

Diversity, Community, & Achievement

Diversity, Community, & Achievement

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*Please visit the Resource Exchange on TFA.Net to access the **Diversity, Community, & Achievement Toolkit**, which contains sample tools we’ve collected over time that are referenced throughout this text. You can also access many other tools on the Resource Exchange—from a wide range of grade levels and subject areas—which have been developed and shared by our corps members and alumni.*

Diversity, Community, & Achievement

Related Readings

Additional readings to supplement each chapter are referenced throughout the book. The following three chapters can be found in the Related Readings section at the end of this book. All other additional readings that are referenced should be accessed online by visiting the Pre-Institute Work page on the Institute Info Center within TFANet.

“Identity Development in Adolescence” From <i>“Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?”</i> By Beverly Daniel Tatum	1
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“Critical Issues In...Identity Development” From <i>“Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?”</i> By Beverly Daniel Tatum	45

Foreword

Over the last 20 years, we have seen that having high expectations, confronting one's own biases, and productively working with students and community members of all backgrounds are critical to effective teaching. The Diversity, Community, and Achievement (DCA) offerings at institute and this accompanying text are designed to foster insights, reflection, and productive dialogue, so that you can more effectively lead your students to ambitious academic goals.

Often times, as corps members read through the text and engage in these conversations at institute and in regions, questions arise about Teach For America's overall approach and commitment to creating a diverse organization and a community that values diversity. This foreword provides an overview of our approach to diversity—how it both underlies the different components of our program and plays into the decisions we make. During the institute and beyond, you will have the opportunity learn more about our approach, to ask questions, and provide feedback.

Teach For America's Commitment to Diversity

Teach For America strives to enlist the energy and commitment of individuals who have the characteristics and skills necessary to advance our cause. These leaders will be diverse in ethnicity, race, and economic background. Their places on the political spectrum and their religious beliefs will be similarly varied, and we seek individuals of all genders and sexual orientations and regardless of physical disabilities.

Maximizing the diversity of our corps and organization is important in engaging all those who can contribute to our effort and also in ensuring our access to and participation in the circles of influence in our tremendously diverse society. Moreover, we seek to be diverse because we aspire to serve as a model of the fairness and equality of opportunity we envision for our nation.

At the same time that we value each individual who commits to our cause, we also place a particular focus on attracting and fostering the leadership of individuals who share the racial and/or low-income backgrounds of the students underserved by public schools, many of whom are African-American, Latino, or Hispanic children living in low-income communities. We emphasize racial, ethnic, and economic diversity to enhance our impact.

Impact on students: Based on our experiences, we know students benefit from all talented, committed teachers, regardless of their race/ethnicity. We have seen that when such teachers are themselves from historically under-represented racial backgrounds or low-income families, they can have a particular impact and be particularly persuasive with students regarding the potential for success in education and in life. As such, we are committed to ensuring that there is significant representation of African-American, Latino or Hispanics, and individuals from low-income backgrounds in the corps.

Long-term impact: Alumni who share the racial and/or economic backgrounds of our students can also be particularly influential in the long-term push for societal change, because of their rich perspective and credibility, and because their leadership in and of itself demonstrates the value of that change.

Collective strength: While it is the responsibility of each person within Teach For America to make decisions with sensitivity to the needs and desires of our students and communities, we have seen that individuals who are themselves from under-represented racial backgrounds or low-income family backgrounds can often ground the discussions and advance the thinking of our corps, alumni groups, and organization in important ways.

Foreword

Fostering Diversity Across Teach For America's Program Continuum

Recruitment - Our recruitment team works aggressively to increase the diversity of our corps. Each regional recruitment team has ambitious, measurable goals for recruiting people of color and people from low-income backgrounds. Organizationally, we measure our success in recruitment largely by our ability to increase the size, quality, and diversity of our corps, annually increasing the share of the corps composed of corps members of color and/or corps members from low-income backgrounds even as the entire corps expands. The recruitment team thus allocates a majority of staff time and resources to recruiting corps members of color and corps members from low-income backgrounds. To meet these goals, we recruit at over 400 public and private colleges, including Historically Black Colleges & Universities and Hispanic-Serving Institutions, and we work closely with the leaders of dozens of national organizations, ranging from the National Society of Hispanic Engineers to Alpha Kappa Alpha Inc., to identify and recruit prospective corps members. Every undergraduate recruitment team across the country employs strategies such as:

- Presenting to campus-based student organizations and governing bodies (e.g., Black Student Unions, Latino Student Unions, multicultural Greek letter organizations) and seeking referrals from influential faculty and staff in order to increase awareness and identify top prospective applicants.
- Personally cultivating students of color on campuses and connecting top prospects to corps members and alumni with shared backgrounds.
- Organizing special events such as regional visits with classroom observations and community forum panels geared toward prospective top candidates of color from around the nation.

Recruiters who focus on broader efforts to recruit beyond specific campuses employ additional strategies including:

- Supplementing our campus-based efforts through relationships with national organizations and scholarships and through national marketing and public relations efforts.
- Prioritizing young professionals or graduate students of color for personal outreach and cultivation.

Selection and Assignment - We know from our experience and research that people of all backgrounds can succeed in significantly increasing their students' academic achievement, and that race, ethnicity and economic background alone do not make an individual successful in our program.

Our selection criteria are based on a set of characteristics that differentiates the most effective teachers in our program, as indicated by the degree to which they make measurable advances in their students' academic achievement. The criteria are:

- Demonstrated past leadership and achievement: achieving ambitious, measurable results in academic, professional, extracurricular, or volunteer settings
- Perseverance and sustained focus in the face of challenges
- Strong critical thinking skills: making accurate linkages between cause and effect and generating relevant solutions to problems
- Superior organizational ability: planning well, meeting deadlines, and working efficiently
- Respect for individuals' diverse experiences and effectively working with people from a variety of backgrounds

Ethnic and Economic Diversity in the 2010 Corps

Total People of Color	32%
African-American	11.0%
Latino or Hispanic	7.0%
Asian-American	6.0%
Native American	0.3%
Multi-ethnic	5.0%
Other (Non-white)	2.0%
Pell Grant recipients	28%

- Superior interpersonal skills to motivate and lead others
- Thorough understanding of and desire to work relentlessly in pursuit of our vision

We are often asked whether, when measuring past achievement, we take a narrow (e.g., GPA only) or broad view. We take a broad view. We look for patterns of achieving ambitious results within varied experiences – academic, extra-curricular and work-related. Within extracurricular and work roles, we seek to understand specifically what an applicant achieved in the role as opposed to judging the achievement by the role’s title alone. Within academics, we regard GPA as an indicator of achievement but consider it within the context of other achievements when determining an applicant’s total achievement measure. When measuring academic achievement, we also take into account whether an applicant worked to finance part of their college education and yearly averages.

Our application readers and interviewers synthesize and evaluate evidence holistically, using all parts of the application, phone interview and final interview to determine scores in each of our selection competencies.

Final selection decisions are made on the basis of an applicant’s likelihood to have a life-changing impact on students, primarily through effecting meaningful academic gains in his/her future classroom, as determined by their scores on our selection criteria and the past impact of those scores in predicting corps members’ success. We seek to ensure that the right decisions are made at every stage of our selection process and administer a series of thorough checks toward this end. A senior selection committee reviews a significant share of interviewer recommendations before final decisions are made to ensure consistent application of our selection model and the best final outcome for the applicant and potential students he/she would be teaching. Although this committee makes it a priority to review the evidence and interviewer recommendation for applicants who are African American, Latino or Hispanic, and/or come from low-income family backgrounds, we ensure the same admission standards for all applicants by reviewing them holistically and giving applicants the opportunities to exhibit their strengths throughout the admissions process.

Once selected, corps members are placed in their regions based on a number of factors, including district needs, corps members’ preferences, and corps members’ academic backgrounds. As such, the diversity of corps members in each region (and therefore each summer institute) may differ. Though we have considered playing a more active role in balancing diversity across regions, we do not consider race or ethnicity in determining assignments because doing so would be unfair to the individuals who receive less preferred regions.

In an effort to ensure that accepted applicants of all economic situations are able to join our corps, we offer over \$7.7 million in transitional grants and no-interest loans to help corps members make it to their first paychecks. Packages range from \$1,000 to \$6,000 and are based on a corps member’s demonstrated need and the cost of transitioning to the corps member’s assigned region.

Pre-Service Training - Over the years, Teach For America has researched and sought external expertise to develop approaches to diversity-related training, and we continually seek to evolve our approaches based upon feedback and new learnings. While we believe that we have made progress over time, we will continue to evolve our approach. Below is a brief overview of our current approach to the diversity, community, and achievement (DCA) component of our training:

- Before institute, you will read portions of this DCA text, a critical analysis of the connection between issues of diversity and the achievement gap, as well as reflections from Teach For America alumni.
- During regional orientation and/or induction you will learn information about the specific community in which you’ll be living and working for the next two years.

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- At the institute, you will participate in weekly discussions led by a trained facilitator in which you will analyze your own backgrounds, identities, and expectations about your students and communities. You will engage with your colleagues in reflective conversations about how issues of diversity impact teacher effectiveness and student achievement. You will also spend time reflecting on the dynamics of difference and sameness between yourself and your students, and the impact of those dynamics on the ways in which you will invest students and their influencers, the ways in which you interact with colleagues and administrators, and ultimately, the ways in which you will lead your students to academic achievement.

These activities are designed to provide a useful context for you to begin or continue this important reflection. However, this type of learning and work is a lifelong process. The discussions and reflections that take place during your summer training should continue throughout your two-year commitment and beyond.

In Conclusion

It is our goal that all corps members will benefit from our efforts around diversity, community, and achievement. At the same time, we strive to constantly reflect on and assess our efforts to create a more diverse organization and movement and to ensure we are creating an environment that embraces diversity and challenges bias. While we have made significant progress over the years, we know there is much more we can and must accomplish in this realm. Your feedback—from recruitment ideas to feedback on our DCA curriculum and beyond—will be very valuable, as it helps shape the way we think and the initiatives we take on.

Diversity as a Path to Achievement

Introduction

- I. What It Takes for Diversity to Be a Path to Achievement
- II. How This Text Is Organized
- III. Our Goals: Why We Address Issues of Diversity
- IV. A Note on Our Core Beliefs (and Questions) About Diversity

I. What It Takes for Diversity to Be a Path to Achievement

As new teachers, the range of the diversity-related issues we encounter is vast. We might, for example, implement lesson plans that recognize and appreciate diverse cultural backgrounds, or that respectfully incorporate the experiences of our students and their families. On the same day, we may need to react quickly to a student's religion-based insult of another student in our classroom. During the same week, we may create personal connections with a key veteran teacher that will help win over a few other veteran teachers on campus who were suspicious of us because of our inexperience, or age, or race, or gender, or religion, or sexual orientation. Or, by reflecting on our own behaviors, we might come to realize that we harbor subtle but deep-seated biases against some of our students because of some element of their identity.

On one hand, your central purpose as a teacher is to lead your students to academic achievement. You will—by setting ambitious goals, investing your students in them, working relentlessly, and constantly improving your approach—strive to close the achievement gap for and change the life prospects of your students. Clearly, if you achieve this purpose, little else matters. Student progress is what your students, their families, your administrators, and you want to see.

On the other hand, it would be naive and misguided to think that this focus on academic achievement means diversity issues do not matter. On the contrary, handling well the plethora of diversity issues that you will encounter is a prerequisite to enabling and inspiring your students to meet their academic goals.

You are beginning a new role. (Even those of us who teach in the community where we have previously lived find that being in the role of a teacher in that community brings new dynamics around issues of diversity.) To invest colleagues, students, and families in your goals requires that you connect with them emotionally. The reality is that diversity-related dynamics are on people's minds. Your students may be wondering about—and perhaps making assumptions about—how your identity as an older White man from California, or a younger Latino woman from Texas, will impact your classroom management. Whatever your racial identity and educational experiences, you may be wrestling with your own stubborn assumptions about the African-American boys, the Latina girls, or the students receiving special education services who are in your classroom. The same veteran teachers who will become such wonderful resources and mentors for you probably have their own questions about your background and its impact on your ability to lead your students to academic excellence. The reality of our role is that diversity-related issues are impacting you and those around you.

Diversity as a Path to Achievement

What We Mean By “Diversity”

Given that we can find virtually every kind of diversity in the classrooms and communities where we work, Teach For America considers “diversity” broadly, to include the full range of differences in identities and backgrounds including, but not limited to, those related to race and ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, gender, age, religion, political opinion, language, and ability.

This text should be viewed as a set of ideas and methods that will make you more effective. By proactively engaging in the questions and conversations that make up this set of ideas, teachers discover a whole range of methods and approaches that empower them to more effectively connect with, instruct, and lead students to ambitious academic goals.

So, what does it take for a teacher to engage in diversity issues proactively—to ensure that issues related to diversity are approached in a way that has the potential to improve, rather than obstruct, the classroom experience for students? Three key ideas, we believe, are at the heart of new teachers’ attempts

to approach diversity issues in a way that serves as a positive force for academic achievement:

(1) Maintaining High Expectations. As teachers in low-income communities, we are often bombarded with unrelenting pressure (at times from society, from the community, from the school, from family members, and even from the students themselves) to lower the academic standards that we demand of our students. We must educate ourselves about the challenges inherent in maintaining high expectations so that we can more effectively overcome those challenges.

(2) Building a Strong Knowledge Base. As an instructional leader, a key to taking full advantage of the rich opportunities afforded by the diversity found in your classroom is to build your knowledge and awareness of:

- a. Your *own* personal experience and background, including your identity-related biases and privileges
- b. Your students’ identity, including, in part, their culture, background, gender, race, ethnicity, and cognitive and emotional development
- c. Methods and theories of multicultural education in the classroom

The Danger of “Lumping” Identities

As you know, all of us carry many identities. And no single identity characteristic can be assumed to carry others. White, for example, does not necessarily mean affluent. We have many White corps members who grew up in low-income settings and whose backgrounds may be very different from those who grew up with greater means. (We do, at times, talk about “White privilege” in this text, but that is a concept that, in our society, transcends socioeconomic status.)

Similarly, we realize that in discussing group labels such as people of color, African-American, Latino, or Native American we are referring to people with a wide range of experiences. We often in this text, for example, talk about the achievement gap in terms of its impact on students segregated by their race and socioeconomic status. In most but not all cases, the achievement gap impacts students at the intersection of those two identity characteristics.

These are obvious points, but it is helpful going into these conversations to check our assumptions and remember that there are probably as many differences within any given “group” as there are among them.

(3) Working to Effect Significant Gains with Respect and Humility. Your commitment to propel your students to achieve ambitious academic goals is an effort to make change. As new members of our school and community, we must approach any attempts to make change with great respect and humility. This is even more critical if you seek to change policies or practices at your school that you believe to be inhibiting your students’ academic achievement.

These three ideas represent the common approaches of teachers who embrace diversity matters in the classroom and who take full advantage of diversity issues as a means of reaching for academic success. This text has been designed to introduce you to these fundamental ideas.

II. How This Text Is Organized

The three guiding objectives of this text are (a) maintain high expectations, (b) build the necessary diversity-related knowledge base, and (c) enter your community with respect and humility. The text is organized as follows:

Part I: Maintaining High Expectations

Chapter One—Race, Class and the Achievement Gap: The Promise of Student Potential

This chapter lays the foundation for further discussion by stepping back to consider some of the reasons for the high correlation among race, class, and the achievement gap. While there is a correlation between low achievement and students' race and class, it is not a difference in students' potential that causes that correlation but is instead, in part, a difference in our expectations of those students.

Additional Reading (on TFANet):

- "Explaining the Academic Gap; Conventional and Alternative Explanations"—an excerpt of a chapter from John Ogbu's *Black American Students in an Affluent Suburb: A Study of Academic Disengagement*¹

Chapter Two—The Power of High Expectations: Closing the Gap in Your Classroom

This second chapter has direct connections to the *Teaching As Leadership* book. Here we explore the amazingly promising power of high expectations—and the frighteningly damaging power of low expectations. Not only are low expectations a key cause of the achievement gap, but high expectations are also one of the primary solutions to the achievement gap that is truly within a teacher's control. As a result, this chapter focuses on those high expectations and what they may look like in your classroom.

Is This Text Just for White People?

No. All new teachers are at different points in the process of understanding the complex issues that our students and schools in low-income communities face. Whether your personal background is notably different from the students you teach, or whether it mirrors their experience in various ways, it is necessary to reflect on the impact that these likenesses and differences will have on your classroom experience before encountering the inevitable challenges that lie ahead.

However your identity compares to the identity of your students, you may find it valuable to undergo a deep process of reflection to ensure that you are always operating with respect and empathy without compromising high expectations. Furthermore, whatever your identity, the process you went through in your own identity development might be helpful as you interact with your students who are likely shaping their own self-concept as well.

We believe that all corps members will benefit from asking themselves the questions posed by this text—particularly as you embrace these questions as a new educator and as an agent for change within your school community. Have you contemplated how you will address issues of race or racism in the classroom? Have you considered the ways in which dynamics of gender or class can mirror many of the stigmas and challenges that we discuss in this text regarding race? And as you make assumptions about what you and your students share, have you thought about the ways in which you are different—or the ways in which you might inappropriately assume that your experiences are similar to those of your students? Similarly, as you make assumptions about how you and your students differ, have you thought about all that you share and the ways in which you might inappropriately assume that your experiences are foreign to your students?

Variations within a particular group are often stark. Different groups often have much in common. For corps members of all races, there is plenty of room to be a student of diversity before assuming the mantle of the teacher.

¹ Ogbu, John. *Black American Students In An Affluent Suburb: A Study of Academic Disengagement*. Manwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Assoc., 2003. Chapter 3: "Explaining the Academic Gap; Conventional and Alternative Explanations," pp. 33-44.

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Additional Readings (on TFANet):

- “Racism, Discrimination, and Expectations of Students’ Achievement,” from Sonia Nieto & Patty Bode’s *Affirming Diversity: The Sociopolitical Context of Multicultural Education*²
- “Equity Within Reach: Insights from the Front Lines of America’s Achievement Gap,” results of a survey of Teach For America corps members

Chapter Three—The Challenge of Maintaining High Expectations

In Chapter Three we explore the difficulties inherent in maintaining high expectations. First and foremost, many teachers find that the bleak reality of students’ low academic skills shakes their faith in high expectations. Other teachers inadvertently contribute to lowering expectations by making excuses for students out of sympathy or concern for them. This chapter will provide suggestions for avoiding those pitfalls.

Additional Reading (in Related Readings section):

- “Identity Development in Adolescence,” a chapter from Beverly Daniel Tatum’s book *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?*

Part II: Building a Strong Diversity-Related Knowledge Base

Chapter Four—Dynamics of Difference and Sameness: Teachers’ Reflections on Diversity in Their Classrooms

This chapter also seeks to lay a foundation for further discussion but narrows our focus from the broad social dynamics that create the achievement gap to the daily dynamics of difference and sameness that are a part of any classroom. In this chapter, we will share in the personal reflections of a number of teachers who have experienced these dynamics first-hand.

Additional Reading (on TFANet):

- “The Silenced Dialogue: Power and Pedagogy in Educating Other People’s Children,” by Lisa Delpit from her book *Other People’s Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom*³

Chapter Five—The “Knowledge Base” of Self: Uncovering Hidden Biases and Unpacking Privilege

Chapter Five begins the process of building the “knowledge bases” that teachers need to use diversity to their advantage as instructional leaders. A key element of that knowledge base, of course, is knowledge of self. This chapter asks each of us—no matter what our own race, ethnicity, background, gender, sexual orientation, or disability—to look within ourselves to consider the conscious and subconscious biases that we are bringing to the table. Here we make and discuss the distinction between those biases and the often invisible benefits of unearned power and privilege that some of us may be afforded because of our identities.

Additional Readings (on TFANet):

- Teaching Tolerance’s hidden bias tests at http://www.tolerance.org/hidden_bias/index.html
- “Unpacking Straight Privilege” by Earlham College Students

² Nieto, Sonia & Bode, Patty. *Affirming Diversity: The Sociopolitical Context of Multicultural Education*. White Plains, NY: Longman Publishers USA, 2008. Chapter 4: “Racism, Discrimination, and Expectations of Students’ Achievement,” pp. 65-91.

³ Delpit, Lisa. *Other People’s Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom*. New York: The New Press, 1995. “The Silenced Dialogue: Power and Pedagogy in Educating Other People’s Children,” pp. 21-47.

Chapter Six—How Racial Identity Affects Performance

Chapter Six explores how students' racial identity (and the ways in which adults can help or hinder its development) affect academic performance. This chapter considers the common patterns of racial identity development for people of color and for White people; these frameworks serve as a way to make sense of both teachers' and students' evolution of understanding around conversations and incidents related to diversity. This area of research offers particular insights into the ways that students may be grappling with their own identity as a member of their ethnic or racial group.

