to achieve desegregation. One African American parent, caught on the documentary film footage of the award winning civil rights series, "Eyes on the Prize" (Hampton, 1986), exclaimed, "When we fight about education, we're fighting for our lives." This urgent perspective of "fighting for our lives" informs the discussion about preparing teachers to teach African American students effectively. This article addresses the dearth of literature about preparing teachers to teach African American students, the attempts by scholars to fill this void, and the need for ongoing research in this area.

### THE SILENCE OF THE LITERATURE

With very few exceptions, the literature does not expressly address the preparation of teachers to teach African American learners effectively (Ladson-Billings, 1994b). Instead, references to the educational needs of African American students are folded into a discourse of deprivation. Searches of the literature base indicate that when one uses the descriptor, "Black education," one is directed to see, "culturally deprived" and "culturally disadvantaged." Thus, the educational research literature, when it considers African American learners at all, has constructed all African American children, regardless of economic or social circumstance, within the deficit paradigm (Bettleheim, 1965; Bloom, Davis, & Hess, 1965; Ornstein & Viaro, 1968).

The literature is reflective of a generalized perception that African American culture is not a useful rubric for addressing the needs of African American learners, and thus, that African American culture is delegitimized in the classroom. Rather than seeing African Americans as possessing a distinctive culture, African American learners often are treated as if they are corruptions of White culture, participating in an oppositional, counter-productive culture (Ogbu, 1987). Schools and teachers treat the language, prior knowledge, and values of African Americans as aberrant and often presume that the teacher's job is to rid African American students of any vestiges of their own culture.

I would argue that the educational literature is silent on the issue of teaching African Ameri-

can students because much of the educational research has relied on generic models of pedagogy (Shulman, 1987) that position themselves as "culture neutral" when they actually support the learning of mainstream students. The emphasis on a "one best system" (Tyack, 1974) emerges from the 19th-century Americanization model that was designed to merge all students, regardless of ethnic and cultural origins, into one ideal "American" model (Olneck, 1995). Of course, this Americanization process considered only those immigrant and cultural groups from Europe. Indigenous peoples and people of African descent were not thought educable and therefore not a part of the mainstream educational discourse.

For many years, the education of African American learners was left solely to the African American community via state-supported segregated schools (Anderson, 1988). And, although not consistent with professed national ideals of equity and justice, there is some evidence to suggest that some segregated schools did meet the educational needs of African American students (Anderson, 1988; Siddle Walker, 1996). Community access and involvement, trust between teachers and parents, and concern and caring for students were all hallmarks of these schools where the needs of African American students were paramount. Foster (1990) indicates that African American teachers in segregated schools felt more comfortable introducing and discussing issues of race and racism in their all-Black settings than in the integrated schools in which they subsequently taught. Furthermore, Foster suggests that effective teaching of African American students almost always involves some recognition and attention to the ways that race and racism construct and constrict peoples' lives.

With the increasing diversity of the school population, more literature has emerged that addresses the needs of non-White students from the standpoint of language and culture (Banks, 1997). However, some of this literature has compressed the experiences of all non-White groups into a singular category of "other" without recognizing the particularity of African American

experience and culture. It is important for teachers (current and prospective) to understand the specific and unique qualities of the African American cultural experience.

## THE UNIQUENESS OF THE AFRICAN AMERICAN CULTURAL EXPERIENCE

Two concepts I attempt to have my own teacher education students grapple with are the notions of "equivalent" and "analogous," because discussions of racism, discrimination, inequality, and injustice sometimes degenerate into a "hierarchy of oppression;" that is, discussants want to talk in terms of who has suffered most. However, when we understand the ways in which oppression has worked against many groups of people based on their race, culture, class, gender, disability, and sexual orientation, we must recognize that there may be analogous experiences that are not necessarily equivalent ones. Thus, the displacement and forced removal of indigenous groups throughout the Americas and the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II are both examples of oppression. However, they are not equivalent experiences. Our understanding of the commonalties of oppression cannot wash out the particularities and specifics of each experience.

The African American social and cultural experience, like those of each cultural group, is unique. African Americans are the only group forcibly brought to the Americas for the expressed purpose of labor exploitation through racial slavery (Franklin & Moss, 1988). As one of the earliest nonindigenous groups to appear in the Americas, African Americans have a history in this country that predates most European Americans.[1]

The creation of a racial hierarchy with White and Black as polar opposites has positioned all people in American society (King, 1994) and reified "whiteness" in ways that suggest that the closer one is able to align oneself to whiteness, the more socially and culturally acceptable one is perceived to be. Thus, when European Americans of various ethnic groups assert, "My people faced discrimination, and they made it. Why

can't Blacks pull themselves up like we did?" they are ignoring the very different historical trajectories from which these cultural groups were launched and the very different symbol system that has been created to reinscribe blackness and whiteness as fundamentally opposite (Morrison, 1991).

The ideology of White supremacy (Allen, 1994) argued that African Americans were genetically inferior and not fully human. Thus, the expectation for educating them was (and continues to be) low. Early efforts at state-supported education for African Americans was directed at training for manual labor and domestic service (Anderson, 1988). Scholarly arguments to the contrary (DuBois, 1903/1953; Woodson, 1933) failed to make their way into the mainstream literature. Thus, separate and unequal education continued for many decades past the Civil War.

As a group, African Americans have been told systematically and consistently that they are inferior, that they are incapable of high academic achievement. Their performance in school has replicated this low expectation for success. In addition to being told that they cannot perform at high levels, African American students often are taught by teachers who would rather not teach them (Grant, 1989; Haberman, 1989).

By the time the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision was rendered, many African Americans were arguing from a position of sameness (Tate, Ladson-Billings, & Grant, 1993). That is, they were asserting that African American and White children were alike and deserved the same educational opportunities. This rhetoric of "equality means sameness" tended to ignore the distinctive qualities of African American culture and suggested that if schools were to make schooling experiences identical for African Americans, we somehow could achieve identical results.

However, because African American learners do not begin at the same place as middle-class White students either economically or socially, and because what may be valued in African American culture (Boykin & Tom, 1985) differs from what may be valued in schools, applying the same "remedy" may actually increase the educational disparities. For example, in the case of gender differences, we know that female students do not perform as well as male students in mathematics. A variety of reasons have been posited to explain this differential. Some reasons are related to females' abilities in spatial relations. Others (Gilligan, 1993; Houston, 1994) examine the ways that male students dominate classroom discussion and teacher time. Still, others (Campbell, 1995; Willis, 1992) argue about the way mathematics is organized and presented. The way to improve female performance, however, is not merely to continue to give female students more of the same, but rather to reorganize mathematics education in some fundamental ways. For example, all-female mathematics classes, integration across math areas (algebra, geometry, trigonometry), and more obvious and specific connections of math to everyday lives, are being employed to improve the performance of female students (and students of color) in school mathematics. Uncovering optimal learning environments for female students may mean deciding on very different strategies for male versus female mathematics learners. The same thing may be true in developing effective strategies for African American learners. As we begin to learn more about successful teaching for African American learners (Hollins & Spencer, 1990; Ladson-Billings, 1994a), we are better able to address their needs through curricular and pedagogical strategies.

## STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING THE EDUCATION OF TEACHERS

Teacher preparation is culpable in the failure of teachers to teach African American students effectively. Most teachers report that their preservice preparation did little or nothing to prepare them for today's diverse classrooms (Ladson-Billings, 1994b). Reviews of the literature on multicultural teacher education (Grant & Secada, 1990; Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1996; Zeichner, 1992) indicate that most preservice

approaches rely on individual courses and diverse field experiences to satisfy legislative and professional association calls for meeting the needs of diverse students.

However, no single course or set of field experiences is capable of preparing preservice students to meet the needs of diverse learners. Rather, a more systemic, comprehensive approach is needed. Work that uses autobiography, restructured field experiences, situated pedagogies, and returning to the classrooms of experts can each provide new opportunities for improving teaching.

## Autobiography

Jackson (1992) argues that autobiography provides an opportunity for the "critical examination and experience of difference" (p. 4). She further asserts that autobiography allows individuals to speak as subjects with their own voices, "representing themselves and their stories from their own perspectives" (p. 3). This use of one's own story is also employed by Gomez and Tabachnick (1992) as a way to get preservice teachers to reflect on their practicum experiences in diverse classrooms. Hollins (1990) refers to "resocializing pre-service teachers in ways that help them view themselves within a culturally diverse society" (p. 202) through the construction of personal/cultural autobiographies. Similar to this, King and Ladson-Billings (1990) link critical education theory and multicultural teacher education to help prospective teachers "consciously re-experience their own subjectivity when they recognize similar or different outlooks and experiences" (p. 26), both in courses and field experiences.

## Restructured Field Experiences

The practical aspects of learning to teach are overwhelmingly valued by teachers as the most important part of their preparation. Unfortunately, many of these field experiences occur in White middle-income communities that offer a different set of challenges and opportunities from those that teachers can expect to encounter in the urban classrooms populated by African American students. Thus, when new teachers enter urban settings, they experience a mismatch between what they expect based on their preservice preparation and what they find in urban schools.

Some teacher education programs require that part of the field experience occur in a "diverse" setting (Zeichner, 1993). However, sometimes these "diversity requirements" are seen by students as hurdles in the way of their "real" student teaching (i.e., in middle income, suburban schools). Spending limited time in urban classrooms often serves to reinforce students' stereotypes and racist attitudes toward African American students because they are not accompanied with requisite understanding about African American culture and cultural practices.

Other programs stress "immersion" experiences in diverse communities (Mahan, 1982; Noordhoff & Kleinfeld, 1991), placing students in community (as opposed to school) settings to help them understand the daily lives of the children in context. Moving away from the predictability of the classroom with its rules, routines, and rituals, prospective teachers may recognize that limited access to goods and services, poor health care facilities, uneven police and fire protection, and unsafe and dilapidated playgrounds, all work against students' willingness to participate in school tasks.

At the same time, community experiences also can help students to see the strengths that reside in a culture. Self-governing bodies such as churches, lodges, social clubs, and neighborhood associations serve as purveyors of culture. Students may learn that families use a variety of child-rearing practices that may or may not map neatly onto schooling practices. They may learn of the role of "other mothers" (Collins, 1991) who, although not blood relatives of particular children, serve in a maternal capacity. Learning to see students with strengths as opposed to seeing them solely as having needs may inform the pedagogical practices of novice teachers in positive ways.

### Situated Pedagogies

The literature of educational anthropologists has addressed culturally specific pedagogies (e.g., see Au & Jordan, 1981; Cazden & Leggett, 1981; Mohatt & Erickson, 1981; Vogt, Jordan & Tharp, 1987). This work has described teachers' attempts to make the school and home experiences of diverse learners more congruent. The majority of this literature has dealt with small-scale, encapsulated communities where cultural practices are easily recognizable and not as intertwined with other cultures.

Critical scholars have posited theoretical, conceptual, and research possibilities for situated pedagogies that consider race, class, and gender (e.g., see Ellsworth, 1989; hooks, 1989; McLaren, 1989). By addressing the specifics of particular diverse communities, this literature avoids the platitudes and unsubstantiated generalities of generic pedagogical perspectives. This work asks teacher educators to think more carefully about the relationship of teacher preparation to the communities in which they are located and the school populations that their graduates are likely to serve.

### Returning to the Classrooms of "Experts"

In my work on successful teachers for African American students (Ladson-Billings, 1995b), I began looking for common beliefs and practices among such teachers. What I discovered were three propositional notions about how they conceived of their practice that form the basis of what I term *culturally relevant pedagogy* (Ladson-Billings, 1994a, 1995b). These propositions involve academic achievement, cultural competence, and sociopolitical critique.

*Academic achievement.* In the classrooms I observed, teaching and learning were exciting, symbiotic events. Although teachers established routines and rituals, the classrooms were never dull. Students were regularly reminded that they were expected to learn and that learning would be rigorous and challenging. Some of the teachers taught from what might be considered a constructivist (Fennema, Carpenter,

Franke, & Carey, 1992) position (i.e., students' own knowledge forms the basis of inquiry either as part of the official curriculum or as it interacts with the official curriculum). Standards were high in these classrooms. Students were expected to work hard, and they welcomed this responsibility.

*Cultural competence.* In addition to promoting learning and academic achievement, culturally relevant teachers foster and support the development of cultural competence. Cultural competence refers to the ability to function effectively in one's culture of origin (Ladson-Billings, 1995b). For African American students, this means understanding those aspects of their culture that facilitate their ability to communicate and relate to other members of their cultural group (Gay & Baber, 1987). Because of the pervasive negative representations of Black culture (Merelman, 1995), students may unwittingly ally themselves with schooling that works to promote their disaffiliation and alienation from African American culture.

Cultural competence can be supported in the classroom by acknowledging the legitimacy of students' home language and using it as a bridge to American Edited English.[2] It also is supported through the use of curriculum content selections that reflect the full range of humanity extant in students' cultures.

*Sociopolitical critique.* Perhaps if teachers could get students to achieve academically and manifest cultural competence, they might be more than satisfied with their pedagogical efforts. However, culturally relevant teachers recognize that education and schooling do not occur in a vacuum. The individual traits of achievement and cultural competence must be supported by sociopolitical critique that helps students understand the ways that social structures and practices help reproduce inequities. This aspect of culturally relevant teaching links it closely with a critical pedagogy that argues for students and teachers alike to participate in a collective struggle (Boggs, 1974). Thus, students must be challenged to ask questions about the ways that whole groups of people are systematically excluded from social benefits.

## ANTIRACIST TEACHER EDUCATION: A PROMISING PRACTICE

Autobiography, restructured field experiences, situated pedagogies, and examining the classrooms of experts all provide glimpses of possibility for facilitating the pedagogy of teachers who teach African American students. However, each has the potential to fail to confront the major stumbling block in preparing teachers for success with African American students: racism.

