

Journal of Teacher Education

<http://jte.sagepub.com>

Effective Teaching/Effective Urban Teaching: Grappling with Definitions, Grappling with Difference

Dyan Watson, Megin Charner-Laird, Cheryl L. Kirkpatrick, Stacy Agee Szczesiul and Pamela J. Gordon

Journal of Teacher Education 2006; 57; 395

DOI: 10.1177/0022487106291564

The online version of this article can be found at:
<http://jte.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/57/4/395>

Published by:

 SAGE Publications

<http://www.sagepublications.com>

On behalf of:



American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE)

Additional services and information for *Journal of Teacher Education* can be found at:

Email Alerts: <http://jte.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

Subscriptions: <http://jte.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

Reprints: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

Permissions: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

EFFECTIVE TEACHING/EFFECTIVE URBAN TEACHING

GRAPPLING WITH DEFINITIONS, GRAPPLING WITH DIFFERENCE

Dyan Watson
Megin Charner-Laird
Cheryl L. Kirkpatrick
Stacy Agee Szczesiul
Pamela J. Gordon

Harvard University Graduate School of Education

This article considers the ways in which 17 novice teachers define and describe effective urban teaching and the stark contrasts that these teachers draw between effective urban teaching and effective teaching. The authors find that descriptions of students played a considerable role when participants made distinctions between effective teaching and effective urban teaching. These teachers defined the two types of teaching largely in terms of perceived behaviors, beliefs, and characteristics of urban and suburban students that were chiefly based on monolithic group stereotypes and in the case of students of color, were deficit laden.

Keywords: *effective urban teaching; new teachers; racial attitudes*

The concept of *urban*, like the term *reform*, has no inherent definition or meaning. Its meaning is derived from its social context and is inextricably bound to dominant social and power relations, especially to the political uses of knowledge and official knowledge.

—Mirón (1996, p. 3)

This article examines the views of 17 novice teachers, all trained in the same teacher preparation program. In this study, we consider the ways in which these novice teachers define and describe effective urban teaching and the stark contrasts that these teachers draw between effective urban teaching and effective teaching. We found that descriptions of students played a prominent role when participants made distinctions between effective teaching and effective urban teaching. These teachers defined the two

types of teaching largely in terms of perceived behaviors, beliefs, and characteristics of urban and suburban students that were chiefly based on monolithic group stereotypes and in the case of students of color, were deficit laden. We argue that properly designed teacher education and school-based induction programs are essential in helping these teachers overcome their deficit ideologies and helping them effectively meet the needs of each of their students.

A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Although the nation's children are growing more and more diverse, the nation's teaching population tends to be rather homogeneous. Researchers have argued that White, monolingual, middle-class women account for the

overwhelming majority of the teaching force, whereas nearly 40% of all public schoolchildren are of color (Cochran-Smith, Davis, & Fries, 2004; Hollins & Guzman, 2005; Zumwalt & Craig, 2005). These demographic differences have serious implications for schools because teachers' attitudes regarding race and class are intricately intertwined with classroom dynamics and student achievement (Gay, 2000; Rist, 2000). Moreover, research points to particular problems with White teachers of students of color (Cochran-Smith et al., 2004). Often these teachers have negative views, attitudes, and beliefs about difference, which they may see as something to overcome or correct (Cochran-Smith et al., 2004; T. C. Howard, 2003b; Ketter & Lewis, 2001; Miron, 1996; Rousseau & Tate, 2003).

There is extensive research on preparing teachers to work successfully with diverse students (Cochran-Smith et al., 2004; Hollins & Guzman, 2005; King, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1999, 2000). This work concludes that although there have been more than 25 years of research and theorizing on this topic, very few teacher education programs have successfully tackled the challenging task of preparing teachers to meet the needs of diverse populations (Hollins & Guzman, 2005). Specifically, most programs have yet to move away from add-on multicultural components toward the integrated approaches advocated by multicultural education and critical race theorists (Banks, 2006; King, Hollins, & Hayman, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 1999). And within programs that have made changes, by and large, diversity or multicultural education has done very little to disrupt teachers' beliefs or teaching practices in any radical way (Ladson-Billings, 1999). Instead, many teachers leave teacher education programs with "limited and distorted understandings . . . about inequity and cultural diversity" (King et al., 1997, p. 158), what Joyce King (1991) has termed *dysconsciousness*: "an uncritical habit of mind (including perceptions, attitudes, assumptions, and beliefs) that justifies inequity and exploitation by accepting the existing order of things as given" (p. 135).

Although there is much research about not only how to teach diverse populations but also how to think about race in all classrooms (Gay,

2000; G. Howard, 1999; Irvine, 2002; King, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1999; Lewis, 2003; Quartz, 2003), many White teachers often do not critically reflect on, question, or analyze how culture, class, ethnicity, and racism influence their teaching (Cross, 2003; Gay & Kirkland, 2003). Although they may have professed a "commitment to promoting educational equity . . . they do not think deeply about the implications and consequences of this knowledge for changing their personal and professional behaviors" (Gay & Kirkland, 2003, p. 184). These barriers cause teachers to place race as an afterthought at best and at worst, as not an issue at all. This current study investigates the role that race plays in novice teachers' thinking about their students and, therefore, contributes to the conversation on both how teachers consider race in the classroom and how they should think about race. In considering the latter, we build on literature that recommends substantive changes in teacher education that will help teachers place race at the forefront of their pedagogy.

THE STUDY

This study began in May 2003, when we interviewed 17 individuals who had just completed the same urban teacher preparation program. This yearlong program included a summer-school teaching component, followed by one semester consisting primarily of course work, including methods classes and courses addressing theories and practices of school reform and literacy across the curriculum. During this semester, students were also in the schools observing classes and, at times, instructing small groups of students. In their second semester, participants took part in a teaching practicum at a local urban school. The program worked to prepare teachers for these urban settings through the examination of issues pertinent to urban schools, as well as readings on practices such as culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Teachers in the sample ranged in age from 22 to 40. Of the participants, 3 are men and 14 are women. There are 2 participants of color: 1 Asian American female (Peggy) and 1 Latino male (Robert); the remaining participants are White. Most participants were preparing to enter the

classroom for the first time, although 1 participant, Peggy, had previous teaching experience.