Additional Readings:

- **(on TFANet)** "How Racial Identity Affects School Performance" by Pedro Noguera⁴
- **(in Related Readings section)** "The Early Years," a chapter from Beverly Daniel Tatum's book *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?*
- **(in Related Readings section)** "Critical Issues in Latino, American Indian, and Asian Pacific American Identity Development," an excerpt from another chapter in the same book⁵

Chapter Seven—"Cultural Learning Styles": Should Students' Culture Inform Instructional Choices?

This chapter explores whether one can and should adjust one's teaching style according to the race or ethnicity of the students in the classroom. Are there generalizations about the "cultural learning style" of African-Americans, or Latino students and families, or Native American students that should inform decisions that you make in the classroom?

Additional Readings (on TFANet):

- *Speaking, relating and learning: A study of Hawaiian children at home and at school*—a study by Steven Boggs, Karen Watson-Gegeo, and G. McMillen⁶
- "An Indian Father's Plea"—a letter from Robert Lake to his son's teacher⁷
- "American Indian/Alaskan Native Learning Styles: Research and Practice" by Karen Swisher⁸
- "Culture, Identity, and Learning," by Sonia Nieto and Patty Bode from their book *Affirming Diversity: The Sociopolitical Context of Multicultural Education*⁹

Chapter Eight—Multicultural Education

This chapter continues our quest to build our diversity-related knowledge base by exploring the definitions and intentions of multicultural education. Here we also consider the importance of recognizing multicultural education as a means to the end of effective teaching. This chapter culminates with a discussion of five strategies for implementing the principles of multicultural education in your classroom.

Additional Reading (on TFANet):

- "Profoundly Multicultural Questions" by Sonia Nieto¹⁰

⁴ Noguera, Pedro. "How Racial Identity Affects School Performance." 2003. *Harvard Educational Letter*. <http://www.hepg.org>.

⁵ Tatum, Beverly Daniel. *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria? And Other Conversations About Race*. New York: Basic Books, 1997. Chapter 8: "Critical Issues in Latino, American Indian, and Asian Pacific American Identity Development," pp. 131-153.

⁶ Boggs, Steven, Karen Watson-Gegeo, and G. McMillen. *Speaking, relating and learning: A study of Hawaiian children at home and at school*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1986. Abstract.

⁷ Lake, Robert. "An Indian Father's Plea." *Teacher Magazine*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 1990.

⁸ Swisher, Karen. "American Indian/Alaskan Native Learning Styles: Research and Practice." ERIC Digest, May 1991. [ED 335 175]

⁹ Nieto, Sonia, & Bode, Patty. *Affirming Diversity: The Sociopolitical Context of Multicultural Education*. White Plains, NY: Longman Publishers USA, 2008. Chapter 6: "Culture, Identity, and Learning," pp. 169-192.

¹⁰ Nieto, Sonia. "Profoundly Multicultural Questions." *Educational Leadership*, Vol. 60, No. 4, December 2002/January 2003, pp 6-10.

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Part III: Effecting Change with Respect and Humility

Chapter Nine—Effecting Change with Respect and Humility: It Starts with Success in Your Classroom

As a teacher striving for your children to achieve ambitious academic goals, you are an agent of change. Further, in pursuit of significant gains, you may feel the need to try to influence policies and practices in your school. If and when such issues truly affect your students' learning, you may choose to engage in those issues to maximize the chances that your students can meet their academic goals. Of course, *how* you choose to approach policies and practices you feel need to be changed can be just as important as which issues you choose to address. This chapter provides some guidance for achieving your ambitious goals within the culture of your school and community.

As you can see, each chapter of this text consists of a brief introductory survey of the chapter's key ideas and then some additional articles or essays on those ideas by various academics, teachers, and commentators. These articles are not "supplemental," but are instead meant to be central components of the reading with each chapter. In some cases, these articles carry important content for a chapter.

Also, note that through these articles, we have attempted to incorporate a variety of voices and perspectives into these conversations. None of those single voices represents the "opinion of Teach For America," whatever that might mean. Just as we may not all agree on using a particular teaching method in a particular situation, members of our organization will have different perspectives on some of these provocative issues. Please read these articles and excerpts not as representative of this organization's thinking, but as catalysts for your own.

If you are interested in pursuing further research into these topics to provoke your thinking, see the **Diversity, Community, & Achievement Toolkit** (p. 1) for the list of selected diversity-related resources; this Toolkit can be found online at the Resource Exchange on TFANet. ✖

How the Texts Are Organized

Teach For America has long wrestled with the most effective and appropriate way to discuss diversity. On the one hand, having a separate "diversity" text risks incorrectly suggesting that diversity issues can be distilled away from the instructional and management contexts in which they actually play out in the classroom. On the other hand, simply weaving diversity issues into the other texts does not lend these matters the independent weight that they deserve.

You will therefore find that key diversity issues are addressed in both this *Diversity, Community, & Achievement* text and in the other texts as well. In considering *Instructional Planning & Delivery*, for example, you will read what factors to consider when choosing from among instructional methods and strategies. That exploration includes consideration of diversity-related factors and what role they should play in your decisions. In *Classroom Management & Culture*, for example, you read about concrete techniques for creating an inclusive classroom—one in which diversity is valued by you and your students. Those of you who received the *Elementary Literacy* text read about teachers' decisions about how to approach differences in dialect in their classrooms. In *Teaching As Leadership*, you read about the particular challenges associated with investing low-income families in students' ambitious goals for academic achievement.

Among the key questions to consider based on your reading of this text are:

- *How does my background affect my teaching and my students' learning? How am I perceived in my new community?*
- *What assumptions and prejudices do we each hold about my students, their families, our schools, and our communities? And how does exploring them make us better teachers?*
- *To what extent, if at all, should race, class, or gender be a factor in a teacher's instructional or managerial choices?*
- *How do I most effectively approach and involve my students' family in our class's academic goals?*
- *How do I create a classroom where all students are welcomed?*
- *What is a multicultural education and how does it help me reach my students' goals?*
- *Why is fighting low expectations so difficult?*
- *How do I respectfully become a part of my school and community without sacrificing any opportunities for academic achievement for my students?*

III. Our Goals: Why We Address Issues of Diversity

Our number one goal in this text—as in all the others—is **to prepare you to lead your students to dramatic academic gains**. We address issues of diversity because we believe corps members who have encountered and considered these questions make more successful teachers, better serving their students and more likely leading them to dramatic academic gains. From a practical perspective, no matter what your background and experience with these issues, you will benefit from (and in some cases struggle with) the three core themes of this text: (a) maintaining high expectations, (b) building a diversity-related knowledge base, and (c) working for change with respect and humility.

More broadly, we believe that to be a truly effective movement to expand educational opportunity, our corps members, alumni, staff, and board members must value and operate with sensitivity to the tremendous diversity found in the communities we serve. To that end, we view the reading of this text as one step in a lifetime of consideration of these issues, and we ask that all corps members—no matter what their race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, socioeconomic background, or culture—engage in these issues, as we expect that all of you will find that at least some of the ideas explored in this text are new to you.

I was the second white teacher to ever work at my school. It was an issue, whether I wanted it to be or not. Instead of ignoring it, I talked to the students about it. When they asked questions I answered, and never ignored it. No one is color blind. There is no one answer to dealing with being the "minority" as the teacher, but the worst thing to do is pretend it doesn't matter. It does.

Cate Reed, DC '00
Project Manager (via Broad Residency)
Pittsburgh Public Schools

We also realize from experience that this process can be difficult. Sometimes the process of examining one's own and others' belief systems is emotional and stressful. As one researcher who has spent her career discussing these issues with new teachers explained:

Many prospective teachers and teacher educators find this discourse powerful but unsettling, in part because it is often difficult to reconcile new understandings with their own prior experiences and assumptions about the meritocracy of the U.S. educational system, and in part because they realize that no obvious solutions exist. Indeed, when we 'unleash unpopular things' by making race and racism explicit parts of the curriculum,

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responses are often strongly emotional, and resistance, misunderstanding, frustration, anger, and feelings of inefficacy may be the outcomes.¹¹

These responses occur because what we are attempting in this text is extremely difficult. The issues are complex and at times deeply personal. As another multicultural education researcher states, “‘Getting there’—the place within oneself where you acknowledge and accept your race/ethnicity, identity, gender, class, spirituality, and sexual orientation and the power relations within our nation’s sociohistoric past that maintain the status quo, and learn to value and respect others whose race/ethnicity identity, gender, class, spirituality, and sexual orientation differ from your own and the sociohistoric past that maintains or constrains power—is often a bumpy road.”¹²

In diversity discussions at Teach For America in the past, members of our group have in relatively rare instances made comments that are insensitive to and hurt others in the group. While we believe strongly that all of us can and do evolve in our beliefs, as an organization we think it is appropriate to challenge and examine insensitive comments as soon as possible. We hope that our norms of interaction (which are provided at the Institute and available from your regional program director) help guide us in those difficult moments.

At the same time, we want to create within Teach For America an environment in which we do share, discuss, and debate our beliefs on these matters, and it is absolutely essential that all of us approach those opportunities with a generosity of spirit, recognizing and appreciating the diverse perspectives that we bring to the conversation.

We also want to ensure that in the course of these conversations at Teach For America, no particular member of any group is expected to “represent” that group’s perspective. Corps members of color are not be expected to teach other corps members about diversity. White corps members will not be assumed to have any less experience with these issues than other corps members. We hope that each of you bring your own personal and unique experience (as female, or White, or lesbian, or Asian-American, or Christian, etc.) to the table as we discuss ways to harness the opportunities afforded by diversity in your classroom.

Finally, a brief note on the limitations of any “diversity training” text—the materials you will read and the ideas you will discuss as a member of the Teach For America community will likely amount to a small fraction of the learning and growing you will experience in your interaction with your students in your classroom. This intuitive truth—verified anecdotally by thousands of corps members—is also suggested by research: “Research during the last decade has demonstrated that the formal aspects of pre-service teacher preparation do little to alter students’ outlooks and practices, while the less formal, experiential aspects of student teaching—fieldwork experiences and especially exposure to the cultures of schools and teaching—are potentially significant influences.”¹³

Our aim in this endeavor is to produce highly effective teachers, and it is as a means to this end that we believe diversity-related discussions are a critical part of a new teacher’s development. Thus, in the context of helping our corps members assure that they are armed to overcome the lowered expectations that have dogged their students, we will ask you to think about a number of difficult issues related to the dynamics of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and disability that play out in your classroom—sometimes among students and sometimes within yourself.

¹¹ Cochran-Smith, Marilyn. “Uncertain Allies: Understanding the Boundaries of Race and Teaching.” *Harvard Education Review*, Vol. 65, No. 4, Winter 1995, p. 2.

¹² Willis, Arlette Ingram. “Keeping It Real: Teaching and Learning About Culture, Literacy, and Respect.” *English Education*, Vol. 32, No. 4, July 2000, p. 267.

¹³ Cochran-Smith, Marilyn. “Uncertain Allies: Understanding the Boundaries of Race and Teaching.” *Harvard Education Review*, Vol. 65, No. 4, Winter 1995, p. 17.

IV. A Note on Our Core Beliefs (and Questions) About Diversity

Over the course of the last twenty years, we have developed some core beliefs that serve as a foundation for our approach to training and supporting new teachers.

- We believe that the achievement gap in America—and its strong correlation with students’ race and class—is a disgraceful blight on our society and undermines the most fundamental ideals of equity on which our country was founded.
- We believe that the fact that 95% of the children in the under-resourced schools where we teach are African-American or Latino is a stark indicator that race and class must be central components of our conversation about ending the achievement gap.
- We believe that the academic out-performance of poorer, minority students by wealthier, usually White students does **not** indicate that minority students have any less potential than students in other communities. In fact, based on our experience, we are confident that it is a widespread **perception** of a lack of potential (because of our students’ race, class, or gender) that, in part, leads to the achievement gap in the first place. Having seen the power of high expectations to break those “self-fulfilling prophecies” of failure in thousands of classrooms, we consider one of our primary tasks in training and supporting corps members to be providing them with the tools and resolve they need to maintain high expectations for their students in the face of an unyielding tide of low expectations, and then in the long-run to take on other fundamental structural issues causing the achievement gap in the first place.
- The myth of low expectations is perpetuated by external factors (such as subtle and not-so-subtle societal images and messages) or by explicit statements from even well-intended adults in our students’ lives (such as teachers who “pity” a child from a low-income household and therefore do not expect as much of her). As honest and self-critical teachers, we also recognize that we may perpetuate such damaging messages in the form of both conscious and subconscious biases and prejudices that all of us have internalized as members of a society that perpetuates low expectations of the children in our schools. We believe that all of us—no matter what our race, class, gender, background, orientation, disability, political view, age, or experience—must actively *work* to overcome both those external and internal perpetuators of low expectations for our students.
- While we believe that we must not lower our expectations of our students because of their race, class, gender, or background, we also have found that figurative “color-blindness” in the classroom (represented by the well-intentioned comment “I don’t see color, I see children”) is at best, misguided and at worst, dangerous. We believe that effective teachers are in fact aware of their students’ unique backgrounds and perspectives and capitalize on

Since I grew up in an environment where little was expected of me, I was familiar with the label of “not able to achieve.” I am living proof that this notion that is often ingrained in students’ minds, of being unable to learn, is simply untrue. For so many of our students, it has become a norm to lack self-confidence. It is our job as educators to bring to the surface the talents and skills that truly lie within.

Susan Asiyambi, New Jersey ‘01
Senior Vice President, Teacher Preparation,
Support & Development
Teach For America

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opportunities to acknowledge and celebrate those differences in the natural course of their march toward ambitious goals for academic achievement.

I worried that I wouldn't fit in at my school, that my students wouldn't like me, and that I'd be a huge failure. Needless to say, these worries were pretty transparent, and both my students and staff sensed my lack of belonging. I figured that the more I could become part of this new community, the more I would be accepted, and the more gains I would make both personally and professionally. By going to all of the football games, attending church with my students (even though I'm Jewish), and eating and shopping in my kids' neighborhoods, I quickly became a recognizable fixture. This not only helped me feel more welcome in New Orleans, but it helped me relate more to my students and in turn improved their behavior in class.

Cheryl Bratt, New Orleans '01
Judicial Law Clerk
Eastern District of Pennsylvania

We know that the reading of this text and discussions you engage in with Teach For America colleagues and others all too often does not provide enough time to process, reflect on, and “prepare for” all of the difficult diversity-related issues that teachers face, especially for those of us who have done relatively little previously to examine our own background and biases. While we recognize that most corps members do join Teach For America having already begun the process of (a) examining critically their own assumptions about their new students and communities, and (b) thinking carefully about how they themselves are perceived given their own unique identities, we believe that learning to recognize, manage, and celebrate the dynamics of difference and sameness in your classroom takes time and is a part of your ongoing commitment to your students.

This text is built upon these fundamental tenets and values. While we welcome discussions of and challenges to these founding principles, the rigorous debates to which they have been subjected and from which they have evolved over the last seventeen years give us great confidence in their guidance.

Part I: Maintaining High Expectations

As outlined in the previous introductory chapter, in order to successfully harness the power of diversity as a means of achieving ambitious goals in your classroom, we believe new teachers must work to:

- (a) Maintain high expectations for all students of all backgrounds
- (b) Build a strong and appropriate diversity-related knowledge base
- (c) Effect change with respect and humility

The first of those three goals—maintaining high expectations—is the focus in Part I of this text. Part I consists of three chapters, each of which is meant to prepare you to establish and maintain rigorous academic standards for your students.

Chapter One, “Race, Class, and the Achievement Gap,” explores the current gap in academic achievement that exists in this country—a gap that is drawn largely along racial and socioeconomic lines. After looking at some of the evidence of that gap, we briefly survey some of its reported causes and their connections to race and socioeconomic status in America. By acknowledging the daunting list of pressures that perpetuate the achievement gap for minority and low-income students, our intention is (a) to reiterate how much work we all have to do achieve education equity in this country, and (b) to highlight that “student potential” is *not* on the list of achievement gap causes. In fact, it is our consistently validated faith in our students’ potential to meet rigorous academic standards that fuels our insistence that high expectations must be the starting place for a teacher determined to close the achievement gap for his or her students.

Chapter Two, “The Power of High Expectations,” dives into this notion of “high expectations” and quickly reviews both the evidence of high expectations’ power for raising achievement and the *Teaching As Leadership* framework that, we believe, offers a proven recipe for establishing and achieving those high expectations in your classroom. This chapter concludes with a snapshot of what those high expectations look like in practice, both from teachers’ and students’ perspectives.

Chapter Three, “The Challenge of Maintaining High Expectations,” amounts to a warning to new teachers that maintaining high expectations in the face of all of the counter-pressures in our society, schools, and classrooms is not easy. In this chapter, you will consider two of the most common and troublesome reasons that new teachers lose their high expectations for students.

Race, Class, and the Achievement Gap: The Promise of Student Potential

Chapter One

- I. The Undeniable Correlations Among Race, Class, and the Achievement Gap
- II. Why There Is a Strong Correlation Among Race, Class, and Achievement
- III. Conclusion: The Promise of Student Potential

The fact that you have joined us in our quest to close the achievement gap in this country indicates that you are not only aware of the inequities in our education system, but you are also bothered enough to do something about them. You know and are frustrated that by the time students from low-income communities reach eighth grade, they are on average three years behind their more affluent (and more often White) peers in math and reading. You recognize but resent that that gap widens to four years by grade 12. Former U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige has starkly stated this tragedy: “Nearly 70 percent of inner-city and rural fourth graders cannot read, even at a basic level. It is our greatest failure as a nation. It is our failure as a people.”

This chapter and its attached readings pose the question “Why?” Why does this gap exist? And why is this gap drawn along racial and socioeconomic lines?

In an attempt to begin to answer these difficult questions, we will survey a variety of factors that are often blamed for the achievement gap. Among the factors we will consider are racism, inequitable school funding, poverty-related burdens, inequitable distribution of political clout, structures and practices inherent in the school system, family structures and support, and cultural norms.

Our purposes for beginning this text with such an expansive discussion of the achievement gap are two-fold. First, we believe that by establishing the landscape of potential causes for the achievement gap we not only focus your attention on all the work we have to do to end it, but we are also better able to identify and isolate those issues that are actually within your realm of influence as a classroom teacher. As we will discuss throughout Part I of this text, we believe the cause of the achievement gap that is most within your power to overcome is the lowered expectations that so drastically undermine minority and low-income students’ academic success. Second, we are inclined to begin with this survey of the achievement gap causes in part because of what is *not* on the list. Low-income, African-American, Latino, and Native American students’ lack of potential is not a reason for the achievement gap. As we have seen over and over in our classrooms, our students—the vast majority of whom are minority and low-income—can in fact meet the highest standards of academic achievement.

Thus, the key point of this chapter is that while there is a correlation between low achievement and students’ race and class, it is not a difference in students’ *potential* that causes that correlation. It may be, however, a teacher’s high expectations of his or her students that can help erase that correlation. So, there is one particular cause of the achievement gap that we, as instructional leaders in our classrooms and schools, can and must fight every single day—the barrage of low expectations that weighs on our students.

Additional Readings

Along with this chapter, please read the following excerpt found on the Institute Info Center within TFANet:

- “Explaining the Academic Gap; Conventional and Alternative Explanations” from Professor John Ogbu’s book *Black American Students in an Affluent Suburb: A Study of Academic Disengagement*

Race, Class, and the Achievement Gap

I. The Undeniable Correlations Among Race, Class, and the Achievement Gap

There is no shortage of evidence of the “failure” described by the Secretary of Education. After some progress toward closing the achievement gap during the 1980s, it has begun to grow again since the early 1990s. And, at every point, the gap between white and minority students, and between affluent students and students from low-income communities, has been shockingly large.

Socioeconomic Correlations

If we group students in this country along socioeconomic lines, the correlations with achievement are stark. One study of fourth and eighth graders’ scores on the 1992 National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) Trial State Assessment found that, within the same school, wealthier students scored more than 30 points higher, on average, than students of low socioeconomic status. In eighth grade, that gap rises to almost 50 points.¹⁴ The gaps are even larger when comparing scores of wealthy and poor students attending different schools.

The Children’s Defense Fund’s *Poverty Matters: The Cost of Child Poverty in America*, also indicates that depressed academic achievement and socioeconomic status often go hand in hand. Lower-income children are far more likely to suffer from poor nutrition, housing problems, stress and depression, and are also more likely to have fewer resources for learning, all of which can have a negative impact on academic achievement. The Children’s Defense Fund cites a study by Duncan and Brooks-Gunn which argues that these deficiencies alone can contribute to one-quarter to one-third of the lower reading, math, and vocabulary test scores among lower income elementary students. Additional research consistently links shortfalls in other resources – like the availability of computers, the opportunity to attend camps or music classes, or the possibility of going on family trips – to lower academic achievement as well.¹⁵

Race Correlations

Similarly strong correlations with academic achievement are apparent if we group America’s students by race. If we use the end of high school as the benchmark moment, the racially-drawn disparities are most glaring:

- While one out of 12 White students can competently read from a specialized text (such as the science section of the newspaper), only one out of 50 Latino students and one out of 100 African-American students are able to gain information from a specialized text.
- One in 30 Latino students and one in 100 African-American students can complete multi-step, elementary-algebra problems that one out of 10 White students can complete comfortably.
- Three out of 10 African-American students and four of 10 Latino students have mastered usage and computation of fractions, percents, and averages. Meanwhile, seven of 10 White students have mastered these same skills.