Although many teacher education programs include some form of multicultural education (Grant & Secada, 1990; Ladson-Billings, 1995a), confronting issues of racism in a deliberately antiracist framework is less common (Cochran-Smith, 1995; Kailin, 1994). Discussions of race and racism are absent from educational discourse even when our conceptions of race are more embedded and fixed than ever before. Teacher educators who have attempted to bring issues of race and racism to the forefront of their preparation programs have been subjected to resistance and harsh criticism from students (Ahlquist, 1991; Tatum, 1994).

Lee (1985) states that the "aim of [anti-racist education] is the eradication of racism in all its various forms. Anti-racist education emerges from an understanding that racism exists in society and, therefore, the school, as an institution of society, is influenced by racism" (p. 8). Thus, teacher education that embraces an antiracist perspective recognizes that prospective teachers' and "teachers' sensibilities are shaped by the same forces that mold us in the society at large" (Kailin, 1994, p. 173). However, antiracist educators understand racism as learned behavior and, as such, it can be unlearned.

Kailin's (1994) approach to antiracist staff development for teachers addresses two perspectives on racism: individual and institutional. The individual aspect of her work requires teachers to know and understand themselves, a process also used by King and Ladson-Billings (1990). Kailin employed strategies for developing collective autobiography, understanding teachers' social backgrounds, participating in multicultural and race awareness exercises, examining teacher expectations of student competency, and exploring the manifestation of individual racism in teacher-student interactions and in school culture. At the institutional level, Kailin's approach prompts teachers to examine the historical roots of institutional racism in the United States as well as the ways that texts and curricula and schools as institutions support racism.

To prepare teachers to be successful with African American students, teacher educators must help prospective teachers recognize the ways that race and racism structure the everyday experiences of all Americans. More specifically, teachers must understand how race and racism negatively impact African American students and their ability to successfully negotiate schools and classrooms. Some of the recommendations for change in teacher education that may lead us to more positive outcomes include:

*Reassessing admissions procedures*. A good deal of our struggle in teacher education resides at the admission door. Haberman (1989) argues that we will not get better teachers until we admit better people into the profession. Current admission procedures continue to screen out potentially excellent teacher candidates who desire to teach in African American communities, while at the same time including many candidates who have no intention or desire to serve those communities.

*Reexamining course work*. Dissatisfaction with teacher education course work has been widely expressed by both those within and outside of the profession. One of the places where course work is particularly weak is in its lack of attention to the perspectives and concerns of African Americans. Many of the foundations and methods courses fail to mention African Americans except as "problems." Course work that addresses the legitimacy of African American culture and problematizes Whiteness can begin to make preservice course work more meaningful for those who teach African American students.

*Restructuring field experiences*. As previously mentioned, field experiences tend to leave a lasting impression on teachers. Restructuring

these field experiences may help students to understand the complexities of communities and cultures. Rather than having prospective teachers dread going into African American communities, field experiences may play a role in addressing the stereotypes and racist attitudes that they may hold.

*Recruiting and retaining African American scholars*. For too many prospective teachers, their only encounter with African Americans is as subordinates. Increasing the numbers of African American faculty can help to disrupt some of the preconceived notions that they may have about the competencies and abilities of African Americans. Certainly, African American faculty can serve as a resource and counterbalance to prevailing notions of African American communities, for both adults and children.

Ultimately, the work of education in a democracy is to provide opportunities for all citizens to participate fully in the formation of the nation and its ideals. These ideals can never be fully realized if significant portions of our society are excluded from high-quality education and the opportunity to play public roles in the society. African American students are suffering in our schools at an alarming rate. They continue to experience high drop-out, suspension, and expulsion rates. Although possessing a high school diploma is no guarantee of success in U.S. society, not having one spells certain economic and social failure. Thus, when we fight about education, we indeed are fighting for our lives.

## NOTES

1. The European American slave trade was legally ended in 1848. The bulk of European immigration occurred in the 1890s. Thus, most African Americans have historical roots in this country that predate those of most European Americans.

2. Rather than the term *Standard English* I use *American Edited English* to refer to the particular formal language used in the United States.

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# The evolving role of critical race theory in educational scholarship

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In 1994 the legal scholarship movement, critical race theory (CRT), was introduced in education. Since that time, a variety of scholars have taken up CRT as a way to analyze and critique educational research and practice. In this brief summary the author addresses the themes of the articles found in this issue and offers words of encouragement to a new generation of scholars who see CRT as a valuable tool for making sense of persistent racial inequities in US schools.

The articles that comprise this issue come from a symposium held at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association (AERA) in April 2004. The title of the session was 'And we are still not saved'. This title has two sources. One source is critical race theory (CRT) legal scholar, Derrick Bell (1992), who used it in the title of his book on the 'elusive quest for racial justice'. The other source is its true source—the Biblical passage from the prophet Jeremiah (Jer. 8: 20) who mourned for his people's lack of deliverance with the words, 'The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved'. Bell used this scriptural passage because he felt it appropriately described the plight of people of colour, particularly African-American people, in this present age.

The session organizers amended the title to say, 'And we are *still* not saved' as an indicator of the limited progress that we have made in educational equity since William Tate and I raised the issue of critical race theory in education 10 years ago at AERA and subsequently in a paper published in *Teachers College Record* (1995). It seems hard to believe that a decade has gone by since the term 'critical race theory' was introduced into educational scholarship and at the same time a very appropriate interval at which to take stock of where we are.

The articles in this issue take different approaches to explain where we are and where we need to go. Two articles address the state of the literature to this point.

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Another article offers an application of the theory and two represent extensions of critical race theory concepts.

In her article, Yosso reasserts the significance of race in our social science discourse and pushes us to move past black/white binaries. This work reminds me of more complex renderings of race such as that in Howard Winant's (2001) work (particularly, *The world is a ghetto: race and democracy since World War II*) that articulates the race-making project in modernity and provides an important historical and international context in which to understand our present racial predicament. I find Yosso's CRT family tree intriguing but caution against the construction of such lineages because of the possibility of unsubstantiated alliances or unintended omissions. I am reminded that conversations about the critical theory project acknowledge the work of the Frankfurt School but omit DuBois, who was an intellectual contemporary of the members of the Frankfurt School who not only asked similar questions but also was studying in Germany at the same moment these critical formulations were emerging.

It is also important to investigate the genealogy of the black/white binaries. Some of the demographic literature (Lee, 1993) indicate that in 1890, when question four ('what is your race?') was first included in the census, there were almost 16 racial categories ranging from White to Black. There were categories for degrees of Blackness such as 'mulatto', 'quadroon', and 'octoroon'. Over the more than 100 year history of the question on the census form the two stable categories have been Black and White and while other groups may not have been able to take full advantage of the privilege of whiteness, there are historical instances where they have been categorized as such.