The first of two interviews conducted with participants consisted of 11 open-ended questions that were guided by the broad research question: How do new teachers trained in an urban teacher preparation program make sense of their preservice experiences and their future job prospects? Although the scope of that initial interview was wide, distinct patterns emerged in how participants spoke of urban and suburban schools and students (Charner-Laird, Watson, Szczesiul, Kirkpatrick, & Gordon, 2004; Kirkpatrick, Charner-Laird, Gordon, Szczesiul, & Watson, 2004; Szczesiul, Charner-Laird, Watson, Gordon, & Kirkpatrick, 2004). Analysis of this first round of transcripts revealed that participants made distinctions between the skills required to be an urban teacher and those required to be a nonurban teacher. In doing so, they spoke specifically about how urban students had distinct needs from other students, how urban schools faced challenges that other schools did not face, and how more was required of urban teachers than of other teachers (Charner-Laird et al., 2004; Szczesiul et al., 2004). We found these distinctions to be fascinating and decided to investigate participants' beliefs and experiences further in our second round of data collection.

We then followed participants into their first year of teaching, speaking with them again during their first few months on the job (October–November, 2003). At that time, participants were employed in various schools: some urban, others suburban; some small, others large; some magnet, others comprehensive. Building off of our findings from the first round of data analysis, a substantial portion of the second interview was designed to elicit participants' conceptions of "urban" and their beliefs about urban schools, urban teaching, and urban students. Therefore, data for this article are drawn primarily from this portion of the second interview protocol. Specifically, this article focuses primarily on responses to three broad questions from this second-round protocol: (a) Would you say your school is an urban school? Why or why not? (b) How do you define effective urban teaching? and (c) Is there a difference

between effective teaching and effective urban teaching? If so, can you describe the difference?

Although it was clear that these questions were difficult for some of the participants to answer, all of them, except 1, responded to the questions without further probing. It is important that the responses to these three questions provided more than a third of the data from this round of interviews. The remainder of the protocol asked participants about their experiences with their colleagues and the culture of their schools, as well as their thoughts on teacher leadership at this point in their career. These data were coded with the same codes applied to the data elicited by the three focal interview questions described above. Analysis of participants' responses in those sections provided additional data for the current analysis in two ways. First, when responding to questions on other topics, such as a school's professional culture, participants' descriptions frequently included references to urban students or schools that were deficit laden and seemed to emerge more from stereotypes than knowledge of individual students. Second, even when speaking about other aspects of their teaching experience, such as collaboration with colleagues, participants noted differences between urban and suburban students and schools.

Following the transcription of interviews, research team members worked in pairs to write memos on emergent themes in participants' transcripts. Multiple researchers read and memoed each transcript, and these memos informed the creation of preliminary emic codes (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). For example, several participants spoke about how urban students do not "value" education, so we used this code to mark portions of the data in which participants expressed this sentiment. In a similar manner, some participants spoke of the need to "control" urban students because they were unlikely to behave properly in classroom settings. We used this emic code to mark examples of ways in which participants spoke of controlling their students, primarily through the use of behavior management techniques, or discussed their inability to control the students' behavior. In our analyses, we also employed etic codes (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) drawn from the literature on preparing teachers for diverse populations, culturally responsive

pedagogy, and urban teaching (e.g., “bring”—descriptions of participants bringing the culture or experiences of their students into the classroom). We also used etic codes drawn from our initial reading of the second-round transcripts and analysis of the first-round data (e.g., “suburban comparison”—implicit and explicit comparisons of urban settings or students to suburban settings or students).

All team members coded each transcript using a common code list. Following this, each team member responded to a set of analytic questions, allowing us to investigate themes across participants. We asked, (a) In what ways do participants describe and explain the difference between effective teaching and effective urban teaching? (b) How do participants describe urban students and their needs? and (c) What are participants saying about urban and suburban students’ behavior? Team members used the previously coded data to find relevant passages to answer these analytic questions.¹ This was done for every participant in the sample. We then looked for patterns and relevant themes in the responses to the analytic questions, which were used to craft analytic memos. We wrote a total of 15 analytic memos—each team member wrote 1 analytic memo per analytic question. All five researchers discussed and compared findings based on these memos, adding to the validity and reliability of the findings. The robust themes that emerged from these memos formed the foundation of our argument.

RESULTS

Below we describe participants’ thoughts on effective urban teaching, effective teaching, and the sources of difference between the two. We found that all of our participants made distinctions between effective urban teaching and effective teaching. Our analysis revealed that all but 1 of the participants rooted these distinctions in deficit-laden comparisons between urban students and suburban students. Ultimately, participants’ notions of urban students were largely based on monolithic stereotypes. Although most participants expressed the belief that culturally relevant teaching was necessary for effective urban teaching, they based their ideas about

effective urban teaching on responses to these stereotypes, as opposed to their knowledge of individual students. We follow this analysis with a discussion of why these new teachers might make these kinds of stereotype-based distinctions and conclude by considering the implications for teacher education and school-based induction.

Grappling With Definitions: Would You Characterize Your School as Urban?

Participants offered various definitions of *urban* when describing whether they characterized their schools as such. Although some participants responded that a school is urban if it is in a city or has some measure of poverty, the most frequent response to why a school is or is not urban was the color of its students. These responses were both explicit and implicit and were found throughout the interviews.

In categorizing a school as urban or not urban based on students’ skin color, most of the participants used words or phrases such as “students of color” or “diverse students” or noted that there is, for example, an “incredible” (Janet)² amount of diversity in urban schools. These descriptions contrasted with phrases such as “few racial minorities,” “majority White,” or “almost entirely White,” leading us to believe that even phrases such as *diversity* are code words for students of color. Implicit in most responses was the notion that urban primarily means students of color.