¹⁴ Lee, J. “State policy correlates of the achievement gap among racial and social groups.” *Studies in Educational Evaluation*, Vol. 24, 1998, pp. 137-152.

¹⁵ Sherman, Arloc. *Poverty Matters: The Cost of Child Poverty in America*. Washington, DC: Children’s Defense Fund, 1997, p. 23.

Overall, according to recent data, “[n]ear the end of high school, in fact, African-American and Latino students have skills in both reading and mathematics that are virtually the same as those of White students in the 8th grade.”¹⁶

Another disturbing means of looking at this data is to contrast the academic achievement of top-performing and bottom-performing students in each racial group. The National Center for Education Statistics, in its report on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, divides student performance into groups called Below Basic, Basic, Proficient, and Advanced, based on their knowledge and skill levels in each subject area. The results are consistent with our worst fears (both in the overall deficiency of all students’ performance and in the racially-drawn disparities in student performance):¹⁷

- 3.4% of White students score at the Advanced level on the science exam, compared to 0.1% of African-American students.
- Nearly half of all White students are placed in either the Proficient or Advanced categories in reading, compared to less than 20% of Black students and about 25% of Latino students.
- In five of the seven subjects tested, a majority (over 50%) of Black students are rated Below Basic, compared to about 20% of White students.

All together, the data reveals the disturbing conclusion that “the average Black or Hispanic high school student achieves at about the same level as the average White student in the lowest quartile of White achievement.”¹⁸

Another government study, “Educational Achievement and Black-White Inequality,” by the National Center for Education Statistics,¹⁹ confirmed that (in 2001) African-American students scored significantly lower than White students on both math and reading tests in both elementary and secondary schools. Comparisons were made first between overall average outcomes for Blacks and Whites (in the first in each pair of columns that follow) and then between average outcomes for Blacks and Whites with similar levels of prior educational achievement (the second in each pair of columns that follow).

In math, the 1990-1993 data shows that the gap actually closes slightly in upper elementary school, but then widens through junior high and high school:

Why Focus Only on Race and Class?

There are, of course, more forms of diversity than race and class, and in fact many of us find those other aspects of our and our students’ identities—such as gender, age, sexual orientation, religious background, disability—to be critically influential factors in the dynamics of difference and sameness that impact the teaching and learning in our classrooms. In discussing the achievement gap and our theory of change, we are focusing on race and class because those are the “lines” by which the achievement gap is most starkly defined, to the point that it is no exaggeration to say that our students are virtually segregated by race and class. So, while we believe that in order to be truly effective teachers we must be aware of the dynamics involved in our interactions and expectations of students of all different identity characteristics, here we are highlighting race and class as the factors most highly correlated with wide-spread patterns of unacceptably low academic achievement in our schools.

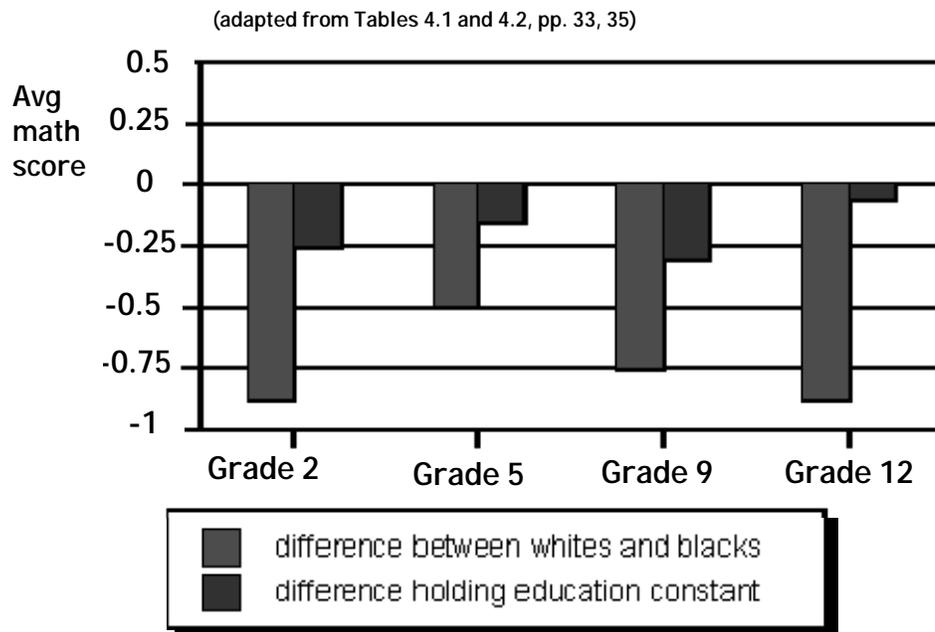
¹⁶ Haycock, Kati. “Helping All Students Achieve.” *Educational Leadership*. Vol. 58, No. 6, March 2001.

¹⁷ National Center for Education Statistics. “Educational achievement and Black-White inequality.” U.S. Department of Education, 2001, pp. 31-43. Online at <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2001061>, accessed 7/1/2010.

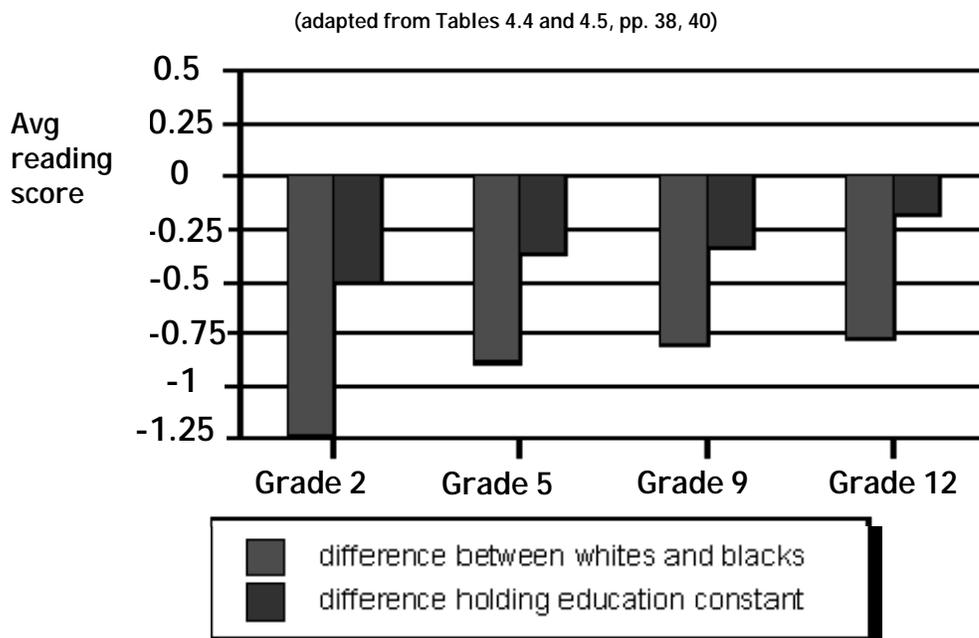
¹⁸ Education Commission of the States. “The Progress of Education Reform 2003: Closing the Achievement Gap.” Vol. 4, No. 1, March 2003.

¹⁹ National Center for Education Statistics. “Educational achievement and Black-White inequality.” U.S. Department of Education, 2001, pp. 31-43. Online at <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2001061>, accessed 7/1/2010.

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The 1990-1993 reading test results show a similar gap, with a reduction of the reading gap in elementary school and then little change thereafter:



The National Center for Education Statistics report concludes that “[w]hatever the causes of Black-White gaps in educational achievement, the perpetuation of a large portion of these gaps throughout elementary and secondary school leaves Blacks at a relative disadvantage as they prepare for college and/or the labor market.”²⁰

²⁰ Ibid. p. 42.

Similar numbers are readily available for Latino and Native American students. Almost 60 percent of Latino students in fourth grade have not been taught to even a basic level of reading skill. The numbers are similar for math.²¹ The dropout rates for Latino students hover around 45 percent.²² Similarly, according to government statistics, Native Americans are less than half as likely as White students to score at or above proficient on standard reading and math tests.²³

II. Why There Is a Strong Correlation Among Race, Class, and Achievement

The fact that race and class are such consistent predictors of diminished academic achievement in this country poses an obvious and difficult question: Why? Why is it that students of color and poorer students, on average, lag so far behind Whiter, wealthier students? If we can answer this question, we may gain insight into how to close the achievement gap for those students.

Of course, answering this question is not easy. The search for the source of the achievement gap raises complex questions with complex answers, and many researchers espouse competing, contradictory, and/or controversial theories about why it is that poor, African-American, Latino, and Native American children lag behind White, affluent students in their academic attainment.

An Incomplete Survey of Purported Reasons for the Achievement Gap

Consider the following brief synopses of some of the common—and sometimes hotly contested—explanations for the achievement gap:

Racism. Many observers and analysts link the underachievement of African-American and Latino students to racism, in all its incarnations in America. First, and most obviously, persons of color may be subjected to straightforward, overt discrimination and prejudice, and that discrimination may occur in the school system. For example, students might be put in less engaging classes because of their race. Teachers may find their impact suppressed because of their race. School funding decisions may be made for race-based reasons. Second, some would argue that the legacy of relatively recent institutionalized racism in this country creates certain dynamics, such as the relatively lower educational attainment of Black parents, that contribute to the achievement gap. Many would also point to the growing re-segregation of minority students and wonder what impact that trend—whether it is purposeful or not—will have on the achievement gap in the next decades. [An astounding 70% of African-American students and over a third of Latino students attend “intensely segregated” schools.]²⁴ Third, many would argue that students in America are subjected to a vast and powerful stream of covert, if not subconscious, racism in the form of lowered expectations of students of color. As we will discuss at more length below and in the next chapter, the notion that racism itself is a primary cause of the achievement gap is a wide-ranging, multi-faceted idea, encompassing not only blatant, individualized prejudices but also the grand social scheme of low expectations that impact our and our students’ visions of academic success.

Inequitable School Funding. Differences in the amounts spent per pupil in different schools can be dramatic. In New Jersey, in 1995-1996, the lowest amount spent per pupil per year by a district was

²¹ “Latino Achievement in America.” A report by the Education Trust. Online at <http://www.edtrust.org>.

²² Valverde, Leonard and Scribner, Kent. “Latino Students: Organizing Schools for Greater Achievement.” *Principals.org Bulletin*. Vol. 85, No. 624, April 2001.

²³ “Reaching Out: Raising American Indian Achievement.” U.S. Department of Education. Online at http://www.ed.gov/nclb/accountability/achieve/achievement_native.html, accessed 1/31/07.

²⁴ After decades of desegregation, schools became significantly more segregated in the 1990s. Orfield, G. “Schools more separate: Consequences of a decade of Resegregation.” Harvard University, The Civil Rights Project, 2001.

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\$5,900. Meanwhile, another district spent \$11,950.²⁵ In Illinois, the gap was even more drastic, with some schools spending about \$3,000 per year and others spending around \$15,000. Before litigation challenging the system began in the late 1980s, expenditures per pupil in Texas ranged from \$2,000 per year per student in some schools to \$20,000 per year per student at other schools. Like most school systems in the country, Texas schools were funded primarily through local property taxes, leading to massive disparities in the available funds for different districts. In fact, the wealthiest district had *700 times* the taxable property value of the poorest district.²⁶ (As it does in many states, the education funding litigation in Texas continues to this day.) Given that these funding disparities are often drawn along racial and socioeconomic lines, many blame these funding systems for perpetuating the achievement gap. Others would point to the success of poorly funded schools across the country, or to the continued failure of some well-funded schools, as evidence that money is, at best, only part of the answer.

The Weight of Poverty. Challenges that disproportionately face children in low-income communities might also be a cause of the achievement gap. Some of us know these challenges first hand, either from our own upbringing or from working, living, or growing up in low-income communities. The Children's Defense Fund report cited earlier explains that poor children often must work to help support their families or spend "study time" caring for their younger siblings; they suffer from poor nutrition and related health problems; the financial stress upon their families can lead to depression and/or behavior problems; they either have no home or live in homes without utilities, with water leakage, or with infestations; and they may have greater financial barriers to education and fewer books, family trips, and extra curricular activities. For some analysts, these poverty-related factors add up to an explanation for the achievement gap. (Not everyone agrees that poverty should be listed as a "cause" of the achievement gap, however. Other analysts point to the fact that poor children in some schools or poor schools in some states perform very well as evidence that poverty does not cause the achievement gap.)

Test Bias. According to some, one contributor to the achievement gap is the method of measurement used. (Of course, very few people, if any, think that the achievement gap is merely a result of test bias. Rather, the argument goes, the achievement gap could be somewhat exaggerated by test bias.) The tests used to determine academic achievement, according to this line of reasoning, are geared toward White, affluent students and experiences, thereby disadvantaging poor students and students of color.²⁷ Tests might be biased in their content (and therefore be asking questions about subjects that one group of students is more likely to have experienced than another group) or they might be biased in "method" (and therefore be designed or administered in a way that is more accessible and welcoming to one group than another). Or, a given test might actually be missing students' strengths; a child might be strong on math and computation but weak on comprehension, for example. Tests might also be biased in that they purport to test something that they do not. For example, according to many psychologists, the IQ tests purport to measure innate ability but actually measure developed ability.²⁸

Lack of Political Clout. Perhaps it is an amalgam of several of the previously mentioned causes, but some analysts would argue that the lack of political empowerment in low-income (and largely minority) communities contributes to the achievement gap as well. This lack of voice in policy- and decision-making may allow injustices such as inequitable funding, institutional racism, and the challenges of poverty to go unchecked by government.

²⁵ Hadderman, Margaret. "Equity and Adequacy in Educational Finance." ERIC Digest, No. 129, August 1999. (ED 454 466). Online at <http://www.ericdigests.org/2002-1/equity.html>, accessed 7/1/2010.

²⁶ Farr, J. Steven and Trachtenberg, Mark. "The Edgewood Drama: An Epic Quest for Education Equity." *Yale Law & Policy Review*, Vol. 17, No. 2, 1999, p. 615.

²⁷ Viadero, D. "Lags in minority achievement: Defy traditional explanations." *Education Week*, March 22, 2000.

²⁸ Jencks, C., & Phillips, M. "The Black-White test score gap: An introduction." From *The Black-White Test Score Gap*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1998, pp. 1-51.

Media-Perpetuated Stereotypes. Another force that some say fuels the achievement gap is the negative influence of media-perpetuated stereotypes about students of color and students from low-income communities. You are undoubtedly familiar with the pattern of racial, gender, religious, and orientation stereotypes and omissions in television, movies and other media. A 1997 study found, for example, that despite the fact that ethnic minority groups made up more than a quarter of the population, only around 15% of the members of prime-time drama casts were members of those groups.²⁹ Moreover—and perhaps even more damaging to the expectations we have for our students—when persons of color are in fact included in entertainment and media, they are often portrayed in stereotypical and inaccurate ways. As the American Psychological Association found in its own study, minorities are “segregated in specific types of content, and rarely engage in cross-ethnic interaction.” Those stereotypes and omissions undermine teachers’ messages to students of color and students from low-income communities that students can in fact succeed academically.

School System Structures and Practices.

Another arena of suspicion for persons trying to track down the cause of the achievement gap is structural practices in the school system itself. One does not need to look too closely to see a number of disparities in the systems and structures of public schools that might be contributing factors. Consider, for example, the disparate dispersal of high performing teachers. Whether one defines teacher quality by teachers’ experience, by teachers’ credentials, or—as Teach For America would suggest—by the academic achievement of their students, high performing teachers generally move from poorer schools to better ones. Another structural contributor could be the allocation of resources within school districts—as poorer, minority students are more often relegated to older, less-resourced buildings. (In one California survey approximately one-third of teachers state-wide and approximately one-half of teachers in low-income schools reported that they did not have enough text books for students to take them home.³⁰)

Other Inequitably Implemented School Structures. Sometimes, lowered expectations of minority and low-income students are essentially institutionalized into our school structures. For example, when “homogenous grouping” is not implemented with opportunities to move from one “track” to another, it can become a virtual institutionalization of low expectations for certain students. Similarly, students may get “tracked” into the “low” or “remedial” classes and then, because those classes—if poorly implemented—move at a slower pace, there is no chance that the students can ever get out of that “track” and into more demanding courses. Remediation systems such as these, while motivated by a

Permanent “Tracks”: Marcus’s Testimony

These structural policies and practices affect real students and impact their entire lives. Consider the testimony of eleventh-grader Marcus McKinney, a California high school senior, appearing before the California Senate Education Committee, April 10, 2002:

In my 11th grade year, I went to my counselor to try to get a Spanish class. I had a floor covering class, where you learn to put down tiles and lay down carpet. I told my counselor that I wanted Spanish 1, so I could try to meet the requirements to apply to [University of California]. She tried to tell me that I hadn’t met my year of technical art, because at my high school you have to have a year of technical art [or] one year of a vocational class [to graduate]. I told her I already did because I had auto mechanics in the 9th grade. I had to bring my parents up there to get out of floor covering and into Spanish 1. Then this year I tried to get into Spanish 2, so again, I could meet the requirements. My counselor told me Spanish 2 was only for students who were going to college, automatically assuming that I wasn’t going to college. It made me mad. I got kind of discouraged, but I told her I am going to college and I want this class. Then I did not get the class anyway, because the class was overcrowded.

Barth, Patte. “A Common Core Curriculum for the New Century.”
Thinking K-16: A Publication of The Education Trust. Winter 2003, Vol. 7, Issue 1, p. 13.

²⁹ Gerbner, G. and Ozyegin, N. *Proportional Representation of Diversity Index.* Cultural Indicators Project, Spring 1997.

³⁰ “First Things First: Why we must stop punishing students and fix California’s schools.” Californians for Justice Education Fund, May 17, 2003. Online at http://tcla.gseis.ucla.edu/reportcard/features/5-6/pdf/first_things_first.pdf, accessed 7/1/2010.

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desire to help students catch up, can become systematized forms of lowered expectations if implemented poorly. The fact remains that lowered expectations, whatever their original motivation, are only hurting our students by perpetuating the massive achievement gap in this country.

Mayo Elementary School in Compton was well known for its students' success on state and district standardized tests. Year after year teachers and students received recognition for their achievement. I felt lucky to have been placed there. My first year teaching I worked hard to maintain the progress for which my colleagues had set a precedent and when our test scores came back I was excited to hear that they were going to be celebrated. Mayo's students scored at a level 3 on a state-wide scale of 1-10. I was confused – a three? The elementary school that I myself attended fewer than 10 miles away scored at a 10, yet we were celebrating success. I was offered an explanation – in districts like Compton, where students face language barriers and qualify for free or reduced lunch, a 3 was considered equal to a 10. Our students met the highest expectations that were set for them. Unable to mask my disappointment from the other teachers at my grade level I was consoled – and reminded that my own expectations needed to be checked. I left that experience determined to spend more time talking to and observing teachers at schools that ranked 10 out of 10 so that I too, could implement teaching strategies and hold expectations that would ensure my students were truly at a 10 despite the excuses made for Compton kids.

Kate Sobel, Los Angeles '98
Principal, Camino Nuevo Charter Academy

Lack of Compensating Capacity in the School System. One way to explain the achievement gap is simply to acknowledge that the students with the greatest needs (academic, social, nutritional, etc.) are attending the schools with the least capacity to serve those increased needs (higher student-teacher ratios, dilapidated infrastructures, fewer resources). This is not to say schools in low-income areas are doing worse than other schools; rather, given the external pressures of increased student needs, those schools need more—not the same, and certainly not less—resources and capacity to serve those students.

• • •

These several proposed “causes” of the achievement gap—racism, inequitable funding, poverty, lack of political power, and school structures—probably each have some impact on the achievement gap in America. And much of the debate surrounding these causes relates to their *relative* impact on students' academic performance. Still other explanations—including the influence of certain racial groups' family structures and/or racial groups' “culture”—are also often discussed but are more controversial.

Family Structures and Changes. Among the many “family structure” factors that different commentators blame for the achievement gap are parents' level of education, single-parent families, and grandparent involvement in raising children. This line of thinking holds that the growing number of students raised in “non-traditional” home settings is contributing to those students' lesser achievement. However, other researchers claim that these family-structure factors do not seem to have very much influence on student performance. For example, some research indicates that the effects of being raised in a single-parent family are “never large enough to be of any substantive importance.”³¹ (The same researchers did find a high correlation between differences in “parenting practices” and children's test scores. And, we do know, for example, that different students arrive at school with dramatically different experiences in terms of exposure to books, pre-school learning opportunities, etc.) On the other hand, yet another group of researchers, warning that family situations and influences are exceedingly complex, assert that by defining “family characteristics” broadly these factors could contribute to as much as two-thirds of the achievement gap.³² (These researchers include in that broad definition parent education,

³¹ Jencks, C., & Phillips, M. “The Black-White test score gap: An introduction.” From *The Black-White Test Score Gap*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1998, p. 42.