Asian Indians were phenotypically determined to be White. In the Lemon Grove School District Incident, Mexican American parents won their suit against having their children sent to a segregated school because they were categorized as White, and for a short time the Cherokee Indians were considered White as they worked hard to assimilate into US society. So the real issue is not necessarily the black/white binary as much as it is the way *everyone* regardless of his/her declared racial and ethnic identity is positioned in relation to Whiteness. Indeed, during his US Presidential administration Bill Clinton's class position made his grip on Whiteness quite tenuous. Scholars like Vijay Prashad (2001) in his book, *Everybody was Kung fu fighting: Afro-Asian connections and the myth of cultural purity,* challenge the hegemony of White racial discourses and help us reorganize our discourses from 'us versus them' to a look at both symbolic and structural barriers that are constructed as a result of White supremacist discourses.

In addition to tracing the lineage of CRT, Yosso also offers an articulation of cultural capital that departs from tradition. I appreciate Yosso's re-articulation of Bourdieu's (in Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) notion of cultural capital to include the notion of 'funds of knowledge' found in Moll's (in Gonzales *et al.*, 2004) and other Latino scholars work and encourage them not be naïve about the way capital can be deployed as a way to create hierarchy and inequity, i.e., the institutions of a capitalist and White supremacist society will happily allow you to have your new forms of

capital as long as they do not infringe on their old established ones. More insidious, they will appropriate your forms of capital and repackage them to produce their forms. A great example of this is the Coca Cola commercial airing on US television where a brown-skinned young man comes to his apartment and finds a plate with empañadas and Coke, ostensibly from his mother. A few minutes later as he is finishing the treat, his Black roommate arrives and finds a note in the kitchen to Tito from Mom and is furious that his roommate ate his homemade treat. The media in this instance is playing on our immediate tendency to separate categories of Latino-ness from categories of Blackness as a 'twist' in the commercial—i.e., the Black person could not be the Latino person.

The Dixson and Rousseau article is a review of the literature in critical race theory that speaks directly to CRT in education. What I find particularly appealing about this review is that it is genealogical and synthetic. Perhaps it is my graduate adviser bias but I am pleased to see a review where the literature is in conversation with itself. Too often, we merely see a litany of work in an area without any type of scholarly integration. This synthetic approach helps the reader understand how this project has emerged over the last 10 years in education. Because the literature is relatively thin in the field, Dixson and Rousseau have the opportunity to provide a more robust treatment of what has happened over the past decade. Like Yosso, Dixson and Rousseau present their review through a set of generally agreed upon features of CRT. Their work is a more traditional search of the literature that indicates the field is still in its infancy in education (perhaps because of my stern warning to folks in education to proceed with caution). Their article does a good job of pulling at thematic strands and highlights Crenshaw's (1988) notion of restricted and expansive views of equality (which is one of the more under developed themes of CRT in education). This is particularly timely as we look at commemorations of landmark US legal decisions of *Brown vs Board of Education* and *Lau vs Nichols*, that addressed school segregation and bilingual education, respectively.

Dixson and Rousseau also pay attention to the storytelling aspect of CRT with their opening vignette. I sometimes worry that scholars who are attracted to CRT focus on storytelling to the exclusion of the central ideas such stories purport to illustrate. Thus I clamour for richer, more detailed stories that place our stories in more robust and powerful contexts. For example, Patricia Williams' (1991) discussion of finding the bill of sale for her enslaved great grandmother is a powerful story to set up the work of students in a contracts law course. The point here is not the titilation of the story but rather than way notions of contracts are not sterile or neutral. They are a part of larger social contexts that can be used to exploit one person or group while simultaneously advantaging another.

Chapman's article is an application of CRT that was probably easier to achieve since she looked directly at the implementation of a legal ruling through a CRT lens. In an earlier work Bell (1983) himself argued that if *Brown* were to be heard today, it would be important not just for social science to weigh in on the deleterious effect of school segregation, but also for educators to be an integral part of the conversation. Chapman outlines just how intransigent the racial rhetoric is around school desegregation and

takes us through the vicissitudes of the Rockford School desegregation fight. We see desegregation from *Brown* to *Milliken* to *Dowell* in one school district and begin to understand the degree to which Whites will go to avoid school desegregation.

In the Donnor article we have an extension of CRT with a new concept—educational malpractice. This term is interesting because it raises a whole set of questions about the professionalization of teaching. If teachers held similar professional status as doctors, lawyers, architects or accountants they could be held libel for malpractice. However, scholars of the profession, like Lortie, argue that teaching remains a semi-profession and not amenable to the professional standards found in other fields. Donnor suggests that what is happening to African-American football scholarship student athletes constitutes educational malpractice, or perhaps a breach of contract. This legal discourse works well with the CRT framework and indeed, if we consider schools as institutions who promise certain knowledge and skills—literacy, numeracy, civic competency, vocational preparation—then a kind of contract is set forth. In public school settings the students are entitled to this knowledge and skill regardless of personal and cultural resources. In the case of elite college athletes, the contract is even more explicit. By virtue of NCAA rules, athletes are offered a tender in exchange for their athletic services. The athlete promises to play by the rules, participate in practices and team meetings, and perform competitively. The school promises to pay for tuition, fees, books, meals during the season, athletic gear and medical insurance. However, two regular practices—steering student athletes into easy courses that fail to yield a degree or other marketable post competition skills and recruiting students who are marginally prepared for college level courses—can be construed as malpractice. The Donnor article looks at the roots of this process by calling forth the voices of athletes and their understandings of how their pre-collegiate education failed to prepare them to take advantage of the contractual offerings of the college or university.

While Donnor examines the implied contractual relationship between scholarship athletes and colleges, I might push his implication to the pre-collegiate level to ask what is the nature of the implied contract between citizens and their schools in democratic nations? Is there some minimal level of educational competency that public support of schools should legally expect? How might we enforce these contracts? What sanctions are available to citizens when schools fail to live up to their end of the contract? What recompense should students who fail to receive an education reasonably expect?

The Duncan article is also an extension of CRT and represents a fresh cut on what Tate and I originally proposed. In his use of allochronism and coevalness he incorporates the anthropological literature into the CRT race project in new and exciting ways. In particular, he points to the allochronic discourses present in both historical and contemporary education. In this way, Duncan provides a lens through which to understand the role of time in the construction of educational inequity. While Duncan points to the way school creates race for everyone, regardless of racial and ethnic affiliation, I argue that race is one of those concepts that is already well established before students even get to school. Duncan's assertion is not rejected however by my argument. Actually, Duncan demonstrates how schools take advantage of this

pre-school establishment to complete its race-making project. The power of the Duncan article lay in its intellectual daring and synchronic rendering of the economic, social, cultural, political and educational moment in which Black students find themselves.

The articles that comprised this issue come from a symposium that states 'we are still not saved', the paraphrase from the prophet Jeremiah, but I would point us toward Pauline pronouncements that suggest 'we have this treasure in earthen vessels' (2 Cor. 4: 7), that is, CRT is a theoretical treasure—a new scholarly covenant, if you will, that we as scholars are still parsing and moving toward new exegesis. And about that, somebody ought to say 'Amen'.