Grappling With Difference: What Is Effective Urban Teaching?

When asked “What is effective urban teaching?” 8 participants had difficulty articulating their responses to this question. Some participants, such as Jessie, stated directly that they struggled with the definition:

Um, I always kind of struggled with effective urban teaching ‘cause I feel like effective teaching is effective teaching whether you’re a suburban teacher, you’re an urban teacher, you’re you know a private school teacher, whatever. I . . . clearly urban is slightly different.

Other participants responded with multiple false starts or gave responses characterized by a lack of coherence. Janet provided an example of this type of response:

Hmm . . . effective urban teaching . . . um I would say . . . I mean . . . I don't know if it's any different than just effective teaching. Um, I mean, I think that if . . . I think it—maybe a way of finding out if it's effective urban teaching would be to find out if the kids that go through the program feel like that they, they have more opportunities than they see . . . I feel like one of the things about urban kids is that they're sort of—the world that they live in seems pretty, pretty small in a way.

Responses like Janet's, led us to believe that many participants found responding to this question challenging and complex.

Although many of our participants experienced difficulties similar to Janet's when describing effective urban teaching, all of them did ultimately arrive at some explanation. Our analysis revealed that 11 of the participants, nearly two thirds of the sample, articulated their definitions by referencing elements of what researchers have termed *culturally responsive teaching*. In particular, participants drew on the notion that good teaching "is based on the inclusion of cultural referents that students bring from home" (T. C. Howard, 2003a, p. 201; see also, Gay & Kirkland, 2003). Participant definitions of effective urban teaching were rooted in two main ideas that emerge from culturally responsive teaching: bringing in the lives of the students and knowing where your students are coming from.

"Bringing in the Lives of the Students" and "Knowing Where Your Students Are Coming From"

Participants explained that effective urban teaching necessitated understanding and respecting students' cultural backgrounds, experiences, and resources. Jenny represents many of our participants who seemed, from their initial statements, to believe that the key to academic achievement is using the cultures and lived experiences of their students in the classroom:

I define effective urban teaching as teaching that engages students' prior knowledge and experiences

in life. Or activates those things in order to help them learn new material. Helping them make sense of their daily experiences and maybe what might be unique about their lives as compared to living in a rural or suburban setting or even in a different country.

In this case, Jenny believed that having students understand who they are in relation to their (urban) environment will help her to help them learn. Others felt similarly. Leah noted that effective urban teaching is "really figuring out where your students are coming from and using what they bring with them to help them get to where you want them to get in terms of content and skill." For Leah, content and skill learning occurs when the teacher—to borrow a word from Jenny—"activates" the information gained from knowing who her or his students are and then uses that information in the classroom for student achievement.

Bringing in the lives of the students and knowing where your students are coming from are concepts that imply recognition that teaching is most effective when a teacher understands intimately who her or his students are as well as how students' construction of knowledge is inextricably tied to their cultures. This intimate knowledge of the student would then be used to help students accomplish curricular goals. At a definitional level, these responses fall soundly within educational research on teaching diverse students (Ladson-Billings, 1994). By bringing students' real-life experiences into the classroom, teachers can better help students achieve the teachers' learning goals and standards. The new teachers in this study seemed to want to do just that. They hoped that their classes were places where students felt welcomed and comfortable enough to learn. Using their students' cultures was seen as an avenue to achieving this comfort and, consequently, academic success.

Grappling With Definitions, Grappling With Difference: Is There a Difference Between Effective Urban Teaching and Effective Teaching?

When asked if there was a difference between effective urban teaching and effective teaching, all of the participants explained several

differences between the two. However, they alluded to these differences in various ways. Of the participants, 4 stated outright that there was a difference between effective urban teaching and effective teaching.³ The rest of the participants responded by stating that the two were the same yet implicitly or explicitly, moved on to demonstrate ways in which they were different. Participants named several factors that contribute to the difference between the two: Urban students are difficult to manage in the classroom, urban students have weak skills, urban students do not value education, and urban students have little support for academic learning outside of school. In naming these factors, participants' responses revealed that they have a "normative reference group" (Rist, 2000) in mind to which they compare urban students when responding to most questions. This normative reference group is both themselves when they were in high school and a group called *suburban students*. Thus, when attributing the difference between effective urban teaching and effective teaching to urban students' behavior, participants were, implicitly or explicitly, comparing them to this normative reference group.

Yes, There Is a Difference

Only 4 participants stated outright that there is a difference between effective urban teaching and effective teaching. When asked "Do you think there is a difference between effective urban teaching and effective teaching?" Molly responded,

Um, in some ways yes I do. Because . . . I plan for my class . . . they're very well thought out lesson plans. . . . And I know that if [I] did that same lesson in a suburban classroom, or a classroom where for whatever reason the climate of the school was such that people behaved better in class . . . it was just ingrained from birth that this is how you behave when you're in school. And if you presented certain lessons in that kind of environment I think they would go over really well. Whereas if you present them in an urban environment, it just sort of depends on how your classroom management skills are.

According to Molly, effective urban teaching can occur only once behavior is controlled. In locating the difference between effective teaching

and effective urban teaching in the students' behavior, she saw students themselves as the source of this difference. Molly's construction of suburban students represents a normative reference group to which she compared her construction of urban students. By asserting that suburban students behave not because of other structures put into place but because it is "ingrained from birth" how to behave in school, she locates the source of suburban students' success in them, as opposed to structural aspects of schooling.

Peggy also stated outright that there is a difference between effective urban teaching and effective teaching. She, too, believed that the main difference is in managing students. Peggy attended suburban schools, and she insisted that her urban students would fail if they attended the same high school that she attended: "I think they'd all just fail because you have to be so self-directed . . . at my high school . . . and that's not effective urban teaching. . . . Especially with kids who aren't getting the same kind of support that I was at home." Peggy believed that what distinguishes urban teaching from nonurban teaching is that in urban teaching, students need more structure to learn and succeed. For Peggy, the normative reference group is the suburban kids in her own high school. It is important that Peggy also pointed to support in the home as the main factor in why urban students are not self-directed, need more structure, and, therefore, must be taught differently than suburban students.