³² Phillips, M., Brooks-Gunn, J. Duncan, G.J., Klebanov, P., & Crane, J. “Family background, parenting practices, and the Black-White test score gap.” From *The Black-White Test Score Gap*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1998, pp. 111-140.

mother's family background, mother's quality of schooling, educational outcomes, family income, parent attitudes and values, grandparents' influence, and parenting practices.)

Our Focus on African-American and Latino Students

Throughout this text, most of the conversations about racial groups focus on African-Americans and Latinos. We focus on these two groups because approximately 95% of the students the Teach For America corps members teach are African-American or Latino. Asian-American students are not discussed very often in this text because we have so few Asian-American students. (Moreover, statistically speaking, Asian-American students are not performing at the same low levels, on average, that African American and Latino students are in this country—though in some of the pockets where we teach, we have seen that behind the overarching statistics lie real disparities.) Of course, while they do not comprise a large percentage of the students we teach overall, Native American students are the primary focus of our New Mexico and South Dakota corps members. When possible, we have attempted to include data and research related to Native American students. New Mexico and South Dakota corps members can expect their training to be supplemented with some region-specific diversity-related conversations.

Group Culture. A closely related and also controversial idea is that there are some elements of certain ethnic groups' "culture" that contribute to those students' underperformance in school. Some contend, for example, that there are unique aspects of African-American culture—and other aspects of Latino culture—that are misaligned with the mainstream approach to education in our schools, leading to the achievement gap. For example, one Berkeley professor contends that "what one sees in Black students is less a refusal to contribute any effort than a sad tendency for their efforts to stop before the finish line. This tendency stems not from laziness or inferior mental power, but from a brake exerted on them by a cultural inheritance that school work is more a pit stop than a place to live."³³ And in their book *No Excuses: Closing the Racial Gap in Learning*, authors Abigail and Stephen Thernstrom argue that as a result of a long history of institutionalized discrimination that precluded African-Americans from the education system, there is a Black "culture" that is disconnected from academic achievement. Different researchers have different, but perhaps analogous, explanations for the Latino achievement gap. Latino's struggles are often framed in terms of immigration-related and assimilation-related challenges, including language acquisition.³⁴ These "culture"-based explanations for the achievement gap evoke both passionate support and heated rebuttal. To some, these theories are often unacceptable "deficit" views of cultures that happen to be different from that of the majority, and such deficit models are not only often inaccurate but may do harm to the

students they purport to describe. Others find that an examination of "Black culture" and "Latino culture" offers insights into how we can best solve the achievement gap problem. Later in this text, we will explore some of the questions posed by these theories, including whether or not differences in African-American, Latino, and Native American students' culture actually should inform a teacher's classroom design and instruction. [See chapter seven of this text, entitled "Cultural Learning Styles."]

"Explaining the Academic Gap; Conventional and Alternative Explanations"

In order to offer a somewhat different lens on these causes of the achievement gap, along with this chapter you will read a brief excerpt from "Explaining the Academic Gap; Conventional and Alternative Explanations"³⁵ from a study by Professor John Ogbu, Chancellor's Professor of Anthropology at the University of California, Berkeley. An educational anthropologist, Professor Ogbu focuses his studies on minority status in education. In fact, some of this work has sparked some controversy because of his

³³ McWhorter, John. *Losing the Race: Self Sabotage in Black America*. New York: Free Press, 2000, p. 126.

³⁴ Conchas, G.Q. "Structuring failure and success: Understanding the variability in Latino school engagement." *Harvard Educational Review*. Vol. 71, 2001, pp. 475-504.

³⁵ Ogbu, John. *Black American Students in an Affluent Suburb: A Study of Academic Disengagement*. Chapter 3, Manwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Association, 2003, pp. 33-55.

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endorsement of the type of “cultural” explanation for that achievement gap that was discussed previously.

The excerpt you will read is part of a study of the academic disengagement of African-American students in Shaker Heights, Ohio. While this study focuses on the particular factors at play in a particular school district, Professor Ogbu’s survey of traditional explanations for the achievement gap—and those explanations’ limitations—will serve as helpful background for your own thinking about why your students are so far behind and how you can help them. As you read this article, think critically about the degree to which you believe he is correct about the influence and limitations of such explanations as racial groups’ IQ, social class status, racial segregation, teacher expectations, and cultural differences and conflicts.

This section began by posing the question, “Why is the achievement gap correlated with race and socioeconomic status in this country?” The incomplete list that we have explored above should give you some theories about the answer to that question. All of those factors, from blatant racism to theories of group culture, are likely to have a higher impact on minority or low-income students, thereby helping to explain the correlations among race, class, and the achievement gap in this country.

III. Conclusion: The Promise of Student Potential

You’ll notice that “lack of student potential” is not one of the factors listed as a contributor to the achievement gap. Among the most important lessons we have learned as educators of under-achieving students is that the *correlation* between race and income on the one hand and achievement on the other does not denote *cause and effect*. That is, the fact that African-American, Latino, Native American and poor students are behind most White, more affluent students in their academic performance does not mean that they are behind *because* they are Black, Latino, Native American, or poor. Put more positively, our students have the potential to succeed at the highest levels of academic accomplishment.

This may be an obvious point. It certainly is intuitive to those of us who have watched our students exceed the expectations that had been placed on them. Unfortunately, not everyone is convinced that our students have the innate ability to succeed alongside their White and affluent neighbors. Not only do many people consciously and subconsciously endorse a theory of lowered potential by adopting negative assumptions and stereotypes about poor and minority students, but some individuals also explicitly develop and foster this theory as a means of explaining the achievement gap.³⁶ Perhaps the best known (and most controversial) of these studies is *The Bell Curve*, published in 1994, written by Harvard professor Richard Herrnstein and economist Charles Murray. This book compared IQ scores of students of different races and attempted to define a causal relationship between race, IQ levels, and academic achievement as shown on standardized test scores.³⁷

³⁶ While these more blatantly racist and classist theories have been roundly criticized and refuted, it is worth noting that some analysts do argue that race itself is the root cause of the achievement gap. The rationale of this view is that the strong *correlation* between race and the achievement gap means that race is *causing* the achievement gap—that students of color are simply less able (because of their genetic predisposition) to succeed in school. .

³⁷ The publication of this book sparked a virtual explosion in the scientific, education, and political communities as scholars and the entire nation debated its findings and the argument of nature vs. nurture. Despite the volumes of analysis and studies debunking *The Bell Curve*’s methods and results, there are still active and vocal supporters of its theories today. (See, for example, Thomas Bouchard’s *The Genetic Architecture of Human Intelligence* and Steven Pinker’s *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature*).

It was easy to list the reasons I should keep my expectations low and not bring my students to the DC Citywide Science Fair. Thoughts of years of institutionalized racism, educational inequality, and poverty, all raced through my head as I worried I should keep them home to protect them from a possible disappointment. But ultimately, if I had not brought them to Howard University that day, to stand side by side with students from around the city that had grown up with more resources of every kind, they would never have won Citywide First Place honors in Medicine and Health and Behavioral Science, and Second Place honors in Chemistry. You can imagine the empowerment this gave my students and our school community, where good news is not brought home often enough. They had high expectations for themselves, which along with their dedicated preparation allowed them to speak to the judges about their projects with their hard-earned confidence, charisma, and aptitude. They taught me an unequivocal lesson in expectations that day and watching them from the audience was one of the most powerful moments of my life.

Sarah Griffin, DC '00
Senior Managing Director of Institute, Philadelphia
Teach For America

Study of Academic Disengagement. You can access this excerpt by visiting the Pre-Institute Work page on the Institute Info Center within TFANet. 

Having witnessed irrefutable evidence that students of color can achieve at high levels, we reject outright the notion that poorer students of color are somehow less able to succeed than their more affluent and White counterparts in other school districts. But we must acknowledge the challenge we face as teachers of maintaining high expectations for our students despite the insidious, low-level murmurs of genetic inferiority that—despite overwhelming evidence of their fallacy—are periodically recycled in this country. We also must acknowledge that we are all exposed to such theories and we must actively challenge them with the evidence from our classrooms so that they do not further take hold in the American psyche.

Our students' potential to succeed is not a mere hypothesis; it has been proven time and time again in classrooms across the country. A critical key to unlocking that potential is, as set forth in the next chapter, establishing and maintaining high expectations.

Please take a break at this point to read "Explaining the Academic Gap: Conventional and Alternative Explanations" from Professor John Ogbu's book *Black American Students In An Affluent Suburb: A*

The Power of High Expectations: Closing the Gap in Your Classroom

Chapter Two

- I. High Expectations: A Teacher’s Primary Role in Closing the Achievement Gap
- II. But What Do “High Expectations” Actually Look Like?
- III. The Power of High Expectations—Students’ Perspective
- IV. Conclusion: High Expectations for You and Your Students

In the previous chapter, we surveyed some of the many reported causes of the achievement gap. Racism, inequitable funding, poverty, lack of political power, school structures, family structures, group culture—all are often blamed for the fact that your students in your classroom are academically behind where they should be.

Taken all at once and in such a grand scope, these many causes can be overwhelming. And yet, as thousands of corps members and millions of dedicated teachers before you have proven, it is well within your power to overcome one of the most potent and insidious factors perpetuating the achievement gap in this country—the pattern of low expectations that has been placed on our students *because* of their race and class. That is, our students are bombarded with messages and images—from grand but intangible forces like the media and from more familiar and trusted entities such as individual teachers or family members—that reinforce the idea that students in the communities where we are working cannot achieve at the same level as students in other schools and communities. Moreover, our students have often internalized these messages so that they, in essence, have low expectations of themselves. As teachers of students who are living under the burden of these lowered expectations, we have a special responsibility to fight such lowered expectations in ourselves and in others.

Additional Readings

Along with this chapter, please read the following selections found on the Institute Info Center within TFANet:

- “Racism, Discrimination, and Expectations of Students’ Achievement” from *Affirming Diversity: The Sociopolitical Context of Multicultural Education*
- “Equity Within Reach: Insights from the Front Lines of America’s Achievement Gap,” results of a survey of Teach For America corps members

I. High Expectations: A Teacher’s Primary Role in Closing the Achievement Gap

In your lifetime and career, no matter what direction it takes, we hope that you will work to combat some of those big, systemic factors that are holding back minority and low-income students in this country. During your initial two-year commitment to your students, however, you may find it challenging enough to focus on all of the issues in your classroom, and tackling some of those broader forces may seem out of reach.

The good news is that you *can* tackle and overcome the achievement gap in your classroom for your students. A key to that success will be establishing and maintaining high expectations of your students.

The Power of High Expectations

In the *Teaching As Leadership* book, you are introduced to six principles that inevitably characterize the approach of teachers who lead their children to significant academic gains. We suggest that by modeling your own practice on those four principles, you too will essentially “close the achievement gap” for your students in your classroom. As you read that book, you undoubtedly noticed the central importance of high expectations.

Viewed through the lens of high expectations, successful teachers in low-income communities are those who:

Taking on every probable challenge and dilemma that comes with the task of being a teacher is not necessarily proactive or necessary, rather providing ALL your students with the concrete real-life experiences and high expectations for learning are the essential keys for creating an environment where anything is possible.

Reid Whitaker, Houston '02
Director, Online K-12 Curriculum Initiatives

- (1) Establish an ambitious academic goal for what their students’ will accomplish that some may believe to be unreasonable.** In establishing those goals, teachers must look beyond traditional expectations of their students and instead benchmark their students’ learning against the achievement of students in the most successful classrooms in the most successful schools in the country. Given your students’ potential to achieve, why should they be deprived of learning at the rate and level of students in affluent communities?
- (2) Invest students in achieving the ambitious academic goal.** This investment process involves convincing your students that those big goals are possible. As discussed below, in doing so you harness the amazing power of the “self-fulfilling prophecy” of high expectations—students work harder and achieve more, simply because they *believe* they can and are *expected to*.
- (3) Work purposefully and relentlessly to achieve their goal overcoming all obstacles.** As an effective teacher, you will assume full responsibility for moving your students forward to meet their ambitious academic goals. Given the many unique obstacles your students may face, whether because of inequitable school resources or the challenges of poverty, determination to ensure students fulfill their true potential requires an unusual level of purposefulness and determination.
- (4) Deliberately and continually improve performance over time through a constant process of self-evaluation and learning.** As part of teachers’ ongoing reflection process, they must work hard to combat the constant negative influences of messages of lowered expectations that eat away at their and their students’ visions of academic achievement.

The Self-Fulfilling Prophecy of Low Expectations—Redux

So, a central tenet of this focus on high expectations is the idea that low, or high, expectations are a self-fulfilling prophecy. While this concept is discussed in *Teaching As Leadership*, the central relevance of this concept to our discussion of the causes of the achievement gap (and the sheer importance of this research) makes it worth revisiting here.

The dramatic positive and negative impacts of expectations are well established by education research. As education researcher and sociologist Sonia Nieto (whose work you will read along with this chapter) explains:

The term *self-fulfilling prophecy*, coined by Merton in 1948, means that students perform in ways in which teachers expect. Their performance is based on subtle and sometimes not so subtle messages from teachers about students' worth, intelligence, and capability. The term did not come into wide use until 1968, when the classic study by Rosenthal and Jacobson provided the impetus for subsequent extensive research on the subject. In this study, several classes of children in grades one through six were given a nonverbal intelligence test (the researchers called it the "Harvard Test of Influenced Acquisition"), which researchers claimed would measure the students' potential for intellectual growth. Twenty percent of the students were randomly selected by the researchers as "intellectual bloomers," and their names were given to the teachers. Although their test scores actually had nothing at all to do with their potential, the teachers were told to be on the alert for signs of intellectual growth among these particular children. Overall these children, particularly in the lower grades, showed considerably greater gains in IQ during the school year than did the other students. They were also rated by their teachers as being more interesting, curious, and happy, and thought to be more likely to succeed later in life.³⁸

Because the teachers THOUGHT the students would be successful, the students WERE successful. The importance of this research cannot be understated. These results verify the incredible positive power of simply expecting the most out of our students. They also highlight the monumental potential for academic success that is lost when we succumb to common assumptions about the limits of students' abilities.

And, we are learning that teachers' faith in students' success is a particularly important element of improving academic achievement for Black and Latino students in particular. Focusing on teacher-student relationships in general, Harvard University economist and researcher Ronald F. Ferguson surveyed more than 30,000, Black, White, Hispanic, Asian, and mixed-race students. One of the most

interesting results of this study is "the distinctive importance of teacher encouragement as a source of motivation for non-White students." The research found that to best lead minority students, teachers need to "inspire the trust, elicit the cooperation, stimulate the ambition and support the sustained industriousness" of those underachieving groups.³⁹

My first year, the paperwork I inherited was such a mess that it wasn't until the third week of school that I finally had and was able to read all of my students IEPs. When I read Antoine's goals—"Antoine had proven himself to be a helpful, outgoing student"-- I actually cried. A third-grader, Antoine was supposed to learn to recognize and identify the letters of the alphabet and the numbers 1-20. I cried, because I was afraid of the idea that this might actually be an appropriate goal for him. Luckily, however, I didn't change my opinion that the student I was beginning to know just seemed capable of so much more. By the end of the year, Antoine was performing long addition and subtraction with regrouping and reading on a mid-first-grade level. The only thing I should have cried about, in retrospect, is that someone actually put in writing those inexcusably-low goals.

**Lisa Barrett, Bay Area '02
Partner, The New Teacher Project**

³⁸ Nieto, Sonia. *Affirming Diversity: The Sociopolitical Context of Multicultural Education*, White Plains, NY: Longman Publishers USA, 1996, p. 42.

³⁹ Ferguson, Ronald. "Addressing Racial Disparities in High-Achieving Suburban Schools." North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, December 2002. Online at <http://www.ncrel.org/policy/pubs/pdfs/pivot13.pdf> accessed 7/1/2010.

The Power of High Expectations

As further described in *Teaching As Leadership* through the research of Jeff Howard, the self-fulfilling prophecy of low and high expectations applies to *students* as well as teachers. Students have been shown to achieve more when *they* believe their teachers and society expect that they will achieve at high levels. And unfortunately, they achieve less when less is expected of them: “[C]hildren may bring to the classroom a lifetime of being told that they are failures, or even worse, that they are developmentally disabled.”⁴⁰

It is easy to equate success to race and background, but doing so will be your demise as a teacher. If you show your students that success is attainable through perseverance, and teach them to be self-propelled and self-motivated, then their background will become obsolete. It is simple to blame failure on background; the greater challenge is to teach well.

Katherine Smith, Delta '02
COO, NYC Department of Education

With the last chapter, you read Professor Ogbu’s chapter on various explanations for the achievement gap. Consider Professor Ogbu’s treatment of *teacher* expectations. Note that Professor Ogbu contends that “low teacher expectations” is a more complicated phenomenon than some analysts indicate, and he asks us to consider the degree to which students themselves influence teacher expectations. How does this contention support or contradict our assertion here that low expectations more generally (including low expectations by teachers, society, families, and the *students* themselves) are a hugely damaging influence that we, as teachers, actually can take on and conquer?

“Racism, Discrimination, and Expectations of Students’ Achievement”

Along with this chapter, you will read another book excerpt. “Racism, Discrimination, and Expectations of Students’ Achievement,”⁴¹ is by Professor Nieto, author of the previous block quote, and one of the country’s leading experts on diversity issues in the education context. In the piece that you will read, Nieto directly takes on the interrelations between conscious and unconscious biases and the low expectations that are so damaging to students.

In her chapter, Nieto contends that deep-seated, often unconscious, prejudices held by teachers, administrators and policy makers often manifest in the education structures of our schools and the education experiences of our students. She argues that social ills of racism, sexism, and other types of discrimination are embedded in schools’ practice and design as much as they are in society at large. Nieto contends that this discrimination is not only revealed through the actions (often resulting from unconscious prejudices) of teachers, but through student outcomes like drop-out rates, college attendance, and other indicators of educational failure or success.

One of Nieto’s fundamental theses is that not only are teacher expectations critical to student success, but that many teachers fail to realize that they have diminished expectations of their students in the first place. As you read this article, think critically about your own perspectives on students in your future classroom. Is there any degree to which you too, despite the best of intentions, tend to see the different backgrounds of students not as an asset, but “rather as an obstacle to be overcome?” Are you tempted to relax expectations of students out of sympathy or pity? And do you recognize the damage that such a relaxation of standards can cause? These are obviously not easy questions to answer, and honest answers are often painful. But, as Nieto indicates, students’ achievement depends on teachers’ frank exploration of their own deep-seated beliefs and expectations.

⁴⁰ Teixeira, Mary Theiry and Christian, Pamela Merchant. “And Still They Rise: Practical Advice for Increasing African American Enrollments in High Education.” *Educational HORIZONS*, Spring 2002, p. 117-118.

⁴¹ This reading is Chapter 4 of Sonia Nieto & Patty Bode’s *Affirming Diversity: The Sociopolitical Context of Multicultural Education*, White Plains, NY: Longman Publishers USA, 2008.

When I arrived in Henderson after institute and made the all-important visit to the local Wal-Mart for school supplies, I had several people approach me in the store and ask if I was a new teacher. I excitedly responded yes—but when they asked where I was teaching, and I responded with the name of my school, they just looked at me with regret. “Oh honey,” they said—“good luck. Those kids don’t do a thing, and that school is out of control.” I realized that if I was hearing these comments from the mouths of strangers in Wal-Mart, I could only imagine what my students had heard over their last eight years of schooling.

Crystal Brakke, North Carolina ‘99
Vice President - Institutes
Teach For America

methods to management structures—consistent with high standards. While the reality of their students’ lagging academic skills may mean that teachers must do more and different things in the classroom, effective teachers aim for excellence by setting an ambitious goal and then fostering a daily sense of urgency to meet that goal.

To establish and maintain these high expectations, you simply must see great teachers—whether in low-income schools or in affluent schools—implement high expectations in their own classrooms. Seeing a room of students working at their potential is often a mind-blowing, eye-opening, fire-lighting experience. [Your regional program directors will make “excellent school” visits available to you. Go! There is nothing so inspiring and infuriating than seeing the pace and learning in fantastic schools, and thereby realizing what your students are being deprived of.]

Consider the following excerpt from Abigail and Stephen Thernstrom’s recent book *No Excuses: Closing the Racial Gap in Learning*. In this section, the Thernstrom’s are reporting on the tangible signs of high expectations that they are seeing in the wildly successful schools they are studying. (You will note that the Thernstrom’s study includes the KIPP - Knowledge Is Power Program - Academies, started by two Teach For America alumni.)