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# Just Showing Up

## *Supporting Early Literacy Through Teachers' Professional Communities*

*The evidence from their project has persuaded Ms. Ladson-Billings and Ms. Gomez that improving teachers' knowledge and supporting changes in pedagogical practice will be a slow and painstaking process that must be grounded in a specific school/community context.*

BY GLORIA LADSON-BILLINGS AND MARY LOUISE GOMEZ

COMEDIAN AND filmmaker Woody Allen attributed a large percentage of his success to just "showing up." His comment reminds us that some of life's challenges are not about complex or complicated solutions and processes. Similarly, in dealing with some of the more intractable issues of urban schooling, we may need to do a better job of "showing up" for our students.

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*Illustration by John Berry*
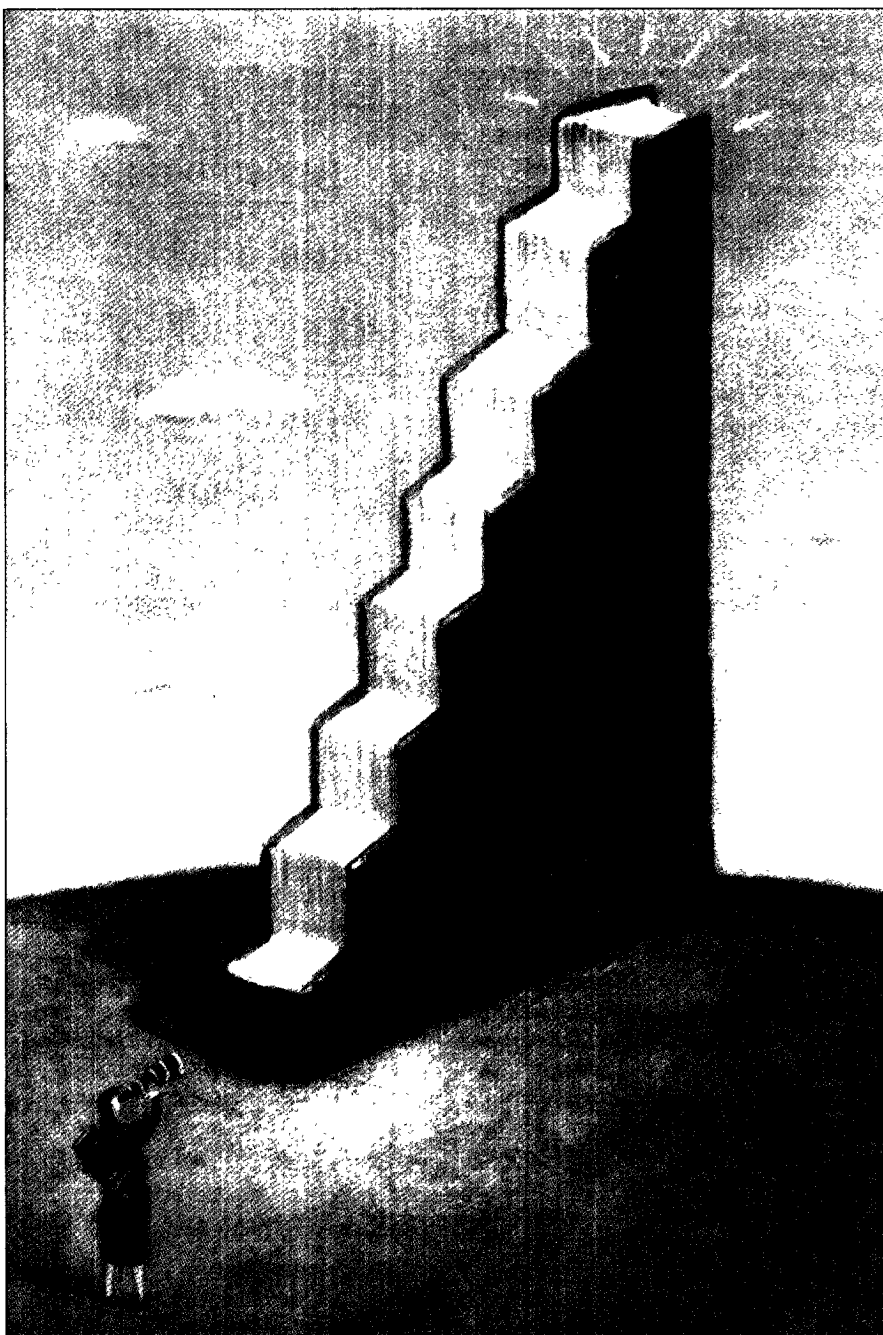
In this article, we detail a collaboration between ourselves — two university researchers — and a group of primary-level teachers who are attempting to improve the early literacy abilities of children at risk of school failure.

We work in a community where public schools are well regarded. Among its four comprehensive high schools, there are approximately 50 National Merit finalists each year. Realtors brag to prospective home buyers about the quality of the public schools and point out how well the students perform on standard measures when compared with students both in other parts of the state and nationwide. At the elementary level, the student/teacher ratio is about 22 to 1, and the elementary schools continue to have specialist teachers in art, music, and physical education. Each elementary school is equipped with a library that is staffed by a certified librarian.

However, in the midst of all these resources and support, there are pockets of failure. Some schools in the district serve children and families who are living in poverty. Many of these children are students of color or students whose primary language is not English. The failure of these students to succeed in the local public schools has been a particular challenge to the school district, to the specific schools, and to the individual classroom teachers. Similar concerns about the academic performance of children of color and children living in poverty have been expressed by school districts with similar achievement and demographic profiles.[1] How can it be that, even in some of the nation's best public schools, some students regularly and predictably fail to benefit from schooling?

The school community we began working with is the Bret Harte School.[2] It is a large elementary school serving about 700 students, located on the side of the city that is home to a substantial number of working-class families. The homes in the community are older and more modest than the homes in other sections of the city, and the school also serves a number of apartment buildings. Many of the children at Bret Harte who have experienced school failure come from a low-income apartment community.

Two years ago, we began a discussion with the district superintendent about how we might collaborate with teachers to help support the literacy abilities of early learners (K-2). Students throughout Wisconsin

are required to take the Third-Grade Reading Test, a criterion-referenced test developed by teachers in the state. Although controversy exists over the validity of the Third-Grade Reading Test, its designations of below basic, basic, proficient, and advanced have serious consequences for how students are taught. Students who fail to achieve at the basic level or above are more likely to be placed in pull-out programs, such as Title I or Reading Recovery. Indeed, failing the Third-Grade Reading Test seems to have consequences that extend through-

## Some five months passed before the teachers acknowledged the pattern of school failure.

out students' academic lives in the district. Our concern, however, was not whether or not some students were in need of special services, but rather why students of color and students living in poverty were overrepresented among this group.

We made clear to the superintendent that we would not be teaching students or "teaching" teachers. Instead, our work was based on a theoretical notion that teachers' ability to create a professional community is integral to improving teaching and student learning.[3] Our work is influenced by the work of a number of teacher education researchers.[4] Instead of using a model in which external "experts" tell teachers what to do, we are committed to working *with* teachers in ways that allow them to share their own expertise and local knowledge in an effort to improve their teaching.