For both Peggy and Molly, the distinctions between effective urban teaching and effective teaching were shaped by their perceptions of urban and suburban students. Urban students do not know how to behave and are not self-directed. Therefore, effective urban teaching requires more classroom management and structure.

They Are the Same but Different

Although 4 participants noted explicit differences between effective urban teaching and effective teaching, the rest of the sample did not do so explicitly. These participants began by saying that the two were, in fact, identical, but went on either immediately or in a later part of the interview to explain differences

between the two. For example, Ruth initially responded that effective teaching is the same as effective urban teaching but then quickly outlined differences between the two:

I don't think effective teaching is any different. I mean effective teaching is effective teaching. I think you just have a lot more to deal with in an urban classroom and from what I've seen, someone who is effective is someone who can control their class long enough to actually teach a lesson.

Although she began by noting that she thinks effective teaching is no different than effective urban teaching, Ruth immediately noted that there is "a lot more to deal with" in urban settings, thus, setting up a distinction between the two. Like Molly, Ruth believed that what distinguishes effective urban teaching is the need for effective classroom management. Ruth, like both Molly and Peggy, has a normative reference group—suburban students—to which she compared urban students.

Making Distinctions Through Deficit-Laden Comparisons

Whether participants described the differences between effective teaching and effective urban teaching explicitly or implicitly, patterns arose in how participants explained these differences. All such explanations were rooted in perceptions of deficiencies among urban students and described via comparison with a normative reference group. Three such explanations emerged frequently and are described below: Urban students have greater needs, urban students do not value education, and urban students do not have support outside of the classroom.⁴

Urban Students Have Greater Needs

Of the participants, 8 asserted that urban students have greater needs (than nonurban students). For example, Mary explained that effective urban teaching requires more because the students need more:

What the kids need in the urban setting tends to be more, require more intensive . . . effort on the part of the teacher. Because the needs I think are greater. And I mean essentially the needs are the same but I think they're greater and more of the kids have

them, more of the kids need your help, guidance . . . and support, than in the suburban setting.

Like others, Mary explained that urban students do not have as much support as her normative reference group, suburban students. Without this support, the teacher has to expend more of herself or himself in guiding students. And Leah noted, "The gap between . . . where students should be performing in terms of skill level and content knowledge is so huge, generally speaking, in urban schools." For Leah, urban teachers have to deal with more skill gaps.

Jessie, on the other hand, described how urban students' needs arise from the "distractions" that they face:

I mean maybe they're worried about whether they're going to leave school and get into a fight or an altercation . . . I mean they might have distractions at home. Maybe they're taking care of a sibling or something. I mean there's just a lot of distraction. It's not that school is so straightforward: Like I come to school; I do work in school; I get homework; I go home; I have a snack; I do homework; I eat dinner; I go to bed. . . . I mean there's so many other things that [urban] kids have to deal with.

Jessie believed that urban kids have trouble focusing because of the complexity of their lives. While at school, urban students are worried about their outside lives; while at home, they are not provided with simplicity and structure. For these participants, and others who asserted such needs on the part of urban students, effective urban teaching was defined, in part, by the belief that urban students need more help and guidance than suburban students.

Urban Kids Do Not Value Education

More than one third of the sample—6 participants—asserted that urban kids do not value education. This, in turn, shaped some of their ideas about the differences between effective teaching and effective urban teaching. As Janet stated bluntly, "The urban kids . . . have a tendency not to sort of get school and understand or sort of see what the value is and what the point is and how does this relate to me." Laura's beliefs echoed those of Janet's. She pointed out that what she perceived as normally

motivating to suburban students does not work for urban kids:

[For] an urban kid . . . passing the class . . . might not mean that much. . . . If you're saying, learn it 'cause it's knowledge and we like knowledge. But you have to come up with like, learn this because this is going to translate into . . . a great career in your future, a comfortable income, a way to raise your own family with an affluence you didn't get to experience.

For Laura, effective urban teaching meant having students who need external motivations for learning because they do not see enough success in their lives. Incentives that are effective for the normative reference group—knowledge for knowledge's sake, grades, and acceptance into a good college—do not work for urban students. For participants such as Janet and Laura, urban kids have a common, low value of education. These teachers believe that urban students intrinsically are apathetic toward doing well in school. As Laura noted, they need someone to “translate” the benefits of a good education.

Sometimes, the deficits that participants ascribed to urban students appeared as a result of participants' beliefs that their students were exceptions to the norm for urban students. Jill noted that because her students valued education, they were “atypical” of most urban students:

The students are more motivated . . . they've kind of bought into the idea of school. So we're dealing with a lot less cynicism about school than I think you would find in other urban schools. . . . So that makes it I think a little bit of an atypical environment.

Because they want to attend college and are motivated, Jill treated this group of urban students as unique and not like the typical urban student. This belief, however, reveals the underlying notion that most urban students do not, in fact, buy into or value education.

Urban Kids Do Not Have Support Outside of the Classroom

The third main characteristic of urban students that shapes the difference between effective teaching and effective urban teaching, according to participants, is that they do not have outside support. Five participants explained that urban kids do not have family or outside support. For example, Mary remarked,

In the suburban setting, things sort of run themselves. . . . The school culture is already defined by the parents who have high academic expectations for their kids and want them to do well and insist that education's important. But in the urban setting you've got to counter . . . the views that aren't there; you've got to supply them somehow.

Again, Mary returned to her belief that urban teachers have to provide more than what is given in suburban schools. In this case, it is the outside support that the normative reference group automatically receives because of its status as suburban students. To be an effective urban teacher, one must provide for what urban students lack, such as outside supports.