“High expectations” is a current educational buzzword, with much hand-wringing about just how high those expectations can be for Black and Hispanic children in poverty. There is no hand-wringing in Esquith’s [a nationally recognized teacher in Los Angeles] class or at any of the superb schools we visited. All of KIPP’s eighth-graders have completed a two-year high school-level Algebra I class by the time they graduate. Part of the secret is a lack of the usual education ambivalence about the need to memorize basic mathematical facts and strategies for solving problems. Levin himself teaches math, and he turns, for instance, the speed with which kids can

II. But What Do “High Expectations” Actually Look Like?

Many of us are easily sold on the importance of high expectations to our students’ experience, but we still may not have a clear vision of what those expectations look like, or we may fail to make the transition from the all-important mind-set of high expectations to implementing those expectations in the classroom.

A key to implementing high expectations in your classroom is to realize that “high expectations” is in fact *something you do*, not just believe. Teachers who reap the benefits of high expectations for their students do not merely *tell* their students that they have high ambitions for them, they also *show* them those high ambitions by making every instructional decision—from choosing objectives to teaching

At the beginning of the year I make sure that every student achieves academic success. I track their progress with a diagnostic and continually track them. At the end of the short unit (usually a week or two) I sit them down and show them their diagnostic and their test. They see the success with their own eyes and they build the confidence to succeed. People want to win, they want to succeed; most often, they just don’t think they can. This way they know they can succeed right at the beginning so when things become difficult, they are ready for it.

Sean Flammer, Delta ‘02
Trial and Appellate Attorney
Scott Douglass & McConnico

The Power of High Expectations

accurately run through the times tables into a competition, the object of which is to beat his own time. To watch him explain to new fifth-graders (with minimum preparation for the academic demands of KIPP) how to tell which of two numbers is the larger is to see a level of sophistication in illuminating the structure of math that is very rare.

This year I dismiss my homeroom by group, rather than as a whole class. Quiet, attentive groups leave first; rambunctious, noisy groups leave last. I struggled with a group of boys that would constantly reenact the best moves of last night's wrestling program with their pens as stand-in wrestlers complete with sound-effects. Not surprisingly, they were consistently leaving last. I tried threatening them with additional time in the classroom, phone calls home, and even contemplated breaking apart the group entirely. I was fed up and was sure that a group of 12 year old boys was incapable of staying still and quiet. Finally, one day I tried flipping my bias on its head. I turned to them and said, "From this point forward, I expect your group to leave first every day." After I made my expectations clear, they created their own routine. During dismissal, the group's leader says, "okay boys, you know the drill." Each one of them folds their hands, sits up straight, and tightens their lips. Needless to say, I dismiss them first almost every day.

**Gabe Scheck, New York City '01
Managing Director - Corporate, Foundation, and
Government Relations
Teach For America**

The teachers set academic expectations, and they work hard to get their students to internalize those expectations. The day we visited Amistad [an excellent school in New Haven, Connecticut], the kids were chanting: "People, people, can't you see? Education is the key. People, people, don't you know/ College is where we will go." (North Star [another excellent school observed for this book] has an almost identical chant.) All the schools we admired offered various rewards for academic performance. . . .Such rewards, publicly labeling some students as more academically accomplished than others, make many public school teachers nervous on grounds of equity. At a Los Angeles elementary school we visited, every month one student was recognized from each classroom. But the teachers, we were told, "don't get specific about the criteria." In other words, recognition was arbitrary, and the students fail to learn a crucial lesson: Schools and employers generally reward hard and good work.

KIPP's sixth-graders are expected to spell such words as audible, audience, confidential, hyperbole, hypertension, and pianist. (Rich vocabularies open literary doors.) In Houston, on a day we visited, an eighth-grade English class was engaged in a close

textual analysis of *The Lord of the Flies*. Later that day in a "thinking skills" class, Michael Feinberg, the principal, led a sophisticated discussion of the federal highway program, the power of Congress over interstate transportation, and the political pressures behind appropriation decisions.

We watched seventh-grade history students at Newark's North Star playing a game visually traveling across a map of Europe with countries and cities differently colored but unidentified by name. Start at Berlin, travel 500 miles east, drop straight south, through one country to the next. Where are you? Almost all hands went up; the student called on had the right answer.

Esquith's fifth-graders play mental mathematical games—no pencil and paper allowed. Take the total IQ of everyone on the board of education ("It's zero!" he says with a twinkle); add 8; multiply by 7; subtract 5; divide by 17. In a flash the students hold up tiles with the number 3 on it. Take the number of holes on a golf course, add the number of years in a decade, add the number of weeks in a fortnight, add 19, and take the square root. Up come the number 7 tiles with amazing speed. These are inner city kids, but Esquith does not ask "inner-city" questions; he wants them to know what a golf course looks like.

Esquith pushes the kids hard, and believes “facts are good.” But there’s nothing grim about his class. (We saw kids at lunchtime shouting, “Let’s skip lunch,” so they could keep working.)⁴²

All of these examples—and many of the examples provided by thousands of corps members in their own classrooms—illustrate not only the importance of high expectations, but their possibility. As a brand new teacher considering the implications of high expectations for your own classroom, remember the two fundamental tenets just described:

- (1) High expectations means doing, in addition to believing
- (2) Treat yourself to the concrete vision of high expectations that is afforded by watching excellent teachers maximize the potential of their students

III. The Power of High Expectations—Students’ Perspective

While it would probably come as a surprise to many people who harbor debilitating stereotypes of our students, another consistent lesson that we have learned as we have worked with our students is that they themselves yearn for higher expectations. Even those students who have internalized the “inferiority complex” that comes from constantly hearing and experiencing low expectations will explain, if asked, that teachers, schools, and society could and should expect more of them.

The organization Public Agenda, a nonpartisan public research group, conducted a study involving surveys of over 1300 high school students and focus groups in communities across the country. Public Agenda ensured that the sample group included an “over-sample” of African-American and Latino students.

Among the telling results of this study was the consistent message from students that they can and want to be held to higher standards. This result might be surprising, coming in the midst of the public discourse about raising standards and accountability in our schools, but these high school students (across all demographic categories) stated loudly and clearly that they want schools to expect more of them. As explained in Public Agenda’s report, “Getting By: What American Teenagers Really Think About Their Schools,”

Teenagers support the nationwide call for higher academic standards, which they think all students should have to meet. They concede that it’s possible today to get good or adequate grades without much effort, and most youngsters in public high schools admit that they do not put as much effort into their studies as they could. The great majority of students say that having to meet higher standards would make them work harder in school and would prompt them and their classmates to learn more.⁴³

In fact, six in ten teens support enforcing the standards to the point of holding a student back for a year, even if that student has tried hard and attended class regularly.

Perhaps most interesting for our discussion of high expectations for our students, the over-whelming majority of high school students believe that standards should not be “eased for youngsters with disadvantages.” In fact, 84% of students say “schools should set the same standards for students from

⁴² Thernstrom, Abigail and Stephan. *No Excuses: Closing the Racial Gap in Learning*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003, pp. 58-60.

⁴³ Johnson, Jean and Farkas, Steve. “Getting By: What American Teenagers Really Think About Their Schools,” *A Report From Public Agenda*, 1997, p. 19.

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inner-city areas as they do for middle-class students.”⁴⁴ There were not significant differences in student answers from various racial or demographic categories on that question.

As one of the students surveyed explained, “I think they don’t take us seriously enough. We’re really smarter than they think.”⁴⁵

IV. Conclusion: High Expectations for You and Your Students

On one level, this chapter and the additional readings have addressed on a grand scale some of the social ills that contribute to the achievement gap in this country. More importantly, however, this chapter and these readings are about your work in your classroom. As many corps members have experienced before you, all of the statistics comparing the achievement of different groups of students have a mere fraction of the impact on you that your students will. Very soon, when you are the instructional leader of your classroom, the achievement gap will become painfully real. You will take on the responsibility for erasing it in the lives of the students in your classroom.

We believe that we, as teachers, have the power to overcome the achievement gap with our students. And we believe the central tool in your most immediate control is high expectations. Our students, very often, do not believe they can succeed. They do not believe that their hard work will lead to the academic success that they readily admit that they want.

Thus, a key to success as a teacher of minority and low-income children is establishing and maintaining high expectations for both your students and yourself. As we will discuss in the next chapter, this task is unfortunately easier said than done.

Please again pause at this point and read the selection entitled “Racism, Discrimination, and Expectations of Students’ Achievement”, which can be accessed by visiting the Pre-Institute Work page on the Institute Info Center within TFANet. Also included on TFANet is the article “Equity Within Reach: Insights from the Front Lines of America’s Achievement Gap,” which you may read for another viewpoint of these issues. 

One of my resourced students, Arnetta, had a very difficult time focusing in class. Anytime I tried to give her personal attention, she always stated that I shouldn’t waste my time because she wouldn’t understand it in the end anyway. I expressed how painful it was for me to hear her say things like that and often asked why she uttered such words. Arnetta stated that she was just repeating the words of adults before her who got frustrated with helping her because it took her a longer time to process the material. Arnetta had become conditioned to sitting quietly while other students reaped the benefits of individualized attention. She thought that this was a norm and acceptable. I didn’t see a change in Arnetta until I made it a point to circulate and stand by Arnetta’s desk every day until she attempted and succeeded with a question. After a while, Arnetta became so happy with success that she would yell out, “Hey Ms. Asiyambi, when you going to make it to this side of the classroom. I need some help.”

**Susan Asiyambi, New Jersey ‘01
Senior Vice President,
Teacher Preparation, Support, and Development
Teach For America**

⁴⁴ Ibid. p. 20.

⁴⁵ Ibid. p. 21.

The Challenge of Maintaining High Expectations

Chapter Three

- I. They're *How* Far Behind? Reality as a Threat to High Expectations
- II. "Kind-Hearted" Prejudice: Lowering Expectations Out of Concern and Sympathy
- III. Fighting Lowered Expectations for Your Students
- IV. Conclusion

In the previous chapter and readings, we explored the incredible power of high expectations. Many of our students are behind in their academic achievement precisely because we have *expected* them to be. We lower our standards for them and they consequently lower their effort. Research has consistently indicated that if we, as teachers, truly have high expectations for our students, they are much more likely to experience academic success.

Additional Readings

Along with this chapter, please read the following excerpt, located in the Related Readings section:

- "Identity Development in Adolescence," a chapter from *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?* by Beverly Daniel Tatum

Study after study has shown not only that teachers with high expectations have higher achieving students, but also that students in more difficult, more rigorous classes are more successful, even at the higher level of performance. In one such study, highlighted by the education policy think tank The Education Trust, students from "low," "regular" and "advanced" courses were all placed together in high-level courses. The result: ALL of the students, including those previously in the most basic courses, learned more and performed better in the "advanced" courses.⁴⁶

Results like these beg the question of what schools tend to call "ability." The conventional wisdom in American education has it that only the "top" students can handle algebra and high-level English. But not only is the identification of "top" students a slippery affair, the unlucky students classified as "low ability" never have a chance. Clearly, these students are *able* when they have *access* to the content.⁴⁷

Simply stated, "poor and minority youngsters will achieve at the same high levels as other students if they are taught at those levels."⁴⁸

These studies on the impact of high expectations are inspiring. We, as teachers, can rally around this approach because we know that it will help close the achievement gap for our students, and rigorous standards and expectations are within the realm of our control.

Unfortunately, as many corps members have experienced first hand, maintaining these high expectations is not nearly as simple as declaring one's intention to do so. Many new teachers are surprised to find just how much *work* it is to stay true to their pledge of high expectations, given (1) just how far behind their students are, and (2) the understandable but dangerous pull of sympathetic excuses that we are tempted to make for our students.

⁴⁶ Barth, Patte. "A Common Core Curriculum for the New Century." *Thinking K-16: A Publication of The Education Trust*. Winter 2003, Vol. 7, Issue 1, p. 13.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p. 18.

⁴⁸ "Good Teaching Matters: How Well-Qualified Teachers Can Close the Gap." *Thinking K-16: A Publication of The Education Trust*. Summer 1998, Vol. 3, Issue 2., p. 2.

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In this chapter, we will begin to explore and give solutions for both of those challenges to maintaining high expectations. We will conclude that discussion with an exploration of some of the concrete methods that you can incorporate into your teaching practice that will help you stem the influences of these challenges to high expectations.

I. “They’re *How Far Behind?*” Reality as a Threat to High Expectations

Perhaps the greatest challenge to high expectations is the achievement gap itself. Many new teachers enter the classroom fully dedicated to establishing and maintaining high expectations. And yet, as they encounter the stark reality of their students’ relatively low skill levels, they find their faith in maintaining high expectations is shaken, if not destroyed, by the long distance between their students’ current performance and truly high academic achievement. For example, you may discover that most of your fifth graders are reading on a second or third grade level (and the rest are just learning to read). Or, you may find that your seventh grade science students do not have the math skills necessary to perform any of the experiments called for by the curriculum, and that they struggle to read your “remedial” text. Or, perhaps you are shocked to find that your eleventh grade English students, whom you want to help apply for college, have difficulty writing one paragraph, let alone a college entrance essay.

Virtually every corps member you meet will share a similar story of shock, disappointment, and concern from the first days of school. Consider, for example, the reflection of Frank Lozier, a 2000 corps member who taught 8th grade English in Los Angeles:

Going into my English classroom, I was thrilled by the opportunity to bring in all the concepts that inspire me about literature—intertextuality across authors; complicated, innovative narration; race, class, and gender analysis. While I knew I had an enormous amount of work in getting my kids caught up to grade level, I spent the first weeks of September stunned by the stark reality. Where do I start? I thought to myself. Spelling? Sentence structure? Vocabulary? Punctuation? I was saddened, overwhelmed, and enraged by a system that had failed a generation of students. How could we discuss an author’s choices of racial representation if my kids couldn’t even independently comprehend the text? How would we produce written analyses of social injustice if they had difficulty consistently writing in complete sentences?

I knew I had a choice: I could a) keep lamenting and throw up my hands at the disturbing reality, b) lower my expectations and remain locked into teaching only the “basics” rather than challenging my kids to reach higher, or c) find a way to weave in the basics while pushing towards the highest levels of literary analysis. After a few weeks, I taught myself to break down and prioritize the grammar errors—first tackling my personal pet peeves, as well as the most glaring errors that would preclude my students from being respected by their readers—and the daunting reality became a challenge to undertake one objective at a time.

Even today, if I find my students not reaching objectives, I force myself to look in the mirror and ask, What can I do better tomorrow, or even next period? I’ve seen and experienced enough examples of success to know that, while difficult, it is absolutely possible. Staying connected to a community of effective teachers constantly builds my repertoire of strategies to reach every student. Observing great teachers, participating in my TFA learning team, attending workshops from the National Writing Project, reading books and articles written by exemplary educators—these are my four favorite ways to

sharpen my own saw to ensure that I am affording my students the best education. As a person of color who attended public schools, I was blessed with an education that over-prepared me for college. My students deserve nothing less.

Frank's experience is very common for new teachers in schools that serve students from low-income communities. Although we read and talk about the achievement gap frequently in preparation for that experience, the harsh reality of our students' academic needs can be overwhelming, and can quickly shake our confidence in those high expectations.

So, how *does* a new teacher maintain high expectations in the face of the stark reality that his or her students are *years* behind where they should be in terms of academic skills?

In addition to the so-obvious-as-to-be-unhelpful answers of "work hard" and "teach well," there are a number of strategies that corps members have developed and shared over the years that guide new teachers during this unsettling process of reconciling one's high expectations with the harsh reality of students' skill levels. The six principles, taken together, both provide a new teacher with a roadmap for meeting students' massive needs and help a teacher preserve the ambitious but realistic goals that the teacher has set for students' academic success:

- (1) Start with the basics.** When faced with the daunting and deflating disparity between where your students are and where you want them to be, it is often helpful to remember the great value of focusing on the most basic, fundamental academic skills first. This is not to say that you should "dumb down" the curriculum, nor should you dilute your goals to include only "the basics;" rather, this is to say that no matter what your assigned grade level and subject matter, you may need to give your students an intensive, accelerated, and on-going course in basic reading and math skills. In some cases, addressing such basics is the most valuable experience you can give your students and will set the foundation for moving on to your ambitious goals.
- (2) Take literacy instruction seriously.** A closely related idea is that all teachers of students on the low end of the achievement gap must teach literacy. Most of the time, when we say that our students are "behind," we mean, at least in part, that they lack basic literacy skills. The *Elementary* and *Secondary Literacy* texts provide you with a number of methods and tools to incorporate literacy instruction into your classroom, no matter what your original teaching assignment. Lagging reading skills trap our students in a cycle of slower and decelerating learning. Whatever your teaching assignment, you should plan on assessing and tracking your students literacy progress.
- (3) Reap the benefits of intellectual capacity that outpaces academic skills.** In addition to challenges, a classroom of students who are dramatically behind where they should be academically presents a great opportunity. Many corps members find that because students' intellectual maturity is in fact on grade level while their skill-development is not, those students are ripe for massive strides forward. That is, fifth graders who are reading on a second-grade level are able to make up that distance quickly because they do have the tools and insights of a fifth-grade mind to apply to second-grade learning. One of the common challenges for corps members is reconciling students' lower skill levels with their higher intellectual capacity; one usually doesn't want to ask one's fifth graders simply to read "baby second-grade" books, for example. (There are a few techniques to consider, including pairing with a lower-elementary class and having your older students read to them, or helping create audiobook tapes for younger classes, etc.)

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(4) Work faster, not slower. Some teachers respond to a classroom of students who are behind by setting a slower learning pace for those students. Precisely the opposite approach is needed. Your students *will* be behind. But, as mentioned above, they will have the capacity and potential for great growth. They need a teacher who will recognize that potential and drive them toward it, with an unwavering sense of urgency. They need a teacher that realizes that every second is precious. They need a teacher who thinks, “showing a video might be fine for kids who are on grade-level, but my students simply cannot afford to take the time to do that.” Think about the teachers described in the previous chapter. Would Mr. Esquith ever let a single minute go by without squeezing the most learning out of it that he can? Would students at KIPP find themselves working more slowly because they are behind?

(5) Benchmark your classroom’s pace and progress against “excellent classrooms” regularly. One of the best ways to “pace yourself” is to keep an eye on some excellent classrooms in excellent schools and to compare your students’ pace and progress with that of the students in those classrooms. If those students are reading fifteen books over the course of the year, why aren’t yours? And if your students have so much farther to go to catch up, why aren’t they reading thirty books? As mentioned earlier in this text, new teachers often find that visiting these excellent schools and classrooms energizes their focus on and determination to meet their ambitious goals for their students because those visits so starkly illustrate the unfairness of a system that educates some students well but not others.

I am practically a West Charlotte cheerleader in civilian clothes, both in my classroom and on the street. Before we take the district assessments, I talk about how excited I am to send our good data downtown so that everyone there will spit out their coffee in disbelief at our scores. I cheer and basically act like a fool as I am grading their mini-assessments while they’re working on other assignments, and my students have eventually gotten excited about proving the negative stereotypes about West Charlotte wrong. I make sure my kids are tracking their own progress, their class, my combined classes, and the school’s data versus the rest of the district. I let them know when we outperform the school and the district on certain objectives. And I let them know that they are the ones producing the data, so the success is theirs.

Leah Nahmias, Charlotte ‘04
Resident History Education, City of New York –
Graduate Center

(6) Teach at the intersection of “comfortable” and “challenging.” When faced with students who are so far behind, you simply must gauge and push the edges of students’ “comfort zone.” You certainly do not want to demand of students tasks that they cannot complete or they will become discouraged and lose the all-important motivation that you are fostering to reach your goals. At the same time, especially with students who are far behind, you must constantly push students to take learning risks by mixing in a fair amount of performance requests that are truly challenging for them. This calls for differentiating instruction for students at different levels.

II. “Kind-Hearted” Prejudice: Lowering Expectations Out of Concern and Sympathy

If the reality of our students’ low academic skills is one challenge to maintaining high expectations, the reality of our students’ lives is another. Sometimes, the more we learn about the various difficulties facing our students, the more we may be tempted to question the appropriateness of high expectations in the first place. When you think about all of the symptoms of poverty that can affect your students, at one point do you become tempted to say “we just cannot expect as much out of these students as we expect from those students in that affluent school across town”?

Consider the following thoughts that are representative of the kinds of thoughts that may creep into new teachers’ minds as they get to know their students:

- “Camilla has to work in the evenings so I should just let her sloppy homework slide.”
- “Oscar comes to school hungry—of course he’s going to act out during the morning meeting. I can live with that.”
- “Three of my students are just not meeting the minimal standards for fifth grade, but they usually try pretty hard. I’m going to see what I can do to make sure they pass on to sixth grade.”
- “Visiting Michael’s home was really eye-opening for me. It’s just so different from my own experience—it doesn’t feel right for me to come in and push Michael to focus on school when there’s so much going on at home,” OR “I know how tough what Michael is going through can be. I should give him a break on some of the demands of the classroom.”
- “Susan’s family has such a rich Navajo culture and tradition. Who am I to come in here and push her to achieve academically by standards set by our non-native culture and government?”

These statements represent the very real pull towards lowering expectations that can come with sympathy, concern, and respect for our students’ experiences. No matter what our own background or experience in relation to low-income communities, because our students’ lives may be difficult or different, we may want to “do them the favor” of backing off on our academic demands. The fact is, however, that lowering our expectations—no matter what the motivation—will not be a favor to our students.