### Teachers Helping Teachers

We named our project "Teachers Helping Teachers" to signal the role we expected teachers to play in ensuring their own

professional development and in supporting students' literacy. Our initial meeting with the teachers at Bret Harte School was an opportunity to establish the terms of our working relationship. Seven teachers agreed to participate in the project. They included kindergarten, first-grade, second-grade, Title I, and Reading Recovery teachers. We had funding to pay the teachers for attending monthly meetings and to offer them a biannual stipend for allowing the researchers to observe in their individual classrooms throughout the year. We also made clear to the teachers that, if the project was successful, we would expect at least two of them to join us as facilitators in subsequent teacher groups in other district schools.

The model of collaboration we employed involved our asking critical questions to stimulate conversation. We hypothesized that the conversations would stimulate teachers to think about their own work and to make pedagogical changes that would benefit students who were deemed to be at risk of failing to become literate. In between the monthly meetings, we (with the help of graduate assistants) spent time observing in classrooms during literacy instruction. We collected field notes of our observations and shared summaries of those notes with the teachers. We did not intervene in the classrooms, but we were available to do tasks assigned by the teachers (e.g., reading with individual students, examining student work, and so on).

For the first monthly meeting, we assigned the teachers to bring a list of those students about whose literacy they were most concerned. We were not surprised to find that the names the teachers brought were overwhelmingly those of students of color and students living in poverty. However, we deliberately refrained from calling attention to the students' minority or socioeconomic status. We believed that early in the process of collaboration we needed to assure teachers that we were not judging them or suggesting that they were exhibiting aspects of racism or discrimination toward the children in their classrooms.

Some five months passed before the teachers acknowledged the pattern of school failure. After looking at data from the school's literacy test, one of the teachers remarked that the school wasn't doing very well "with the African American boys." This statement about the pattern revealed by the data needed to come from a teacher. The teachers had to own this problem, and we had

to establish an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect so that teachers would feel safe talking openly about race and class discrimination as they worked toward improving children's literacy.

Our strategy was to allow the teachers to talk frankly about their students and to encourage them to think about what capabilities the students might have. We asked them to consider the question "What strengths does this child have?" This question provoked the teachers to think about what resources the students already possessed. Thus it was not unusual for a teacher to say, "Well, she really likes to listen to stories," or "He can remember lots of details in a story." By letting teachers identify these strengths, we wanted to help them see that their students did have something on which to build.

During the school day, we spent time in selected teachers' classrooms, observing their literacy teaching practices. We carefully documented those practices so that the teachers could see how their practice might appear to others. Our field notes were summarized and presented to the individual teachers for their review. Often teachers brought information from these summaries to the monthly meetings. However, the analysis of individual teachers' literacy teaching practices was never the primary focus of our work. Instead, we were attempting to see whether helping to create and support small professional development communities might lead teachers to make the kinds of changes that they felt were important to improving children's literacy.

We structured the monthly meetings around a critical question for teachers to ponder. We recognized that many of the teachers in the district used a "literature-based" approach to reading. However, not all of the teachers understood what such a practice entailed. A number of the teachers did things that looked *procedurally* like a literature-based approach to literacy. They introduced students to well-written, lively illustrated trade books. They permitted children to make their own reading selections and to read with reading buddies. The children were encouraged to write about their books and to make illustrations to accompany their writing. This strategy seemed to work well for those students who already knew how to read — mainly the white students from middle-income homes. However, the children who lived in poverty and the African American children who lacked phonemic awareness were often at a loss as to what to do with the books they selected other than look at the pictures.

After having observed this practice in the classroom, we asked the teachers to respond to the question "What did you teach in reading last week?" To our surprise many of the teachers struggled to articulate what they actually had *taught* in reading during the previous week. Teachers spoke in detail about various writing activities they had conducted and about the stories they had read aloud. But they could not tell us what reading instruction they had conducted. The only teacher who was able to describe the previous week's reading instruction was a teacher who had been considered by many of her colleagues to be "old-fashioned." Her reading instruction included a variety of word-attack strategies, comprehension exercises, and guided reading. The revelation that many of them were *not* teaching the students (particularly those most in need of instruction) to read became a crucial turning point for the group. Unlike Woody Allen, these teachers found out that they were not even "showing up" for the children who needed them most.

## Changed Classroom Practices

Although we were not trying to change the practice of individual teachers, we have begun to see how listening to one another's struggles and solutions can serve as a catalyst for changing ways of thinking about students who have experienced school failure. Such changed thinking can change practice. Because many of their students were experiencing success in early literacy, it was easy for teachers to forget the few who were not. Typically, such students were referred to specialists (e.g., Title I or Reading Recovery teachers), and teachers assumed less responsibility for their literacy.

It also became clear to us that students who received academic services from a variety of professionals were more likely to be confused about to whom they were responsible and for what. For example, at one of our early meetings, the Title I teacher told a classroom teacher that she had directed a student to follow a particular procedure. The teacher commented that she had told the student something different. Soon the reading specialist chimed in that she had told the student something altogether different from the first two, and finally the special education teacher admitted that she had requested that the student respond to a fourth set of directives. "No wonder he looks like a deer caught in the headlights," replied his classroom teacher. "The poor kid doesn't know which one to pay attention to." The professional development meetings were becoming a way to increase the communication among the teachers so that they could better serve their students.
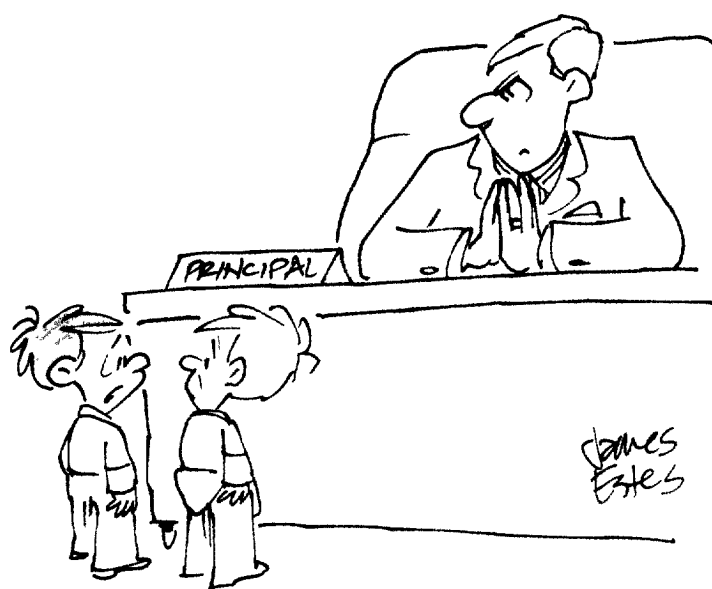


*"Boy, what I wouldn't give to have an out-of-body experience about now !"*

Other changes we have observed as a result of the teachers' participation in the monthly meetings are shifts in the ways teachers talk about children and their families and alternations in the sense of responsibility they feel for ensuring that all students learn to read, write, and speak well. During our early meetings, the teachers seemed intent on venting about the students and their families. We learned about which students came from households in which the adults were unable to provide basic necessities. We learned which children might be experiencing various sorts of trauma — a parent in prison, homelessness, family dissolution. These issues dominated our early conversations with the teachers. However, by consistently refocusing the dialogue on students' learning, we became more successful at helping the teachers talk about their students' academic needs and strengths.