For Naomi, the normative reference group, when discussing outside support, sprang from her own school experiences:

I think that this is kind of true in any case but . . . I think that this is absolutely true of—I know this is true of public schools and urban communities—is that a number of my students don't have supports at home or in other places in the community. I grew up in . . . suburban communities and there was . . . a lot of structure. There were a lot of supports I had. So I have kids . . . whose organizational skills are . . . very poor in large part because there are so many areas of their lives that are not well organized; they don't have that structure. . . . And they don't have that “you get home, you do your homework.”

Naomi recognized that there are all types of students who may not have outside support but believed that it is “absolutely true” that urban students definitely do not have support and structure outside of the classroom. She “knows” that in contrast to her own experience as a student growing up in “suburban communities,” urban students suffer from a lack of home support and structure.

In sum, when distinguishing between effective teaching and effective urban teaching, the shared understanding of urban students depicted by the participants was one of deficits and cultural deprivation. These teachers believe that urban students are undersupplied with the values, norms, behaviors, and beliefs that suburban children possess: They have greater needs, they do not value education, and they do not have outside support. These beliefs, in turn,

formed the foundation of participants' views on effective urban teaching. They differentiated it from effective teaching by the fact that effective urban teaching, to them, must address and redress what urban students lack in comparison to suburban students.

A Return to "Knowing Your Students"

Given that many participants initially described elements of the culturally relevant pedagogies necessary to teach diverse populations, we were surprised that their descriptions of how they attend to their students' needs were based on group stereotypes. Recall that a main defining characteristic of effective urban teaching for these participants was knowing your students. This implies that teachers placed importance on understanding who their students were as individuals, including knowing their lived experiences and cultural backgrounds, as well as prior knowledge. In fact, teachers valued knowing their students no matter the context, as illustrated by Jenny:

I think it's mostly about knowing your students to know their needs and where they're coming from than whether they're urban. . . . Because even if you have an all-White classroom in the suburb . . . every kid in your class in front of you is still not the same. . . . So, I think it's just about . . . knowing your students and adapting to them. Whether it's urban or not.

For Jenny, and others, it was important to know one's students, regardless of whether they were urban or suburban. It is important, however, that our analyses revealed that for participants, knowing your students in urban contexts often meant basing their teaching on what they *believed* constituted the lives of their urban students. As illustrated earlier, these beliefs were most often based on deficit-laden racial and class stereotypes. For participants, believing in the importance of bringing in the lives of one's students or knowing one's students did not always entail divesting these teachers of their reliance on "reductive cultural characteristics" (T. C. Howard, 2003a, p. 201) of their students. In other words, for many participants, knowing their students and bringing in their lives did not

necessarily mean finding out who their students were.

For example, when Molly described the ease of teaching in a suburban classroom, "or a classroom where for whatever reason the climate of the school was such that people behaved better in class—classroom management was not such an issue," she illustrated her stereotype of urban students as behavior issues. Molly planned her lessons accordingly, focusing predominantly on classroom management in her teaching. In so doing, Molly's teaching responded to her *stereotype* of urban students as hard to manage, as opposed to the individual backgrounds and identities of each of her students.

In a similar manner, in choosing a book to read in her English class, Jenny chose one that dealt with kids in jail and in gangs, set in a neighborhood that Jenny described as "very similar to theirs [her students']." In her mind, this was a novel that her students "could identify with." In choosing such a book, Jenny seemed to imply that her students lived in the same types of neighborhoods and had similar experiences with the law as the characters in the book. Although she earlier stated that effective urban teaching is "teaching that engages students' prior knowledge and experiences in life," she chose this book based more on assumptions about their lives. Such assumptions about her students' life experiences may create a barrier to actually getting to know them and to teaching them well. In essence, teachers used stereotypical constructions of race and class to determine who their students were and to plan their teaching accordingly.

It Depends on the Teacher

We pause here to discuss one participant who stands apart from the rest of the participants. Robert is the sole teacher who did not exhibit deficit thinking in his responses about urban teaching and urban students. Furthermore, unlike the other teachers, Robert saw teachers, not student characteristics or needs, as responsible for the differences between effective teaching and effective urban teaching. He also recognized the structures within schools that perpetuate inequitable access to quality instruction. He is

the only Latino teacher in our sample and the only teacher who attended both urban and sub-urban schools growing up.

For Robert, *urban* is a complex concept involving issues of class and race, with class being a more salient factor than race. He explained that urban, in part, is rooted in “a heavily . . . populated city, . . . the density being high and . . . having issues of class and poverty even more so than race.” He further noted that many interrelated factors in urban schools—race and poverty being two critical ones—play out differently depending on the specific urban location. Thus, urban schools in Los Angeles are markedly different from urban schools in New York City, for example. According to Robert, understanding students in urban schools means acknowledging and understanding the “different modes of communication . . . different codes of talking [and] particular ways that young people communicate” within local contexts. It is important that Robert believed that understanding the ways in which meaning is locally constructed allows a teacher to connect with his or her students on an individual level. Robert recalled what it meant to him as a student when a teacher recognized him as an individual:

The times when I became most interested in schools . . . was when . . . a teacher would actually make things that were connected to myself and make . . . things directly to like the culture or the location where I came from, like the physical location, references to it, or . . . even if it's like a . . . simple referencing to let me know that the person actually knew where I came from and can understand better. Even if the person never lived in my community . . . the teacher know[ing] where I'm coming from always made me feel more comfortable.

For Robert, getting to know students means more than relying on stereotypical constructions of race and class; unlike other participants in the study, Robert's complex and multiple meanings of urban and effective urban teaching did not pigeonhole students into one understanding. The key to effective urban teaching, for Robert, was “adaptability” and knowing your students:

What will determine whether you're a good urban teacher or not will be how well and how soon you

can adapt to [the environment of the students] and how open minded are you going to be to learn about where your students are coming from.

Here, Robert returned to the theme other participants proffered earlier, knowing where your students are coming from. Unlike the other participants, Robert actually stated a plan for how to accomplish this notion—a plan that placed the responsibility for effective urban teaching on teachers, as opposed to citing student deficits as the source of difference between effective urban teaching and teaching in other contexts. He described, in detail, how he got to know what types of music his students listened to and how he came to understand what the students' home lives were like. For Robert, it is important not to assume, because of social locators such as race and class, who his students are. He did not talk about urban students not being committed to or valuing their education or any of the under-supplied characteristics of which his participant peers spoke. As such, there was no apparent normative reference group to which he compared urban students.