Once again, perhaps the most compelling way to digest this idea is through the experience of new teachers before you who have dealt with this struggle to maintain their focus on academic success despite all the challenges in their students’ lives. Consider, for example, the written reflection of Kate Sobel, Los Angeles ’98. She taught first grade and agreed to share her experience with one student, Ernesto—an experience that, for her, has always reminded her of the challenge and importance of maintaining high expectations for every student:

“Mm Mm Miss Sobel,” Jaime stuttered. “My brother’s gonna be in your class this year. Mm Ms Powell said so.” I looked to the door to see two little heads peeking into Room B. “Come on in boys,” I said. “I’d love some help setting up for the first day of school.” Ernesto came into my room for the first time, looked around and grinned a wide smile. Four years in the classroom and my eyes looked past the too-big shoes, too-short pants

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and backwards t-shirt to see the excitement in this soon to be a 1st-grader's eyes. Ernesto and Jaime spent the day putting up butcher paper, organizing the library and unpacking boxes of fresh-tipped crayons. Ernesto was off to a good start. I had big plans for the students of Room B, and Ernesto was already high on my list.

Looking around my room at the end of that year and thinking back to that initial encounter, I wondered how I had managed to put my high expectations for Ernesto aside. I spent so much time with him that year - I grew to love his toothless smile and misfit uniforms. But all of that time and I lost sight of my expectations and my primary responsibilities as a teacher. I let Ernesto go through an entire year of first grade without learning to read.

I think about it all the time. It's one of those things that seemed to be part of a year flying by. I remember each incident clearly but I can't remember when I decided to put my academic priorities aside for Ernesto. There was the time when, with a tooth so rotten it made his face swell like a football, I sent him home with explicit directions to stay there until he had seen the dentist. And the afternoons when he and his brother ate peanut butter and crackers, content to use tutoring time to eat a much-needed snack. And all the time I spent talking to his mom about bedtime, and visits to the clinic, and getting new clothes. Somehow, when Ernesto walked through my doors in the morning my mind spun through a checklist that was different from when I greeted other students in the class. Instead of: Homework? Check. Does he know his spelling words this week? Check. Have I talked to his mom about the research project we're doing on ocean animals? Check... I jumped to sending him to the bathroom with soap and a toothbrush, checking to make sure he was wearing socks, and that he brought a jacket for recess. I had so much to give but I forgot to teach.

Ernesto spent a year in first grade with me better fed and cleaner than perhaps he is now as a fourth grader, but because I forgot to teach Ernesto he spent two years in first grade. The year he left room B to join a first grade class for the second time, Ernesto learned to read with his peers. Another teacher looked past the too-big shoes, too-short pants and backwards t-shirt to see his potential as a student. She may not have had a secret stash of snacks in a drawer with his name on it, but she gave him what he really needed - and he lived up to her expectations.

As Kate's experience suggests, succumbing to "kind-hearted" temptation to lower expectations can be just as damaging, from students' perspective, as believing that the students cannot meet the high expectations that you have set for them. In fact, if you think about the implications of this idea, you come to realize that the teachers who believe and act on statements like those above are just as guilty of limiting their students' academic achievement and life prospects as a teacher who flat-out states that "poor kids can't learn." The teachers who conform to those statements are essentially creating the achievement gap with their supposed "kindness."

In order to be more aware of times when "benign" discrimination like this is sneaking into your teaching practice, it is helpful to parse this tendency into several common strands as experienced by new teachers. Consider each of these four guidelines for avoiding these forms of "well-intended" lowered expectations. Ask yourself which of these principles you are most and least likely to have trouble following:

- (1) Define kindness in terms of learning rather than excuses.** Kindness takes many, many forms, but making excuses for poor performance is not one of them. If you see a problem in your student's life, you do what you can to take action to help, but you must also maintain focus on

instruction. As you develop your own teaching practice, take the time to think about your interactions with students—especially those that initially seem like kind acts. Are they all aligned with your goal of maintaining high expectations? Are you doing students any “favors” that are actually lowering your expectations for them?

(2) Recognize that *problems* that are outside your control do not necessarily mean a lack of achievement-related *solutions*. Sometimes, we find ourselves facing students’ living conditions that are simply not in the realm of our influence. Perhaps a student is a migrant worker and has to leave in the spring to go north to work. Perhaps a student is pregnant. Perhaps a student has asthma related to environmental hazards in his neighborhood. We look at those situations and we may be discouraged that we cannot change the root condition or problem; and yet, we should not allow that discouragement to blind us to possible achievement-related solutions. In every case, there are creative means of ensuring students’ achievement despite the obstacle (without necessarily taking on the obstacle itself). You may not be able to affect the fact that a student’s home arrangement is not conducive to homework, but there are a number of creative ways of getting that student the quiet time and space elsewhere he or she needs to complete it. You may not be able to change the fact that a student does not have a structured environment at home, but that does not stop you from creating structured expectations around behavior and academic performance at school.

(3) Maintain your convictions about the value of academic achievement despite your (possible) unfamiliarity with students’ lives and lifestyles.

We all want to respect and appreciate the difficult cultures and lifestyles that we see in our students, schools, and communities. We must not, however, confuse that important principle with a relativistic view that we have no business “imposing” the value of academic achievement on our students. We are committed to the value of academic achievement, as it will inevitably expand our students’ life prospects, giving them more and better choices in life. Imagine, for example, that you are teaching on a reservation in New Mexico, and you have the utmost respect and admiration for Navajo culture. That respect should not in any way compromise your dedication to academic achievement—these are not mutually exclusive interests. Our students’ families want their children to learn, and they may express that interest in a variety of ways. While we might adjust the manner in which we strive for academic excellence given the cultural norms of our community, we should not confuse our respect and admiration for that culture with a need to change or lower our high expectations for student achievement.

One of the most valuable lessons I have learned as a teacher has been to distinguish between the things I can't change and the things I can change. Hearing about the pressures and challenges my students face outside of my classroom can be overwhelming and often leaves me with a sense of hopelessness. Hearing my student struggle to read aloud only re-energizes me because I know that IS something I can change.

**Martin Winchester, RGV '95
Chief Schools Officer, IDEA Public Schools**

Relaxing your expectations for any student—whether out of concern for difficult situations at home or in the community, or out of respect for a culture that is different from our own—in the end only hurts that student by lowering achievement and thereby limiting life-prospects.

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III. Fighting Lowered Expectations for Your Students

Clearly, maintaining high expectations is not as simple as pledging to do so. As impassioned as we might be about the importance of high expectations, and as sincere as we may be in our promise to act on and implement them in our classroom, all of us face an uphill battle to maintain them. We must accept the challenge posed by the reality of our students' low skill levels, and we must be careful not to be an accomplice to lowered expectations through "benign" factors such as sympathy and certain school structures.

Generations of new teachers have discovered the difficulty inherent in maintaining high expectations for their students. Here we have collected a few of the "best practices" for ensuring that you are successful in overcoming that difficulty:

(1) Proactively and incessantly affirm and nurture high expectations. Given the background of forces constantly eroding high expectations for our students, you must recognize that affirmative energy and work is required even to maintain the high expectations you have already established. Every day your students are being exposed to messages that conflict with your messages of high achievement. Every day you may be tempted by well-intended sympathy or concern or respect for your students' experiences to give in a little on the rigorous standards of achievement that you have set for them. You must be perpetually vigilant and re-assert your messages of achievement.

Before entering my classroom, I knew that low expectations and negative stereotypes for my students existed, but I think I was surprised by the extent to which my students had internalized them. To counteract this, I had to make sure that I was constantly rewarding and recognizing them for positive behavior and academic achievement. It took a while for students to want to behave and achieve this way because the stereotypes and expectations were so powerful.

**Stephanie Crement, Bay Area '99
Special Education English/Language Arts
Teacher, Boston Public Schools**

(2) Challenge others' statements of lowered expectations swiftly and with real-world evidence. As a teacher of students in low-income communities, you will encounter messages of lowered expectations frequently. Sometimes those messages will come from surprising sources: not just television, but from co-workers, administrators, and sometimes even students and students' families. Address those comments when you hear them. And, just as importantly, demonstrate those comments' fallacy by introducing the speaker to the success of your students—even if (and especially if) that speaker is your student. Consider, as examples, the following actual statements heard by corps members and the corresponding ways to answer those statements:

Statement	Response
<p><i>From an administrator:</i> “Those students don’t get a thesaurus, because that level ESL is too low for the blue dictionary.”</p>	<p>This teacher might respectfully explain that her academic goals for these students will actually take them well beyond the level of the blue dictionary and explain, using data from her benchmark assessments, that her students are already handling material in the blue dictionary. She could then set an appointment to return to get a thesaurus.</p>
<p><i>From a fellow teacher:</i> “It is too much to expect parents here to have their students read 21 minutes a night.”</p>	<p>The teacher who is told this might explain that, actually, her students’ parents have really rallied around the ambitious goals he has set for the students and, based on his Reading Time Reporting system, every single student is reading AT LEAST 21 minutes a night. In fact, his students are up to an average of 33 minutes per night. This teacher might go on to describe a few of the concrete signs of the benefits of this campaign on the academic achievement of students in class.</p>
<p><i>A corps member who taught a self-contained class for students with emotional disabilities, reports:</i> “Other teachers would frequently walk past me in the hall and, often in front of their classes, say ‘I have a student for you!’ or ‘I don’t know how you do it, you must be a saint!’ These statements undermined the self-esteem of all the students involved.”</p>	<p>This teacher might discuss with her students why those teachers said those things. (As described in Chapter 3 of Learning Theory in the section on “Demystification,” students often respond positively to an explicit and respectful discussion of their learning differences.) Once those differences are named and the students know that this class is designed to teach to those differences, discussions of each student’s highly ambitious goals (as described in his or her IEP) are possible and fruitful. Finally, the teacher might follow up with the teachers who said those things and describe to them some of the progress students have made. It might be a good idea to ask those other teachers for help in communicating high expectations of success to the students, perhaps even “planting” with the teacher a few specific statements to mention in front of and about particular students that acknowledge those students’ achievement so far.</p>

(3) Flip the “malleable intelligence switch.” If you will recall from the *Teaching As Leadership* book (Chapter Two), a considerable and growing body of research indicates that one negative effect of low expectations is that students internalize the idea that no matter how hard they work, they will not achieve success. As a result, they often see their academic ability as fixed and thus tend to choose easier assignments and be less resilient about failures.

As a teacher, you must indoctrinate your students with the idea of “malleable intelligence”—that the notion of “intelligence” is not a fixed, permanent idea that cannot be improved. Students that believe their intelligence is correlated with their effort are more likely to tackle risky, challenging tasks and to rebound from failures by redoubling their effort. Part of your role as a teacher of students who may have been deflated by low expectations is to “flip this switch” in their mind, to make them realize that their hard work will in fact lead to academic success. (For more on these two different perspectives and how to drive home this idea with students, see *Teaching As Leadership*, Chapter Two.)

The first thing I teach my students is the theory of malleable intelligence. We look at examples of people who have worked hard, overcome obstacles, and achieved audacious goals. I point to the students’ own accomplishments in school or in extra-curriculum activities and show them role models in their community who genuinely want them to succeed. Students need to know that they have family, faculty, and staff members who want them to achieve their goals.

Christopher Arnold, RGV ‘04
Instructor, Purdue University

The Challenge of Maintaining High Expectations

- (4) Search for your own hidden biases and “unpack” your own privilege.** One of the most important methods of fighting the barrage of lowered expectations that grind away at your and your students’ visions of academic success is to monitor your own thoughts and perspectives for hidden biases and prejudices. We have found that corps members of all backgrounds and perspectives can benefit from the self-reflection involved in searching for our personal hidden biases and privileges. What stereotypes about your students (that you see and hear on a daily basis) have impacted your perspectives? In what settings, if any, have we enjoyed some unearned privilege because of our race, ethnicity, gender, age, or socioeconomic status? No matter to what degree we identify with our students’ identities and backgrounds, by becoming aware of our hidden biases and unearned privileges, we are much more able to check and correct the ways in which we might be inadvertently contributing to the lowered expectations that we are trying to fight for the sake of our students’ achievement.

IV. Conclusion

The high standards of excellence that you have pledged to expect of your students will immediately be challenged when you start teaching. You may find your own dedication to those standards shaken by the shockingly low performance of your students at the beginning of the year. You may also find yourself tempted to lower your expectations out of misguided sympathy, concern, or respect for your students’ lives. You must not allow these influences to undermine your high expectations for your students’ success.

At this point, please turn to the Related Readings section and read “Identity Development in Adolescence,” a chapter from Beverly Daniel Tatum’s book *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?*

Part II: Building a Strong Diversity-Related Knowledge Base

In the Introduction to this text, we outlined three over-arching themes of our diversity-training model. In order to successfully harness the power of diversity as a means of achieving ambitious goals in your classroom, we believe new teachers must work to:

- (a) Maintain high expectations for students of all backgrounds
- (b) Build a strong and appropriate diversity-related knowledge base
- (c) Effect change with respect and humility

In the first three chapters that made up Part I, we discussed the achievement gap itself and the role that high expectations can have in closing that gap for your students. Here, in Part II of this text, we survey a number of the “knowledge bases” that a new teacher must develop in order to take full advantage of the opportunities (and, in some cases, to handle the challenges) presented by diversity issues in the classroom.

The first, and perhaps most important, of these “knowledge bases” is knowledge of one’s self. Excellent teachers reflect on their own perspectives, seeking out patterns of thought and hidden assumptions that might be hampering or supporting their role as the instructional leader of their classroom and as an advocate in and for their community. Chapter Four, by exploring new teachers’ impressions of and reactions to the dynamics of power, communication, and interaction that occur in their classroom, will serve as an introduction to the process of exploring your own prejudices as a means of maintaining high expectations for your students. Then, Chapter Five, “Unpacking Your Bias and Privilege (As a Means of Maintaining High Expectations),” will encourage you to reflect on these issues in your own life and will also address the reasons that such a process will make you a better teacher.

In Chapter Six, we turn to a “knowledge base” closely related to cognitive development—a realm of human development theory referred to as “racial identity development.” This chapter explores the patterns of self-identity that occur in minority and White students and teachers and asks whether and how those patterns impact our role as teachers of mostly African-American, Latino, and/or Native American students.

Chapter Seven, “Cultural Learning Styles,” then addresses the somewhat controversial “knowledge base” of ethnically- and racially-centered “culture” and its implications for teachers in the classroom. Some educators and scholars believe that there are generalizations to be made about African-American, Latino, and Native American cultures that provide insights on the most effective instructional methods in the classroom. The final chapter in this “knowledge bases” part of the *Diversity, Community, and Achievement* text is on “Multicultural Education.” An expansive collection of ideas, “multicultural education” is a set of practices that teachers employ to create an atmosphere of inclusion in their classrooms that ultimately can lead to increased academic gains for their students.

Dynamics of Difference and Sameness: Teachers' Reflections on Diversity in Their Classrooms

Chapter Four

- I. What We Mean by Dynamics of Difference and Sameness
- II. The Dynamics of Difference and Sameness in the Voices of Teachers
- III. Conclusion: How Will Diversity Issues Play Out in Your Classroom?

I. What We Mean by Dynamics of Difference and Sameness

“Dynamics of difference and sameness” is a phrase we use to refer to the complex—often unspoken or even unrealized—dynamics of power or bias that can arise in any human interaction. Many new teachers discover that a classroom is a crucible for such dynamics. When a White teacher walks into a room of mostly Latino students, what hidden and not-so-hidden dynamics are at play? What dynamics surface if the teacher herself is Latino? Or male? Or gay? Or blind? What dynamics of difference and sameness might arise if a corps member is returning to his old neighborhood to teach? What if she is instead teaching in a community that she has never experienced?

Additional Reading

After reading this chapter, please read the following selection found on the Institute Info Center within TFANet:

- “The Silenced Dialogue: Power and Pedagogy in Educating Other People’s Children.” by Lisa Delpit, from her book *Other People’s Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom*

The process of posing and discussing these questions about our classrooms will unearth critical answers about our own, our students’, and our colleagues’ perspectives and motivations. In many cases, such reflections will greatly enhance our self-awareness, providing surprising insights into our thoughts and behavior. What dynamics did we expect to arise? Why? In what ways were we right and wrong, and why? How could those assumptions impact our choices and actions at school?

This chapter is somewhat different from the others in that rather than progress through an incremental outline of structured ideas, it simply presents a range of reflections from corps members themselves. We hope that you will take the time to consider the ways in which you do and do not identify with, expect yourself to connect to, and appreciate the reflections of the teachers below. These reflections will serve as deep background for all of the following, more traditionally structured chapters designed to build your diversity-related knowledge base. Many, many thanks to Michelle, Justin, Kristy, Dan, Rich, Mona, Eric, Camika, John, and Tracy for sharing these personal reflections with us.

II. The Dynamics of Difference and Sameness in the Voices of Teachers

Precisely because discussions of “dynamics of difference and sameness” are so personal and question-laden, we believe the most effective means of spurring your own thinking about these matters is to ask you to share in the reflections of a number of other teachers who have been kind enough to make transparent their own thoughts about diversity-related dynamics in their classroom.

No matter what your background and identities, as you enter your classrooms this summer and this fall, you are likely to encounter dynamics of difference and sameness in ways that you may not have before. While you read these, consider carefully what experiences, thoughts, and feelings you identify with and are surprised by. What do you think your OWN written reflection would say after a few weeks of school?

Dynamics of Difference and Sameness

Michelle Koyama, Rio Grande Valley '97. I identify as a multi-ethnic female; however, I am predominately Mexican-American and grew up within this culture in Colorado. My placement was the Rio Grande Valley, and I knew I had to be cautious with any assumptions I had about feeling "connected" to the Mexican-American culture, especially in South Texas. I knew my new community would view me with caution, especially since I have a Japanese last name, and at first glance appear "White" to most people.

At the beginning of my teaching experience, I guess I wanted my school community to accept me and trust me sooner. At times I almost wanted to scream out to my new community that I grew up with similar traditions and practices, and that even though I could not speak Spanish, my family in Colorado did - they just never taught me. But one day I came to the realization that with time, and with trust established by staying and living in my school community, these conversations would happen. Eventually they did happen. I did not have to prove my cultural background to anyone. I had to prove I was dedicated to my students and their success.

Justin May, Greater New Orleans '00. During my first year of teaching, before Thanksgiving, my principal called me into her office. I remember the conversation as something like this:

"Mr. May, you know why I called you in here right?"

"Not really, what's going on?"

"Mr. May, you're not the person I hired. I hired a creative, passionate teacher. I want to see your creativity and your caring for your students! I want to see the puppet shows you showed me [I did a lot of puppet shows at the Teach For America Summer Training Institute]. I want to see radio shows. If you don't get it together soon you need to leave and go do something else. Your students deserve better than what you are giving them."

I remember my complete bewilderment: "My students deserve better? Do something else?" I began to panic. My principal was completely right! I was a monster in my classroom. I realize now that my principal's concerns were valid, and that my actions were rooted in my fear of my students and my community.

I started frantically looking for resources that would help me improve. I went to master teachers, I went to the public library, I went to workshops, I talked to friends, I sent off e-mails to teachers, I went to conferences, and I spoke with my Teach For America staff. In order to process these ideas and reflect aggressively upon my practice I developed a daily routine of tape-recording myself, running, meditating, and writing. My transformation as a teacher took several months. My thinking changed from a focus on my fears to a focus on strategies. I wanted to create a classroom that I would feel excited about sending my children to, more importantly, I wanted to create a community that all children wanted to be in.

In the fall I had been placed by TFA as a third grade teacher at William J. Guste Elementary School. The school I worked in had no windows, no air conditioning, and no copier. We had very few supplies or books. Guste was in the middle of the housing projects in New Orleans, where the student population was 100% African-American. I had never before been the minority. There were over four hundred children and over forty staff members in our school. I was the only White male, and one of only 4 White staff members. All of these factors increased my level of discomfort...I just didn't fit in here!

I had mistakenly thought that I could master this fear by dominating the classroom and by forcing kids to behave. I struggled more than I ever had in my life on my first day of teaching, and every day after that for several months! Students that were exceptionally angry at me would scream:

“Your WHITE self...HUH!” As if being White was enough of an insult to make one jump from the second story balcony. Having students call attention to my skin color made me realize that I hadn’t dealt directly with the differences between my students and myself. It also made me realize that I hadn’t set up a learning community that felt comfortable talking about these differences.

Kristy Marshall, Phoenix ’98. I have a physical difference. I was born with Poland’s Syndrome and as a result my right hand did not fully develop in my mother’s womb. As a child, I had no idea I was different until I encountered a world that did not know how to ‘treat’ people who were physically or mentally different from what society deems as the ‘norm’. One of my many reasons for joining TFA was to ensure that regardless of one’s difference, every child has the same opportunities.