At one group meeting, for example, one of the teachers talked about her ongoing struggle with a youngster. The student seemed to have little in the way of family support, and his own frustrations with failure were prompting him to act out more in the classroom. In exasperation the teacher commented, "I just can't teach this child!" An uncomfortable silence came over the group. Pronouncements such as this had previously been glossed over, and other teachers would redirect the conversation. But on this day one of the other teachers said, quite emphatically, "You don't mean that. Of course, you can teach that child!" This kind of within-group accountability has created a sense of empowerment that cannot be imposed by the get-tough sanctions that many current reform efforts entail.

At another group meeting, we invited someone from the district research department to bring a copy of the data from the school's reading assessments. Prior to this meeting, the teachers had simply been told that the standardized test scores were available in the office, or they had picked up a local newspaper to see how the schools ranked in relation to one another. Previously, little or no consideration had been given to using test scores to diagnose students' strengths and weaknesses so that teachers could develop appropriate curriculum and instructional strategies to improve achievement. Granted, since large numbers of students in the district do well on such tests, there was not much precedent for using

the tests as tools to improve teaching and learning. However, the observed pattern of failure among poor students and students of color required the teachers to begin to see the tests for what they are: tools that can provide some baseline data for improving schooling. We wanted the teachers to move away from the antagonistic position that the tests were an indictment of their teaching and to begin to ask questions about how such measures might be more useful to them in their work.

The first look at the test data was disheartening. All the identified students were performing significantly below grade level. All the African American students had performed poorly on phonemic awareness. All the socioeconomically disadvantaged children had performed poorly on comprehension. One of the teachers let out a sigh of despair and said, "Our children are just so low." However, within a moment or two, another teacher remarked, "It doesn't matter how low they are right now. [It was then October.] What matters is where they are in May, and that's *our* responsibility." Once again, we were amazed at the way the context of a small, intimate, and ongoing professional community created opportunities for support and encouragement that would have an ultimate payoff for the students.

Having the teachers identify the students about whom they were most concerned gave us (and them) somewhere to focus. Teachers understood that, when we came into their classrooms, we would be looking at what was happening with the identified students. The added attention we were giving those students probably made teachers feel compelled to pay more attention to them also — to "show up" as teachers for them. Even if we were unable to visit a classroom in a particular month, the teachers understood that their contributions to the group conversation needed to begin with a discussion of the progress of their at-risk students. They needed to be able to discuss how they, as teachers, were "showing up" for students who typically fall through the cracks.

Linda Winfield's work on teachers' beliefs about students placed at risk is instructive in helping us understand the kinds of strategies teachers may deploy to deal with student failure. According to Winfield, teachers believe that students who are not achieving can be either improved or maintained. Teachers who believe that students can improve have an orientation that suggests that,

## "Keepers of our own vision" became a metaphor for our work with the teachers at Bret Harte.

regardless of students' past failures, something can be done pedagogically to raise their academic achievement. Teachers who believe that students can only be maintained see the school's role as avoiding "slippage." Instead of pushing a student to higher academic improvement, such teachers are preoccupied with making sure that the student neither loses ground nor proves to be a disruption. Winfield also contends that teachers see this dichotomy of improvement versus maintenance as something for which they are responsible — or for which others must assume responsibility.

The teachers who believe that students at risk of school failure can improve *and* that they as teachers are responsible for that improvement are called "tutors." They take time each day to work with the students individually to make sure that they receive the expert, individual help that the teacher can give. The teachers who believe that students at risk of school failure can improve but that it is someone else's responsibility to foster that improvement are called "general contractors." They take responsibility for the finished product, but they search out knowledgeable others to provide the specific pedagogical support.

The teachers who do not believe that at-risk students can improve — the teachers who believe that they can only be maintained — and who also believe that they as teachers are responsible for that maintenance are called "custodians." They are the teachers who find a way to keep struggling students in their rooms and quiet, typically doing such busy work as worksheets and puzzles that fail to challenge

their intellect or improve their skills. The teachers who do not believe that at-risk students can improve and who believe that those students' maintenance is someone else's responsibility are called "referral agents." They see their role as finding someone else (e.g., the special educator, the Title I teacher, the reading specialist) to teach the students.

Winfield's rubric is helpful for looking at schools that are organized in traditional ways, with each teacher working alone and in isolation. However, the development of a professional community makes public those activities and behaviors that were once private. No teacher in our group could come in month after month and respond to our questions about supporting student literacy by reporting that he or she had sent Shaniqua or José to someone else. The public conversations and supporting documents served as testaments to whether or not teachers really were "showing up" for those students in most need of help.

We have also been able to track changes in the teachers' attitudes over time. We recruited teachers who wanted to participate in this project. We realized that the financial remuneration might be an incentive for some teachers, but we knew that the money would not be enough to sustain them throughout the process. One of the teachers seemed not to have much to contribute to our monthly discussions. This teacher was often impatient to leave and sometimes made excuses for missing parts of the meetings. However, when we began to focus on the progress of one of the students in her classroom, she started to contribute more to the group and began to incorporate more of the group conversation into her practice. Our observations helped us to see that this teacher was using a variety of effective practices to manage her classroom and that she took a strong interest in developing a wider repertoire of effective teaching strategies.

After spending a week at a reading conference, this teacher came back enthusiastic and happy to be able to share some of what she had learned with our study group. "I really felt like I understood what I need to be doing to help the children who are struggling," she said. "Right now, the work in this group is helping us along, but after a while when you guys are gone, we'll become keepers of our own vision." This expression — "keepers of our own vision" — became a metaphor for our work with

the teachers at Bret Harte. The professional community that was forming at the school was a way for teachers to begin to take both risks and responsibilities.

After we and the teachers had worked together for almost 18 months, the scores for the Third-Grade Reading Test were released. For the first time in recent memory, all the target students at Bret Harte met the standard. The good news of the improved test performance was announced on the school's public address system. The principal telephoned one of the researchers at home that night and purchased a cake to help the faculty celebrate. We had no magic formula to share. The primary teachers had been willing to engage in a long-term professional development effort aimed at ensuring that the students who often are forgotten would receive regular and deliberate attention during the literacy instruction.

## Expanding the Circle

Beginning with the 1998-99 school year, we expanded our project to two additional schools with demographic and academic profiles similar to those of Bret Harte. However, instead of both researchers working with the professional communities in the two new schools, each of us has taken leadership responsibility for one of the schools and asked one of the Bret Harte teachers to accompany us. Our intention is to expand the growth of professional communities throughout the district by developing enough teacher facilitators at these three schools to allow our withdrawal from the schools.