Although other participants located the source of differences between effective teaching and effective urban teaching in urban students and their perceived deficits, Robert located this difference in the teacher and his or her practice. To teach effectively in urban contexts, one must come to know students and the community: “Your success as an urban teacher will have a lot to do with how quickly you can understand the culture and community of not only the school but of the [entire] community.” It is important that just as Robert experienced teachers who got to know him as an individual, showing that they understood the uniqueness of his lived experiences, for him, coming to understand a school community means knowing students and community members as individuals. As such, Robert did not rely on group stereotypes in his teaching. Instead, his work was founded on authentic knowledge of his students.

Robert believed that his understanding of urban students and their backgrounds comes, in part, because of his experiences as a Latino

growing up in low-income schools and neighborhoods and because even before he entered a teacher education program, he read literature on, among other things, critical theory, different cultures, and the importance of identity in constructing knowledge. For him, fundamentals of culturally responsive teaching were not just elements that he could recite but instead, as noted above, he could describe explicitly how they were used in his teaching practice.

Further distinguishing Robert from the other new teachers in the study was his recognition of systems within schools that marginalize students of color. He specifically pointed to tracking, discipline, and attendance policies that worked to the detriment of the students in his classroom. These policies were a "huge concern" to Robert as far as "learning services" are concerned:

Many teachers . . . are pretty unhappy with . . . the way that the school deals with discipline, with the way it deals with attendance, primarily tardiness. And myself . . . this whole idea of tracking . . . we practice tracking at our school. . . . And I'm really against it . . . the self-esteem and the motivation, that translates into poor attendance. That translates into not really being able to do particular type[s] of activities, like group activities, . . . that take more than one day because there is no consistency within groups. . . . Your options are reduced as a teacher. . . . There's political conversations about what the principal should, should not be doing . . . some of the teachers have organized to reach out to students who are really failing.

Robert saw such systems as obstacles to effective urban teaching and as damaging to the emotional and academic well-being of students. He also believed it was his responsibility, as a teacher, to call attention to those systems and to counter them: "[You] can't say that it's not your responsibility . . . I think it really is."

DISCUSSION

In the first interview conducted with these participants, we found that they believed that good teaching was predicated on understanding one's students (Charner-Laird et al., 2004). At the time, teachers believed that good teaching "responds to the student" (Laura, Interview 1) and "reframes standards and curriculum to

address the needs of the specific population of students . . . in front of you" (Josh, Interview 1). We believe that this has not changed. In their first few months of teaching, these participants still believed that who one teaches matters in delineating what is effective teaching—urban or otherwise. What has become clear in the second interview is how participants view their students and how these views might mediate their ability to "respond to the student" in terms of their self-reported practice. These views are very limited and built on stereotypes, both of urban and suburban students and schools.

Teachers in the study overwhelmingly wanted effective urban teaching and effective teaching to be congruent, as evidenced by the contradictions stated at the beginning and throughout many responses. Yet as they explained, the two simply are not the same, and the majority of the reasons that participants cited for this difference are rooted in the urban students who participants believe are not the same as suburban students. This leads us to an important observation. As noted above, every participant except 1 used suburban students or themselves as the normative reference group.⁵

Teachers' explanations of effective teaching were rooted almost exclusively in descriptions of students. Teachers spoke very little about how their school structures and culture influenced their conceptions of their students or their ability to enact effective teaching. Few participants explicitly spoke about effective urban teaching being affected by urban school bureaucracies or any of the myriad stereotypes often associated with teaching in urban settings (Weiner, 1993, 2000). Although these may in fact be beliefs of these participants, they did not express them in this interview. We theorize that the school experiences that the teachers in this study had as students, along with their understanding of social constructions of race, factor heavily into how they make sense of teaching urban students. Participants in this study have successfully navigated the educational attainment structure in the United States: They accessed quality schooling and were rewarded with increased position as a result of it (e.g., attendance at the best colleges, acquisition of professional jobs). They are products of a meritocratic schooling

system predicated on the individual that has historically rewarded some, namely Whites, and marginalized others, namely people of color. It is possible that as students who were not disadvantaged by the racist structures of the institution of education, they are more likely as teachers to have internalized the meritocratic ideal that one's academic success is determined by individual capacity. Such internalization might explain why they construct the problems that urban students encounter as individual problems rather than social problems.

It is important that participants largely viewed *urban* in racial terms. For the majority of participants, urban means primarily non-White. Therefore, to use suburban as a normative reference group was to use "White" as the normative reference group. This means that participants were primarily comparing behaviors, beliefs, and values of racial minority students and families to behaviors, beliefs, and values of White students and families. In Ray Rist's (2000) watershed research on the self-fulfilling prophecy, he found that teachers developed certain criteria that became the indicators of expected success and for others, expected failure. Each teacher had a normative reference group used as the marker of success. In our study, each teacher, save Robert, had a normative reference group—suburban students—that she or he used as the marker of *normal* and correct beliefs, values, and behaviors. In most cases, these comparisons were made without reservation, excuse, and we would argue, often without an awareness of the comparison being made.

Robert is the only participant who neither described urban in terms of deficits nor used a normative reference group to make distinctions between effective urban teaching and effective teaching. We believe that Robert's lack of a normative reference group, which may be a result of his experience as a student in both urban and suburban schools, contributed to his beliefs. He did not compare his current urban students to himself as a student or his peers growing up. Rather, he looked at his students in their current context and took responsibility as a teacher to work with them. In addition, Robert attributed his understanding of his students to his Latino background and extensive reading on culture

and identity construction. We contend that these factors also contributed to his beliefs about effective teaching and effective urban teaching.