I taught first grade English as a Second Language. I vividly recall preparing for my first day, daunted by the thought of how students would react to my hand. Goodness, I was 21 years old and still succumbed to the pressure of image and beauty as defined by our society. Looking back, I cannot believe that I was ‘worried’ about what six-year-olds would think, say, or do for that matter. I walked into my classroom the first day of school with my #1 classroom management tool that was going to work: I introduced myself and gave each of them a chance to meet/greet each other. I then went on to explain and model how they would know it was time to ‘stop, look, and listen’. I clapped twice and told them to repeat after me. At that moment, I looked at the class and each of them had one fist (modeling my withered right hand) and one hand clapping back at me. My teaching moment began right there. However, it was not their lesson but my lesson.

You see, my entire life I took each child’s actions/words (from when I was growing up) to me personally, as children do. I let those children I encountered define how other children and people would perceive my difference. On the other hand, as an adult, I realized that my students were merely modeling their teacher. At this very instance, I realized the ‘innocence’ of a child and, in reality, humanity. You see, I understood that every single child who scoffed at me, ridiculed me, etc. did not know any better. They had never seen anyone with a hand like mine, and more importantly, no one taught them how to ‘treat’ people and moreover, approach people who are ‘different’ than them. As a classroom teacher with or without a hand, the students saw me for me.

Violence and bullying is prevalent in our schools, and often, I received the brunt of it growing up. Yet, in my classroom, there was no bullying, violence, hatred, or even an “I can’t,” because being different was okay in room 17. Teachers need to teach their students that difference, diversity, and uniqueness are welcomed and encouraged. Open dialogue needs to occur, and students should feel comfortable asking people who are not like them questions to further educate themselves. As a White corps member—even a White woman—I could never, and will never, understand personally what it feels like to grow up in our society as a minority in terms of race, yet I have a responsibility to educate myself on the perspective of a Black person by asking questions and generating conversations about race. I was a minority in some sense, and in my classroom if my students were curious about someone or something, they asked. Violence, bullying, and hatred will only be prevented in our schools if students feel comfortable asking questions and sharing their feelings with each other.

Dan Konecky, Greater New Orleans ’98. Difference and sameness were major issues for me when I left liberal California and moved down south to teach high school in New Orleans. As a White person, I’m used to thinking of myself as an individual. I’m not used to being part of a group, except for

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groups of my own choosing. I'm never been held accountable for any misdeed that someone who shares my pigment commits. That's why realizing that I am part of a group, that my student's perception of me was rooted in a larger perception of White people, was such an intense revelation.

The past is never dead. It's not even past. New Orleans will let you know.

Not long after finding an apartment, I went out to get a haircut. I walked down my nice street to the dilapidated Boulevard a few blocks away. There's a barbershop on the corner of Broad and Dumaine. I wanted to build those relationships; I wanted to be a part of the community. So I entered and sat down.

You would have thought that my arrival meant the end of the world the way the barber and the few patrons that were in the place were staring at me. The barber told me they were closed and they couldn't cut my hair. I got the message and I left as other customers, with considerably more melanin in their skin, walked in and sat down to wait.

I taught on the west bank in New Orleans. A White faculty member, also a first-year teacher, told me his uncle was a barber. My hair was getting unruly so I went to his Uncle's shop. The man cut my hair, the whole time talking to me about the problems with Black people. He stopped at the appropriate spaces, waiting for me to validate his southern drawl with an "um hmmm" or a "yes indeed." He kept telling me to be still in the chair. I had to just sit there and take it.

Why is he talking to me like this?
Who does he think I am?

Sameness in New Orleans put me in a group with some people whose views often made me want to scream. Sometimes it was flagrant. Other times it was soft. In our teacher's lounge, White folks sat around the big long table and the Black teachers sat around the smaller circular table. The air in that lounge was thick. Where I wanted to sit, and where I was 'supposed' to sit did not always jive with each other. When I asked another teacher in confidence about the default seating chart, he just laughed it off. "No big deal" he told me. "We got bigger fish to fry."

It was a big deal to me. I was prepared to be different from my students. In fact, I was excited about its prospect. However, I was not prepared for the sameness that I shared with other White people, and the conclusions that are made based on that shared identity. I was not prepared to be perceived by my students in that light. Placing myself within history's context, as opposed to someone floating above its sphere of influence, helped me to connect to my adopted city, to my students, and to my own concept of who I am. It takes a concerted, conscious effort to blow against the wind. For me, as a White man, realizing that there was a wind to blow against—in regards to my own identity, was a major step in that direction.

Richard Reddick, Houston '95. I made a lot of assumptions about teaching in Fifth Ward. Because it looked a little like the neighborhood in which I went to school, I assumed that I would have a level of familiarity with my students and their parents that would prove beneficial in building relationships with them. It turns out that I was both right and wrong--some of my parents' faces lit up when I met them, and on several occasions I would hear them say how happy they were to see that their child had a positive Black male role model in their lives. Connecting with my students on cultural commonalities--food, music, and even our vocabulary--was another positive manifestation of our bond.

On the other hand, my students had only seen Black men in three incarnations in their school experience: the principal, the coaches, and the custodial staff. (The other Black male teachers were in the middle school or behavioral adjustment classes.) We certainly went through a testing period where the students would call me "Miss" (sometimes mistakenly; other times, not). There was a constant conversation about their assumptions about me: yes, I enjoyed basketball, but I wasn't particularly good at it. No, I was not replacing Mr. Johnson as principal-- ties and slacks are business dress for men. The coaches wear tracksuits, and the custodians wear uniforms because those outfits are appropriate for their jobs.

There were experiences that I will relive forever--spending time with the eighth grade boys and talking about life, school, sports, and women, all the while trying to impart a sense of responsibility, duty, and service to them. There are other moments that I reflect upon with regret--Katie, my most challenging (and most memorable) student in my first year. Katie and I had really come to an understanding. She had been through unspeakable abuse as a child, and was living with her grandmother and cousins in a fairly stable environment, which really allowed her to grow in confidence and do well academically. I was so inspired by her effort that I promised to take Katie and three other students to Hermann Park for a TFA fun day. As I drove up to Katie's house, several of the cousins eyed me suspiciously. Her grandmother (with whom I had obtained permission for this trip) wasn't home, and here I was, a man dressed in sport clothes, asking to take their cousin to the park. It was clear that they did not believe that I was a teacher, or that my intent was to simply take Katie to the park as a reward for her behavior. I still cringe when I think about talking to Katie on Monday about the broken promise.

One of the things that initially bothered me was the fact that the students would often laugh at me when I spoke to them. When I asked them why, they'd respond, "You sound like a White person." Over time, though, I learned to ask what about my voice reminded them of a White person. Sometimes they would say it was the way I pronounced words; other times they would say it was because I sounded "proper." A rumor started up that I was also a minister, because someone heard me using words as a preacher did. I played some of my students a tape of a Malcolm X speech once, and remember one of the kids yelling out, "That's a White man talking!" Helping the students to understand that there is a diversity of dress, opinion, athletic prowess, and intellectual acuity among Black people was one of the most rewarding aspects of my experience in Fifth Ward.

Some of the research I do now as a doctoral student analyzes the differing social adaptations that poor, working-class, and affluent Black families manifest. One thing I've discovered is that social class strongly conditions how one perceives and interacts with the world--as my mentor Charles Willie often says, "A Black family is not simply a Black family." Affluent families may subscribe to the "American dream" ideal of hard work being the path to success, while a poor family, having the results of their hard work thwarted by racism and economic calamity, sees the "American dream" as a set of unfair rules for success that have rarely worked in their favor. For instance, some parents saw me as an extension of the social service system, which alternately threatened and wagged a nagging finger at them, and were defensive in their interactions with me. My ethnicity was of little help then--if anything, I think I was perceived as a "sellout."

One thing was clear--once I had established the understanding that my expectations were high for *all* my students, virtually all of the parents supported my efforts. Teaching in a community in which you share the same, or a similar ethnic or racial background as your students can be alternately comfortable and challenging. But I would advise you to prepare to have your assumptions and hunches often turned upside down.

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Mona Abo-Zena, North Carolina '93. During a lunch of barbeque, I was introduced to my colleagues in a cafeteria in rural North Carolina. I was one of the only new faces, and they circled around me with their friendly questions.

"Are you Baptist?" they asked.

"No."

"Are you Episcopalian?" they wondered.

"No." I felt myself flushing.

"Are you Lutheran?"

"No."

"So what are you?"

Suddenly, I remembered myself as the only Muslim child in the class being asked what I got for Christmas. Then, I did not know how to begin to answer.

Now with this authority as Teacher, I realized I had the responsibility to explicitly welcome children of all religious backgrounds. I did not want any child to experience the isolation I had felt. I began to plan how I could expose the class to religious traditions without celebrating any. I wanted to teach children how to ask sensitively, and how to answer confidently. While they may not fully understand why ours was the only class not having a Halloween party, at least they began to question.

Eric Guckian, North Carolina '95. I straighten the knot in my tie, wipe my brow with my handkerchief and look down the benches where my students stand before me. Three weeks ago I became a fourth grade teacher. Every morning has started just like this one. We sing, our principal gives the morning announcements and we move up four flights of stairs with cages for railings until we reach classroom 404, my fourth grade classroom. Thirty-two students sit in their chairs packed like sardines. They look at me and they expect something. Thus far I have fallen short, far short of what they need and deserve.

I am trying. I stay up late creating interesting lesson plans that fall flat on their faces when I try to execute them. Today I tried reading from *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. The opening scene of the book depicts the Ku Klux Klan burning the leader's childhood home.

"Hey Mr. Gu-Can?" Corey asked. "How do I know you weren't in the KKK?"

"Now, Corey," I reply. "Do you really think I would be here if I felt that way?"

"Well, maybe you weren't, but maybe your father was, or your father's father was, and now you just feel guilty."

I have no response for Corey. I look at his hard stare, and then I look down at the tops of my shoes. Colgate and now Teach For America have offered me countless books to read, with words that espouse the values of critical thinking, celebrating diversity, and multiple intelligences. But only Corey, a nine-year-old boy with a razor sharp intellect, could have brought me to this moment.

Camika Royal, Baltimore '99. I chose to come to Baltimore because the site guide said its school system's students were 89% African American, like me (I am 100% African-American, but I think you know what I mean). I was eager to teach Black students. When I got my school placement at the Institute, I shortly thereafter found out that I would be teaching in a poor White neighborhood. I was angry; there were so few African-American corps members coming to Baltimore and so many Black children there who needed teachers who looked like them. I could not understand why I was placed somewhere I thought the children didn't need me. When I got to my school, I saw that the student population was about 60% Black and 40% White, but all my students were from low-income backgrounds, and regardless of their race, they brought with them all of the academic challenges that having been educated in under-resourced schools brings. I began to learn about my students individually and treat them accordingly, instead of continuing my assumptions on what I thought they would be like based on my limited life experiences. By the end of the year, because I saw my students as people who each needed something unique and tailored to them, I was able to truly teach them. And my children taught me more about life and race and possibility by the end of the year than I ever thought was possible.

John White, New Jersey '99. I taught in a school of over 3,000 students. Forty languages were spoken in the homes of my students and their families. Difference was the invigorating, volatile foundation of our community.

Packing up after my first day of teaching, I looked up as two ninth-grade girls approached me, arms linked. "Mister," they called in unison—and then just one: "You're White, right?"

It was the perfect pitch for any one of a dozen punch line home runs. So good that I had no idea what to say. "Yes. I am."

"White-Dominican or White-Italian?"

I don't remember how I answered, but my answer involved my story—where I was from, how that led me here, where my parents were from, why I wasn't there.

There were other ethnic reductions. African-Americans were either "Black-Dominican" or "Black-American." Hispanic students not from Puerto Rico or the Dominican Republic were "Spanish." Anyone claiming ancestry in Saharan Africa or central Asia was "Muslim."

But a push beyond those labels compelled storytelling. I was a WASP who went to college in Virginia. Alice was African-American and had family in Virginia, as did Lashawn, but they guessed that wasn't the same Virginia as mine. And that necessitated more stories. Mustafa was Indian but he wasn't a Hindu. Luis was "Spanish" but he didn't speak Spanish. Storytelling was our tool for resolving the contradictions that emerged of our strange life together.

Strife came when individuals couldn't author their own stories. A theatre troupe told us about ancient Black Egyptians, when we—in great part Black, in great part Egyptian—had stories of our own that seemed not to corroborate that story. We watched from my classroom window as men destroyed the World Trade Center towers, less than two miles away. Fewer scarves were worn in the days following; anger and fear had muted the stories.

In the weeks following that day, a student died. She was a young woman. She was a Christian, and she was African-American. About fifty of us went to the wake together. Some of us had grown up in African-American churches, some in other churches. Many had never been in a church. A few

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had been told not to go to churches. The mother was heaving hard cries and the father would pat her on the back as my students walked by and said in many words and in few, the bits of the story they held, like offerings from a community of storytellers.

Tracy Epp, Rio Grande Valley '97. When I learned that I'd be teaching in the RGV, I figured I'd relate and adjust rather well. Growing up in a small town with limited resources, being the first in my family to graduate from college, and having observed the reality of the advantage my privileged peers had, I thought I would absolutely be able to relate to my students. Though I was White and all of my students were Mexican-American, I grew up underprivileged and my family history was similar to that of my students.

At the same time I expected my students and I to understand each other, I found myself frustrated with their ideas and opinions—especially around gender and sexuality. I thought that my students just didn't "get it" and it was a strong religious upbringing and isolation to the rest of the world that brought on these ideas. I found myself having conversations with my colleagues about my frustrations—almost always, these conversations were about me and who I was and less about who my students were.

At the point I realized that both of these things had to coexist, real learning took place, both on my part and on the part of the students. It led to real culture of respect, interest in others' ideas and most of all, critically analyzing why we do and think the things we do.

I began to reflect on my practice in the classroom in the context of both where I was coming from and where my students were coming from. This by no means meant lumping my kids into one category, but rather led to not only a desire, but a necessary step in the learning process, to truly know my students.

III. Conclusion: How Will Diversity Issues Play Out in Your Classroom?

In all likelihood, these reflections sparked in your own mind a whole range of new questions about what your teaching experience will be like. What dynamics of difference and sameness will play out in your classroom? How will you approach them? How will you recognize them?

As one more catalyst for these types of reflections—and as a bridge to the next chapter on uncovering your own hidden biases and privileges—you will read with this chapter an excerpt from Lisa Delpit's book, *Other People's Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom*.⁴⁹ This chapter, titled "The Silenced Dialogue: Power and Pedagogy in Educating Other People's Children," focuses in particular on the dynamics of difference and sameness that play out between White and non-White teachers when communicating about how to best educate non-White children. She introduces the topic with several statements from minority teachers discussing their frustration with their White colleagues who do not listen to their ideas, causing them to stop verbalizing their opinions and thus "silencing" the conversation on the education of students of color. Think about whether you have ever been in such a situation—on either side of that divide. Also consider carefully Delpit's contention that White, middle-class children come to school already benefiting from a culture of power, and have different needs than their non-White peers. In the next several chapters, we will address this issue in both a personal and a more theoretical/academic way.

⁴⁹ Delpit, Lisa. *Other People's Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom*. New York: The New Press, 1995, pp. 21-47. Chapter title: "The Silenced Dialogue: Power and Pedagogy in Educating Other People's Children."

As you read Delpit’s chapter and as you consider the anecdotes and reflections you read above, think about your own identity—whatever your ethnicity, race, background, gender, sexual orientation, religion, etc.—and imagine your own classroom, school, and community. What dynamics of difference and sameness may play out there? Can you predict what your “dynamics of difference and sameness” reflection will look like once you are in the classroom?

Please take another break from the text at this point to read the aforementioned selection by Lisa Delpit entitled “The Silenced Dialogue: Power and Pedagogy in Educating Other People’s Children,” which can be accessed by visiting the Pre-Institute Work page on the Institute Info Center within TFANet. 📖

The “Knowledge Base” of Self: Uncovering Hidden Biases and Unpacking Privilege

Chapter Five

- I. Paths to Effective Teaching: Exploring Bias and Privilege
- II. Exploring Your Own Bias
- III. “Unpacking” Privilege
- IV. How Exploring Your Biases and Privileges Makes You a Better Teacher
- V. Addressing Your Biases and Privileges in the Classroom
- VI. Conclusion: Getting Started Exploring Your Biases and Unpacking Your Privilege

In your quest to harness the instructional power of diversity-related dynamics in your classroom, one of the most important “knowledge bases” is self-knowledge. Not only must you be keenly aware of your own identities and background (and how they will create dynamics of difference and sameness in the classroom), but you also must be cognizant of your own beliefs and perspectives and how those may be influencing your classroom leadership.

The challenge here is that our beliefs and perspectives are not always obvious, even to ourselves. Indeed, it is the hidden or subconscious presumptions, biases, and prejudices that can sometimes undermine our overt declarations of high expectations for our students.

As we will discuss below, the process of “knowing thyself” serves as a key foundation for becoming an effective teacher in your classroom in at least two ways. First, this process helps a teacher develop empathy and understanding about his or her students’ backgrounds and perspective. Second, looking at your own biases and privileges helps you interact more effectively with people in the school community because you develop a better understanding of your perspectives, their perspectives, and how any differences between them might affect your interactions.

For these reasons, excellent teachers of all backgrounds reflect on their own perspectives, seeking out patterns of thought and hidden assumptions that might be hampering or supporting their role as the instructional leader of their classroom. They also think critically about their own identity characteristics, searching for ways in which those characteristics affect their day-to-day interactions with students and colleagues. Especially for those teachers who happen to share some identity characteristics with the “dominant” culture, taking time to consider what unearned privileges one enjoys because of those identities is an important and revealing process.

In this chapter, you will be asked to think carefully about your own background. Whether or not you share characteristics such as race, socioeconomic status, and background with your students, you can benefit from reflecting on what overt or hidden biases you bring to the classroom, and what you can do to overcome them.

Additional Readings

Along with this chapter, please read the following selection found on the Institute Info Center within TFANet, and visit the web page below:

- “Unpacking Straight Privilege” by Earlham College Students
- In addition, please spend some time completing Teaching Tolerance’s hidden bias tests online, located at: http://www.tolerance.org/hidden_bias/index.html

The “Knowledge Base” of Self

I. Paths to Effective Teaching: Exploring Bias and Privilege

The Distinction Between Bias and Privilege

Two general parameters shape these potentially personal conversations. First, we separately define and address issues of “bias” and issues of “privilege.”

By “bias,” we mean an individual’s internalized—but often unrealized—preferences for or assumptions about some group. A teacher’s tendency to call on boys more often than girls, or to punish African-American students differently, or to predominantly choose short stories that reflect her own cultural background are all examples of possible manifestations of bias in the classroom.

By “privilege” we mean the ways in which an individual enjoys unearned advantages because of some societal preference for some aspect of his or her identity. Examples include a White teacher’s (perhaps unrecognized) assurance that there will be short stories to choose from that reflect his or her identity characteristics, or a male teacher’s assumed appointment to a budgetary committee.

Both of these concepts—bias and privilege—require careful self-reflection. While in both cases that self-reflection leads us to revelations about how we can be more effective in the classroom, the ways that you can most effectively unearth bias and privilege are different. Thus, we address them separately.

Exploring Bias and Privilege as a Means to Academic Achievement, Not an End unto Itself

The second basic parameter for this conversation is that exploring one’s own beliefs, perspectives, and privilege is a means to effective teaching, not an end unto itself. We are embarking on self-analysis not out of any desire to make ourselves feel guilty, or proud, or blamed, or pleased, or angry; rather, we are working to discover internal influences that threaten to lower our expectations of our students.

Maintaining high expectations is the key reason that we ask you to build the “knowledge base” regarding your own biases about your students and communities and the privileges you have enjoyed because of some aspect of your identity.

I remember it was really hard to prevent making assumptions of why occasionally parents would be late or not show up to parent teacher conferences. It scared me to realize that I would be more generous and “understanding” of those parents from higher income communities. To combat this, I actually used an envisioning exercise where each of my parents were huge company CEOs who were extremely busy with multiple meetings, and thought of how I would react in that same situation in a more affluent environment and what assumptions I would make about those parents in a suburban community. That allowed me to maintain very high expectations of my parents, but at the same time understand that they had multiple things they were juggling—and it didn’t matter if the job was president of Xerox or cleaning the riverboat casinos or working for a local real estate company—but still had the best interests of their students in mind. And it worked--with the right amount of persistence—I had extremely high parent turnout for my conferences. And it didn’t matter if we had to reschedule or if I had to make a home visit or arrive at school early. It’s what any good teacher would do.

Maia Heyck-Merlin, S. Louisiana ‘99
Chief Operating Officer, Achievement First

[A] teacher’s culture, language, social interests, goals, cognitions, and values—especially if different from the students’—could conceivably create a barrier to understanding what is best for children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Teachers can break through this barrier by reflecting on their self-knowledge and by learning to acknowledge and respect their students’ language, literacy, literature, and cultural ways of knowing.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ “Critical Issue: Addressing Literacy Needs in Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Classrooms.” North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, p. 2.