What we have noticed at the two new sites is that each new effort places us right back at square one. Once again, we listened as teachers shared a litany of problems about the children. We heard about a child who rolled on the floor and refused to participate in classroom activities. We heard about another child who seemed to come apart at each and every transition. The move from opening exercises in the morning to reading activities was always a battle. The change from reading to music resulted in a tantrum. The requirement that the student attend the Title I classroom meant tears and sulking.

Once again, our role was to redirect the teachers' conversations toward the students' strengths. One teacher paused for a long time when she was asked about one of her

student's strengths. Finally, she said with a smile, "He can ride the bus!" This comment seemed out of context. However, the teacher pointed out how complex the public transportation system was in the city. It is a system that depends on a central transfer point. All buses come into the center of the city and go back out again to various parts of the city. The teacher further commented, "I'm a grown woman, and I don't know how to ride the buses in the city. He can do it, and he's only 7 years old. That tells me that he's an intelligent little boy. He just doesn't know how to read."

At one of the new sites, a primary teacher focused our attention on a Latino child named Fernando, the eldest of the three children of a young neighborhood couple. Throughout the fall and early winter, the teacher bemoaned Fernando's immaturity — his continual talking with neighbors and constant moving around the room. For many months, other teachers in the group responded to the complaints with bemused smiles, indicating their quiet support — they, too, had students like this one.

As the weeks passed, the teachers began to take up an "asset model" of looking at children, and one winter afternoon, another teacher responded to the complaints, "You know, Fernando always is smiling. He seems happy in school. I think he loves you as his teacher." Fernando's teacher's mouth dropped and her eyes widened.



*"Remember me?"*

"Hmm," she said. "He does like me, doesn't he?" Then she blushed, recognizing that her comments may have led others to think that *she* did not like Fernando. Clearly, "showing up" means more than teaching children the skills of reading and writing; it means personally investing in their development as readers and writers.

On another occasion, a teacher in the group began talking about how many of the children struggling to learn to read and write at the school were children of color. We had hoped to open this conversation numerous times earlier in the year. However, each time someone would initiate a question concerning race and achievement, others would look away, subtly change the subject, or shift about in their seats, signaling their discomfort with the topic. Seated at the table in each of our meetings was a white teacher with her toddler baby who came to nearly every meeting because of the complexity of scheduling late-afternoon day care. Swallowing hard, and smiling at her little son, the teacher said:

> I think a lot now about when Trenton goes to school. How will teachers treat him and talk to him? They will see an African American boy. Maybe they will see a child who they believe *can't* do things. If they knew me, and he went to this school, Trenton would probably be okay; everyone would say, "Oh, that's Callie and David's son." David smiles at me when I tell him I think this way. He thinks I am just waking up to what he has always lived through as an African American. But what if Trenton goes to our neighborhood school and people don't know us? What will happen? How will people think about him and teach him? What will they expect? I think about it all the time, and I think about us as teachers, how we think about other people's kids.

That day, because we had been talking together for so many months and because Callie's voice broke and because we had been passing Trenton around, kissing his soft cheeks and feeding him bits of fruit and cookies, it was hard to ignore her plea and our responsibilities. We talked softly and slowly, uneasy with our unmet obligations, willing at last to take them up, bit by tiny bit.

Recently, we began planning a second year of work at our two additional sites. At one planning meeting, the teachers came ready "to take action." "Last year," one teach-er said, "we talked a lot about what worried us about our literacy program and which children weren't making progress. This year, we need to make a plan. How are we going to make changes across all of our classrooms? What is important to do?"

That morning, we laid plans to:

• send a book home with each primary-grade child every day to encourage family reading pleasure,

• develop biweekly staff breakfasts and after-school coffees to support the same kind of professional community among the entire school staff as we have experienced as a small group,

• write and distribute a memo to the parents of primary-grade children offering tips on supporting their child's reading and writing skills at home, and

• develop a fall literacy program night for each grade, featuring a children's performance and an open library time when families can check out books.

As the meeting broke up, the teachers smiled at one another. It felt good to take action together on behalf of children's learning. It felt a little scary, too. We recognized that there was much to be done and that there were only nine of us on a very large staff, working with dozens of children struggling to learn to read and write. While it remained unspoken, the idea that we would be showing up — together — heartened our group.

## Concluding Thoughts

The work we have done with these teachers is obviously more complex than just sitting around holding monthly conversations. Our own theoretical, philosophical, and pedagogical perspectives have shaped the way we have approached this work. And one assumption that undergirds our work with the teachers is that one of the major causes of children's academic failure is the failure of teachers to teach them. We believe that no teacher sets out to be unsuccessful with certain students. However, we have seen teachers compensate for their initial lack of success with poor children and children of color by literally ignoring them. By spending more of their time with the more successful students, teachers can convince themselves that those students who are failures are not really their responsibility. The failing students fail because their parents do not read to them or listen to them read or even care about their education.

Sometimes, telling ourselves these stories about the children creates enough of a space between the children's failure and our own efforts that we can pretend that we have done our best for the children.

We also believe that the only way to improve the quality of teaching and learning is to improve teachers' skills and abilities. Thus we see professional development as the linchpin of school reform aimed at raising academic performance. No amount of standards, benchmarks, and high-stakes testing can bring about school improvement without attention to teacher quality. We believe that teachers have to be active participants in their own professional development. And we cannot expect that one-shot, one-size-fits-all workshops directed by "expert" consultants can produce the kinds of changes in pedagogical practices that will support student learning.

The evidence from our project has persuaded us that improving teachers' knowledge and supporting changes in pedagogical practice will be a slow and painstaking process that must be grounded in a specific school/community context. We also know that the very first step in changing teaching practice is in helping teachers learn to "show up."

1. Such school districts as Ann Arbor, Mich., Chapel Hill, N C.; Shaker Heights, Ohio; and Evanston, Ill., have experienced similar disparities between the performance of white, middle-income students and that of students of color and students living in poverty.

2. All school names used in this article are pseudonyms

3. Caroline Clark et al., "Conversation as Dialogue: Teachers and Researchers Engaged in Conversation and Professional Development," *American Educational Research Journal*, vol. 33, 1996, pp. 193-231.

4 See Kenneth M. Zeichner, "Traditions of Practice in U.S. Preservice Teacher Education Programs," *Teaching and Teacher Education*, vol 9, 1993, pp. 1-13; Marilyn Cochran-Smith and Susan L. Lytle, eds., *Inside/Outside Teacher Research and Knowledge* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1993), Mary Louise Gomez and B. Robert Tabachnick, "Telling Teaching Stories," *Teaching Education*, vol. 4, 1992, pp. 129-38; and Gloria Ladson-Billings, "Shut My Mouth Wide Open Conversations Among Eight Successful Teachers of African American Students," in Conrad Kottak et al. eds., *The Teaching of Anthropology Problems, Issues, and Decisions* (Mountain View, Calif.: Mayfield Publishing, 1996), pp. 342-52.

5. In addition to the authors, our research team included two graduate students, Janice Kroeger and Jennifer Rushneck

6 Linda Winfield, "Teacher Beliefs Toward Academically At-Risk Students in Inner-Urban Schools," *Urban Review*, vol 9, 1986, pp. 253-67. **K**