That the majority of participants blamed the families and students for their deficiencies and the sole Latino teacher did not is neither new nor surprising. Other researchers have found that White teachers in racially diverse schools blame the students and their families for schooling troubles more often than teachers of color, who tend to put more blame on teachers (Uhlenbert & Brown, 2002). Our analyses reveal the continuing salience of race and the belief, illustrated by participants, that racial and ethnic inequalities (i.e., academic achievement) are most often rooted in individuals as opposed to institutions.

Participants failed to recognize the ordinary acts of racism that they engage in when they base their professional decisions on stereotypes of students of color (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). By purporting to address the needs of their students of color, whom they characterized as unmotivated and underskilled, and yet responding more to stereotypes of their students than to their actual needs, these teachers are likely to reinforce and perpetuate inequitable access to quality instruction. Furthermore, when these new teachers propose to improve the condition of those they see as deficient, they may also be described as performing an act of domination: Acting "as modern, free, and enlightened" professionals "they re-enact [the] imperial relation" and affirm White positional superiority by rushing to the aid of people of color (Razach, 1998, p. 6). It is ironic that this is the antithesis of what many of them hoped to do by becoming urban teachers.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

A critical task in becoming an effective teacher of diverse students is coming to understand individual young people in nonstereotypical ways while acknowledging and comprehending the ways in which culture and context influence their lives and learning (Darling-Hammond, 2002, p. 209).

Based on the findings from this study, we believe that these new teachers still have much to learn about race and context (particularly urban contexts) and their influences on teaching practice. To become effective teachers, as described

above by Darling-Hammond (2002), these novices must attend to their students as individuals, moving beyond group stereotypes to considering the unique needs of each student. Perhaps of greatest importance for these new teachers is that they understand how their own life experiences, schooling contexts, and the settings in which they currently teach shape their teaching. The development of such knowledge and skill relies on both teacher education programs and induction programs. Such programs must have not only the willingness but also the means with which to support novices in effectively questioning discourses and systems that continually marginalize and demean students of color, thereby perpetuating inequity across the U.S. public school system. These programs have the potential to disrupt teachers' beliefs and teaching practices, enabling them to provide instruction that is accessible to all students and a reflection of high expectations for students' academic achievement (Ladson-Billings, 1999).

Teacher education is often a prospective teacher's first encounter with ideas about equitable teaching and learning that may challenge his or her own experiences and beliefs. Thus, teacher preparation programs present the first opportunity for training teachers in antiracist, equitable pedagogies. Our analysis demonstrates, however, that many of the participants in this study exited their preparation program and continue to talk about their teaching in the same "dysconscious" state (King, 1991) as many of the majority White middle-class teachers who went before them. We believe that teacher preparation has an important responsibility to more purposefully attend to disrupting the beliefs of prospective teachers, particularly their beliefs about how race affects their teaching.

Although accomplishing this goal in teacher preparation has been elusive at best and ignored at worst (Hollins & Guzman, 2005), we believe that teacher education programs can realize the aforementioned goals. Our recommendations below draw heavily from the work of Ladson-Billings (1999) and others who have brought critical race theory to education, as well as the findings outlined in this article, particularly concerning participants' dysconsciousness. Teacher

education programs must be designed such that multiculturalism and grappling with issues of race and inequity are fundamental to the program's philosophy of learning to teach. Programs must help prospective teachers learn to recognize, expose, and eradicate racism both in themselves and in society. Attention to race and inequity must not exist only as add-ons in the teacher preparation curriculum but must be as central to learning to teach as learning about child development, teaching methods, and classroom management. Integral to supporting this type of teaching philosophy is faculty fluency with antiracism. Faculty members must have a deep understanding of the sociohistorical context of race and a commitment to addressing the inequities that continue to widen the gap between students of color and their White counterparts. Equally important in supporting this philosophy of learning to teach is designing course work and fieldwork that, as Ladson-Billings and other critical race theorists suggested, will prompt students to "unmask . . . and expose . . . racism in its various permutations" (p. 213).

However, the responsibility for helping novice teachers question their beliefs and think critically about how race and inequity affect their practice does not fall solely on teacher preparation. Disrupting stereotypes, like the ones held by many of our participants, and supporting the development of antiracist teaching practices also needs to be an integral part of school-based induction programs. In their first few years in the classroom, novices need to be supported in learning how to develop pedagogies that address the specific needs of their students. They need to be given opportunities to reflect on the specifics of their own classrooms with mentor teachers who are comfortable with and skilled in exposing racism and talking about how race and other inequities influence their teaching. In addition, induction programs must be supported by professional development that tackles issues of race and inequity.

Not only do teacher education programs and teacher induction programs need to develop an antiracist focus but also there must be greater coherence across these programs. This coherence takes seriously the continuum of learning

to teach (Feiman-Nemser, 2001), placing the philosophy of antiracism at the core of the process.

NOTES

1. Note that although the majority of data drawn in response to these analytic questions came from the three focal interview questions outlined above, when relevant, data were taken from other areas of the interview transcripts as well.
2. All data presented in this article are from Interview 2, conducted in October/November 2003, unless otherwise noted.
3. One of these participants, Robert, will be discussed in a separate section.
4. Note that participants may be in more than one category.
5. Recall that all of these participants went to suburban schools except Robert, who was schooled in both urban and suburban schools.

REFERENCES

- Banks, J. A. (Ed.). (2006). *Cultural diversity and education: Foundations, curriculum, and theory* (4th ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Charner-Laird, M., Watson, D., Szczesiul, S. A., Kirkpatrick, C., & Gordon, P. (2004, April). *Navigating the culture gap: New teachers experience the urban context*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Diego, CA.
- Cochran-Smith, M., Davis, D., & Fries, K. (2004). Multicultural teacher education: Research, practice, and policy. In J. Banks & C. A. M. Banks (Eds.), *Handbook of research on multicultural education* (pp. 931-975). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Cross, B. E. (2003). Learning or unlearning racism: Transferring teacher education curriculum to classroom practices. *Theory Into Practice, 42*(3), 203-209.
- Darling-Hammond, L. (2002). Educating a profession for equitable practice. In L. Darling-Hammond, J. French, & S. P. Garcia-Lopez (Eds.), *Learning to teach for social justice* (pp. 201-212). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J. (2001). *Critical race theory: An introduction*. New York: New York University Press.
- Feiman-Nemser, S. (2001). From preparation to practice: Designing a continuum to strengthen and sustain teaching. *Teachers College Record, 103*(6), 1013-1055.
- Gay, G. (2000). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, and practice*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Gay, G., & Kirkland, K. (2003). Developing cultural critical consciousness and self-reflection in preservice teacher education. *Theory Into Practice, 42*(3), 181-187.
- Hollins, E. R., & Guzman, M. T. (2005). Research on preparing teachers for diverse populations. In M. Cochran-Smith & K. M. Zeichner (Eds.), *Studying teacher education: The report of the AERA panel on research and teacher education* (pp. 477-548). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Howard, G. (1999). *We can't teach what we don't know: White teachers, multiracial schools*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Howard, T. C. (2003a). Culturally relevant pedagogy: Ingredients for critical teacher reflection. *Theory Into Practice, 42*(3), 195-202.
- Howard, T. C. (2003b). Who receives the short end of the shortage? Implications of the U.S. teacher shortage on urban schools. *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision, 18*(2), 142-160.
- Irvine, J. J. (2002). *In search of wholeness: African American teachers and their culturally specific classroom practices*. New York: Palgrave.
- Ketter, J., & Lewis, C. (2001). Already reading texts and contexts: Multicultural literature in a predominantly White rural community. *Theory Into Practice, 40*(3), 175-183.
- King, J. E. (1991). Dysconscious racism: Ideology, identity, and the miseducation of teachers. *Journal of Negro Education, 60*(2), 133-146.
- King, J. E. (Ed.). (2005). *Black education: A transformative research and action agenda for the new century*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- King, J. E., Hollins, E. R., & Hayman, W. C. (Eds.). (1997). *Preparing teachers for cultural diversity*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Kirkpatrick, C. L., Charner-Laird, M., Gordon, P., Szczesiul, S. A., & Watson, D. (2004, April). *Different shades of urban: New teachers' understanding of urban contexts*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the New England Educational Research Organization. Portsmouth, NH.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1994). *The dreamkeepers: Successful teachers of African American children*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1999). Preparing teachers for diverse student populations: A critical race theory perspective. *Review of Educational Research, 24*, 211-247.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2000). Fighting for our lives: Preparing teachers to teach African American students. *Journal of Teacher Education, 51*(3), 206-214.
- Lewis, A. E. (2003). *Race in the schoolyard: Negotiating the colorline in classrooms and communities*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Mirón, L. F. (1996). *The social construction of urban schooling: Situating the crisis*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton.
- Quartz, K. H. (2003). "Too angry to leave": Supporting new teachers' commitment to transform urban schools. *Journal of Teacher Education, 54*(2), 99-111.
- Razach, S. (1998). *Looking White people in the eye: Gender, race and culture in courtrooms and classrooms*. Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press.
- Rist, R. C. (2000). Student social class and teacher expectations: The self-fulfilling prophecy in ghetto education. *Harvard Educational Review, 70*(3), 257-301.
- Rousseau, C., & Tate, W. F. (2003). No time like the present: Reflecting on equity in school mathematics. *Theory Into Practice, 42*(3), 210-216.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Szczesiul, S. A., Charner-Laird, M., Watson, D., Gordon, P., & Kirkpatrick, C. L. (2004, April). *Urban definitions*,

-
- urban differentials: Implications for how new teachers locate the urban school problem.* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Diego, CA.
- Uhlenbert, J., & Brown, K. M. (2002). Racial gap in teachers' perceptions of the achievement gap. *Education and Urban Society*, 34(4), 493-530.
- Weiner, L. (1993). *Preparing teachers for urban schools: Lessons from thirty years of school reform.* New York: Teachers College Press.
- Weiner, L. (2000). Research in the 90s: Implications for urban teacher preparation. *Review of Educational Research*, 70(3), 369-406.
- Zumwalt, K., & Craig, E. (2005). Teachers' characteristics: Research on the demographic profile. In M. Cochran-Smith & K. M. Zeichner (Eds.), *Studying teacher education: The report of the AERA panel on research and teacher education* (pp. 157-260). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Dyan Watson is a doctoral candidate in learning and teaching at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and a Spencer Research Training Grant recipient. Her dissertation work focuses on how teachers define and understand urban teaching, as well as how teachers use racial code words to describe their students. Her interests include teacher education, exploring how race mediates teaching, and qualitative research methods. She taught high school social studies for 6 years before coming to Harvard.

Megin Charner-Laird is a doctoral candidate at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and a Spencer Research Training Grant recipient. Currently she is conducting a study investigating factors that contribute to teachers' learning in the early stages of the career with

Harvard's Project on the Next Generation of Teachers. She has served as the cochair of the Harvard Educational Review and as an editor of *Education Past and Present: Reflections on Research, Policy, and Practice*, which celebrated the 75th anniversary of the journal. Prior to coming to Harvard, she taught elementary school in California's Bay Area.

Cheryl L. Kirkpatrick is a doctoral student and Spencer Research Training Grant recipient at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Her research interests are in the areas of teacher development and sustainability. Prior to beginning her doctoral work, she taught middle school history. Currently, she is working on a study of teachers' job engagement with Harvard's Project on the Next Generation of Teachers.

Stacy Agee Szczesiul is a doctoral candidate at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. She is a research assistant with Harvard's Project on the Next Generation of Teachers and a Spencer Research Training Grant recipient. She is currently conducting a study that explores teachers' constructions of professional autonomy in school contexts heavily influenced by high-stakes accountability. Prior to coming to Harvard, she taught special education at the high school level.

Pamela J. Gordon is a doctoral candidate at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Her research interests include democratic and civic education, new teacher development, urban education, and teacher leadership. Prior to beginning her doctoral work, she was a history teacher in Boston.