In order to most effectively lead our students to dramatic academic achievement and thereby give them vastly expanded opportunities in life, we must acknowledge and overcome the often hidden lowered expectations that undermine our students' self-confidence and academic success. We must recognize that it is not only "society," but also *we* that hold those damaging lowered expectations. "When teachers become aware of their own cultural backgrounds and values, they have an opportunity to recognize and address any bias or preconceived notions they may have that would make it difficult for them to accept, understand, and effectively teach their students."⁵¹ So, we discuss bias and privilege because we must insist on, maintain, and prove valid the highest expectations we hold for our students—no matter what our students' race or class or gender or religion or orientation or disability.

Is This Discussion Meant for Everyone?

Yes. All of us—whether we identify as a person of color or as White, as affluent or as poor—can benefit from thinking about the hidden assumptions and prejudices we may have regarding our students, our schools, and our communities. Social psychologists will assure us that no matter what our color of skin and no matter what our background, we are not immune from the many influences in society that lead us to internalize subtle preferences, fears, and stereotypes about various groups of people with whom we are not familiar (and even those with whom we are). A corps member of color or a person of low socioeconomic status may bring a different perspective to this conversation than a White corps member or an affluent corps member. We do believe, however, that all new teachers need to consider these issues.

As discussed in the "Unpacking Privilege" section of this chapter, the process of considering one's unearned privilege is arguably more applicable to White, male, straight, and affluent persons than to African-American or Latino, female, homosexual, or poor persons, simply because the former groups are more likely to have experienced the type of societal preference that we are talking about. On the other hand, an argument might be made that to greater and lesser degrees, all of us, no matter what our primary or many identities, experience identity-based privileges in various contexts—that is, being Black, or Jewish, or female, or gay can and does confer elements of privilege in certain, specific contexts. For example, a Spanish-only speaker who must struggle to work within the dominant language and culture in an English-speaking community, might find that he or she enjoys the "privilege" of language dominance while in a different, Spanish-speaking community—where an English-only speaker might lose his or her privilege. Also, the mere fact that all of us have at least a bachelor's degree puts us in relatively exclusive company that undoubtedly affords us all certain privileges.⁵²

II. Exploring Your Own Bias

All of us would like to believe that we are free of biases—that we will enter our new communities and classrooms void of assumptions, misconceptions, and prejudices about those we interact with. And yet most of us, upon careful reflection, come to realize that we do in fact harbor hidden biases about various groups of people. Most pertinent to our discussion here, given our focus on the race- and class-correlated achievement gap, are the hidden biases each of us may have about African-American students, Latino students, and Native American students, and about poor students in low-income communities. Of course, also critically important to our self-reflections about prejudice and privilege are subtle and not-so-subtle ways that we, as teachers, may treat boys and girls differently in the classroom.

⁵¹ Ibid. p. 3.

⁵² Only 24.3% of Americans aged 18 or over hold a Bachelor's Degree or higher, according to the 2002 Current Population Survey on Educational Attainment (found at www.census.gov).

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Consider the following experiment: teachers listened to students’ taped responses to questions about television programs. Teachers were shown a picture of either a White or Black student and told that that student had made the statement (even though the pictures were not actually of the speaker). The teachers were asked to rate the responses for personality, quality of the response, current academic abilities, and future academic potential. The results showed a highly significant relationship between the race of the student shown in the picture and teachers’ estimation of the students’ response and academic abilities,⁵³ laying bare the teachers’ deeply-rooted assumptions about the potential of African American students.

Initially, I was under the impression that community members, parents, and teachers were not concerned with the academic progress of the community’s children. I quickly learned that despite the conditions they live in, their hopes, dreams, and aspirations were far-reaching, and not limited to the poverty conditions that surrounded them. After inviting parents to a “report card dinner,” I quickly realized that we as a community were all in this together. I thought I was in this all by myself. Little did I know that I had a whole town behind me.

**Christopher Arnold, Greater New Orleans ‘04
Instructor, Purdue University**

As explained by Professor Ron Ferguson, who reported on this research, these results do not necessarily indicate that these teachers had a conscious or subconscious dislike of Black students. Rather, the explanation might be that these teachers have been conditioned by previous experience with Black students who underachieve in the classroom (as we know, Black students, statistically speaking, are disproportionately likely to have done). Of course, both possible motivations still result in racially biased behavior that could have very real impacts on a teacher’s instruction and management in the classroom. How would you perform on a similar test? Why do you think so? How can you know?

Going on the assumption that every student can be high-achieving if we show them how to be, I’ve had to consciously unpack and override my own bias about the background, resources, or personality traits that I’ve traditionally associated with high-achievers.

**Julia Guez, Houston ‘03
Graduate Student, Columbia University**

To help begin to answer those questions we strongly encourage you to put yourself through a similar test. Tolerance.org, a web project of the Southern Poverty Law Center, has made available on the Internet a series of bias-tests that were created by psychologists at Harvard and the University of Washington. These “implicit association tests” ask you to quickly respond to a series of rapidly changing images and ideas.

Log on to http://www.tolerance.org/hidden_bias/index.html to take some of these tests. (The results are kept entirely private.) After taking one or several of these five minute tests, read the attached tutorial to learn more about the tests themselves, about stereotypes and prejudice, and about the societal effects of bias. If you are interested in trying an additional or different bias test, please see the **Diversity, Community, & Achievement Toolkit** (p. 2: “Computer-Based Implicit Association Tests”); this Toolkit can be found online at the Resource Exchange on TFANet ✖

If you are like most participants in the online exercise, these tests will confirm the idea that even though we may believe we see and treat people as valued equals, hidden biases may still influence our perceptions and actions. The fact is that stereotypes and prejudice linger in most of us, and those biases can and do have impacts on our classrooms. Perhaps we make assumptions about students that “look” a certain way, or we make assumptions about why certain students do not do their homework. Maybe we have stopped making copies of the classroom assignments for Mary in detention because we “know” she

⁵³ Ferguson, R.F. “Teachers’ perceptions and expectations and the Black-White test score gap.” Printed in C. Jencks and M. Phillips (Eds.). *The Black-White Test Score Gap*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1998, p. 277.

is not going to do the work anyway—even though what Mary actually needs is to know that we do believe she can and will do the work.

After we discuss the related notion of privilege, we will review some concrete suggestions for diminishing the effects of those hidden biases in our classrooms.

III. “Unpacking” Privilege

Another angle from which we must build the “knowledge base” about ourselves is to consider the ways in which we benefit from societal preference for some aspect of our identity. “Unpacking privilege” is a metaphor used to describe the process of becoming aware of the ways in which our identity-based status in society confers on us invisible advantages in life, thereby shaping our experiences, viewpoints and actions. Such privileges may be conferred on us because we are White, male, affluent, educated, straight, able-bodied, Christian, or speakers of English. The process of “unpacking privilege” involves careful consideration of the societal realities that subtly—and not so subtly—create the “privilege” of additional opportunity, freedom, or comfort for us because of some aspect of our identity.

In your classroom, these privileges could manifest in any number of ways. Do we even contemplate the fact that letters from the school are written in English only? Do we plan a Mother’s Day project on the assumption that everyone has a parent who is a woman? Do we take for granted that religious symbols in a school celebrate Christianity? These questions often do not occur to those of us who are enjoying that so-obvious-as-to-be-invisible privilege.

As mentioned above, “unpacking” one’s privilege is not exclusively—but is probably predominantly—a responsibility of persons with identity characteristics most often associated with the dominant or mainstream majority in our society. It is precisely those individuals who are part of that “dominant” group that may be blind to the privilege that they themselves have experienced. “[D]ominant groups, whether by race or class, often are unaware of their identity because it is in sync with the internal and external images they hold of themselves and reality.”⁵⁴ (Nonetheless, we encourage all corps members to take part in this process because it is highly likely that all of us, in some way or another, enjoy some privileges beyond those enjoyed by our students, if for no other reason than by virtue of our level of academic achievement.)

McIntosh’s Original, Invisible Knapsack

The phrase “unpacking privilege” was popularized in large part by Peggy McIntosh at Wellesley College Center for Research on Women. An excerpt from Professor McIntosh’s work commonly called “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack” has become a model for the kind of self-evaluation and awareness that is necessary for one to begin to recognize the many ways that social dynamics of power influence our lives. To further help define the phrase “unpacking privilege,” consider an excerpt of that influential 1988 essay:

Through work to bring materials from women’s studies into the rest of the curriculum, I have often noticed men’s unwillingness to grant that they are over privileged, even though they may grant that women are disadvantaged. They may say they will work to improve women’s status, in the society, the university, or the curriculum, but they can’t or won’t support the idea of lessening men’s. Denials that amount to taboos surround the subject of advantages that men gain from

⁵⁴ “Critical Issue: Addressing Literacy Needs in Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Classrooms.” North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, p. 2-3.

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women's disadvantages. These denials protect male privilege from being fully acknowledged, lessened, or ended.

Thinking through unacknowledged male privilege as a phenomenon, I realized that, since hierarchies in our society are interlocking, there is most likely a phenomenon of White privilege that was similarly denied and protected. As a White person, I realized I had been taught about racism as something that puts others at a disadvantage, but had been taught not to see one of its corollary aspects, White privilege, which puts me at an advantage.

I think Whites are carefully taught not to recognize White privilege, as males are taught not to recognize male privilege. So I have begun in an untutored way to ask what it is like to have White privilege. I have come to see White privilege as an invisible package of unearned assets that I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was "meant" to remain oblivious. White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools, and blank checks . . .

1. I can if I wish arrange to be in the company of people of my race most of the time.
2. If I should need to move, I can be pretty sure of renting or purchasing housing in an area which I can afford and in which I would want to live.
3. I can be pretty sure that my neighbors in such a location will be neutral or pleasant to me.
4. I can go shopping alone most of the time, pretty well assured that I will not be followed or harassed.
5. I can turn on the television or open to the front page of the paper and see people of my race widely represented.
6. When I am told about our national heritage or about "civilization," I am shown that people of my color made it what it is.
7. I can be sure that my children will be given curricular materials that testify to the existence of their race.
8. If I want to, I can be pretty sure of finding a publisher for this piece on White privilege.
9. I can go into a music shop and count on finding the music of my race represented, into a supermarket and find the staple foods which fit with my cultural traditions, into a hairdresser's shop and find someone who can cut my hair.
10. Whether I use checks, credit cards, or cash, I can count on my skin color not to work against the appearance of financial reliability.
11. I can arrange to protect my children most of the time from people who might not like them.
12. I can swear, or dress in second hand clothes, or not answer letters, without having people attribute these choices to the bad morals, the poverty, or the illiteracy of my race.
13. I can speak in public to a powerful male group without putting my race on trial.
14. I can do well in a challenging situation without being called a credit to my race.
15. I am never asked to speak for all the people of my racial group.
16. I can remain oblivious of the language and customs of persons of color who constitute the world's majority without feeling in my culture any penalty for such oblivion.
17. I can criticize our government and talk about how much I fear its policies and behavior without being seen as a cultural outsider.
18. I can be pretty sure that if I ask to talk to "the person in charge," I will be facing a person of my race.
19. If a traffic cop pulls me over or if the IRS audits my tax return, I can be sure I haven't been singled out because of my race.
20. I can easily buy posters, postcards, picture books, greeting cards, dolls, toys, and children's magazines featuring people of my race.

21. I can go home from most meetings of organizations I belong to feeling somewhat tied in, rather than isolated, out-of-place, out numbered, unheard, held at a distance, or feared.
22. I can take a job with an affirmative action employer without having coworkers on the job suspect that I got it because of race.
23. I can choose public accommodation without fearing that people of my race cannot get in or will be mistreated in the places I have chosen.
24. I can be sure that if I need legal or medical help, my race will not work against me.
25. If my day, week, or year is going badly, I need not ask of each negative episode or situation whether it has racial overtones.
26. I can choose blemish cover or bandages in flesh color and have them more or less match my skin.

I repeatedly forgot each of the realizations on this list until I wrote it down. For me White privilege has turned out to be an elusive and fugitive subject. The pressure to avoid it is great, for in facing it I must give up the myth of meritocracy. If these things are true, this is not such a free country; one's life is not what one makes it; many doors open for certain people through no virtues of their own. . .⁵⁵

Thus, as McIntosh's essay makes clear, "unpacking privilege" refers to our attempts to pull back the veil of complex dynamics of difference and sameness that impact our lives—especially those dynamics that make us more appreciated, safe, influential, or comfortable in a given situation than we might be if we presented some alternative identity. Several variations of McIntosh's original piece have been written to help people unpack their privilege related to their gender, religion, socioeconomic status, etc. We ask that along with this chapter, you read the "Unpacking Straight Privilege" piece written by students at Earlham College about heterosexual privilege in society.

Teaching forced me to a new level of questioning and re-evaluating my racial identity. As a white woman, one of the privileges that I had experienced is that I had not often found myself in situations where I was the minority. In my classroom, I was the only white person in a classroom filled with students of color. I had a hard time coming to grips with the fact that even though I was the minority in numbers, I was still in power. My "power" did not come from being a part of a majority; it came from my white privilege.

**Stephanie Crement, Bay Area '99
Special Education English/Language Arts Teacher
Boston Public Schools**

Some people have described the process of unpacking privilege to be like "a fish discovering water." Coming to grips with the ways in which you may have enjoyed unearned benefits because of your identity can be a surprising, disturbing and even painful process. It is a critically important process for teachers to go through, as difficult as it may be.

As some of you have no doubt already experienced, recognizing the unspoken privileges that one's White-ness, or male-ness, or straight-ness, or affluence offer can obviously be an unsettling process. But keep in mind that the difficulty of this process is not, in and of itself, its purpose. The point of this process is not to make anyone feel guilty or ashamed, but is instead to identify those power dynamics that shape our beliefs and perspectives so that we can be more aware of them in the context of our

classroom. Only by recognizing your own biases, and the assumptions you may have developed because of privilege, can you effectively fight the temptation to act on lowered expectations of our students' achievement.

⁵⁵ McIntosh, Peggy. "White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming To See Correspondences through Work in Women's Studies." A working paper at Wellesley College Center for Research on Women, 1988.

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IV. How Exploring Your Biases and Privileges Makes You a Better Teacher

Thus, in the teacher-training context, reflecting on your own prejudices and privileges is not an end unto itself, but rather is a means to becoming a better teacher. But what is the connection between this potentially personal and painful process and teaching well?

The answer to that question begins with a recognition of the close relationship between bias and privilege. In a manner of speaking, these two concepts are corollaries of one another. If one carries a bias, he or she has some unfounded assumptions that shape expectations of the targeted group’s behavior or abilities. On the other hand, if one enjoys a “privilege” (in the sense we are using here), one likely has some unfounded assumptions about one’s own contribution to his or her success in the world. That is, “privilege” is closely related to “bias” in that “privilege” involves unquestioned assumptions about *one’s self*. In both cases, the process of “uncovering” or “unpacking” that bias or privilege is a process of replacing those assumptions with a more nuanced and real vision of one’s interactions with others. In the context of teaching, this quest for a more nuanced and realistic view of the world is particularly important and has direct implications for a teacher’s interactions with and leadership of students.

First, this heightened awareness and vision is key to understanding who your students are and how their backgrounds and cultures and experiences shape their view of and approach to your classroom. That is, as a teacher who is trying to assess students’ needs and motivations, you must have an unfiltered view of the students’ abilities and past performance. Exploring your biases and privileges is a way to check yourself for those “filters” that would otherwise inhibit your ability to truly read and help your students. Have you made assumptions about the process and pace of your students’ learning of some concept based on your own experience with that concept, even though you were a native English speaker and your student is not? Or, maybe you find yourself making assumptions about the reasons behind your students’ acting out—assumptions that are entirely based on your experience as a student of that age and that ignore critical differences in the challenges that you faced and those facing your students. Perhaps you are not thinking about the impact that others’ high expectations for you had on your own performance and behavior?

The better knowledge of our students’ perspectives and challenges (that arises from exploring one’s bias and privilege) leads to insights that inform instructional and

Before I went into the classroom, I automatically thought that I would have a pretty simple time as a teacher in the classroom. After all, not only was I of the same background as the students I taught, but I had also grown up with similar socio-economic and educational inequities. This fact alone built my confidence; I would be able to assimilate into the school and community culture with pure ease. After my first week of school, I was perplexed by how my assumption was completely inaccurate. I had students and colleagues questioning why I was teaching in their neighborhood. I tried to explain my similar circumstance to what they were experiencing; yet, they were hesitant to believe me. They mentioned how the language I spoke was proper, my style of dress was different, and how each and every day I drove home in my car to another neighborhood that I called home. This was very disappointing to me, but it made me realize how important it was for me to recognize the privilege I was bringing to the classroom. Although I was a minority, I had gone to college and had amassed certain experiences that were not common to my students or their families. My perspective had completely changed. I was the same as my students in terms of skin color but our experiences were different based on the academic freedom I had the opportunity to explore. I had to approach the situation differently. I had to approach my school community more humbly, acknowledging my privilege while expressing (through my actions) my purpose for teaching—giving my students the same opportunities I was lucky enough to receive so that they too have choices and a voice for their own life experiences.

Susan Asiyambi, New Jersey '01
Senior Vice President – Teacher Preparation, Support, and Development
Teach For America

managerial decisions in the classroom. As we are able to truly trust our own assessments of students' needs and challenges, we are better able to address them.

Second, looking at your own biases and privileges helps you interact more effectively with people in the school community because you develop a better understanding of your perspectives, their perspectives, and how any differences between them might affect your interactions. A teacher's exploration of his or her bias and privilege may offer insights into how that teacher is perceived by—and how that teacher perceives—others. What do my colleagues see as the privileges that I have enjoyed? How can I know? What of my deep-seated biases have my students picked up on and how does that affect our relationships? What are my biases and default assumptions about the administrators in my school, and how have those assumptions colored my interactions with them? These types of questions—all fruits of the “unpacking” process discussed above—are keys to maintaining the respect and humility necessary to have a meaningful impact on your classroom, school, and community.

In our experience, corps members who look within themselves to consider the ways in which their various identities have advantaged and disadvantaged them are more effective as classroom and community leaders, and are more often successful in their quest to close the achievement gap for their students. In a nutshell, they are better able to maintain the high expectations that they have set for their students.

V. Addressing Your Biases and Privileges in the Classroom

What is a teacher to do upon realizing that he harbors some potentially damaging prejudices about his students? Or upon realizing that her previous assumptions about what should be “easy” for her students is shaped, in part, by privileges afforded her by her own identity?

There is no easy or blanket answer to this question—as every situation most certainly has unique characteristics that call for unique solutions. We have, however, mapped out a few strategies in other texts that offer guidance here. For example:

I think I had always associated rural poverty with white folks and urban poverty with people of color. I also believed that urban settings were more dangerous and rural settings were more impoverished. As a white man from a lower SES town in the northeast, in my experience this was an accurate assumption. Working in Garyville, Louisiana, as part of the GNO corps, I realized just how subjective that experience was, and my notions about what poverty looks like were completely challenged.

**Bill Murphy, Greater New Orleans '00
Principal, Baltimore City Public Schools**

- **Collect Data.** In a case where you suspect you are preferencing one group of students over another in your interactions in class, you should (a) create a system that monitors your interactions (perhaps a clipboard with students' names on it and put a check by the student's name as he or she shares a response or gets to participate in a demonstration), and (b) create a system that ensures variety in your calling on students (such as the tried-and-true popsicle sticks approach). For more information, see the section on “Engaging, Involving, and Valuing All Students” on page 69 of the *Classroom Management & Culture* book.
- **Bring In Fresh Eyes.** Ask your Program Director or co-worker to observe your classroom and bring a fresh perspective, looking for any manifestations of the bias that you are concerned about exhibiting. Sometimes an observer will see things that you do not. Or, your observer might be able to reassure you that your suspected bias is not actually manifesting in the classroom.

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- **Grab Opportunities to Challenge Your Assumptions.** There is no antidote for prejudices like counter-evidence from your own students. If, for example, you are worried that you do not have as much faith in your girls as your boys during math class, pay particular attention to some girls’ math products and, in all likelihood, you will find your assumptions shaken by the very real evidence before you.
- **Watch Yourself.** Using video tape to examine your own practices is an excellent way to watch for bias- and privilege-driven behaviors. Does the privilege you have enjoyed as a White person, or as a Christian, or as a college graduate impact your classroom teaching and interactions with students? By watch your own teaching with those questions in mind, you may discover ways that you can mitigate the impact of bias and privilege.

While these various strategies are all helpful in particular contexts, the bottom line is that there is no solution for your hidden prejudices like openly acknowledging them. Once you identify your propensity to think or feel a certain way about a certain group of students, your awareness of that pattern will be heightened and you will automatically begin to adjust your behavior in response.

VI. Conclusion: Getting Started Exploring Your Biases and Unpacking Your Privilege

In this chapter, you have been asked to look within. “Knowledge of self” is one of the first and arguably most important diversity-related knowledge bases that you need to develop in order to maximize the learning in your classroom.

While many of you have already begun this process (and you will be encouraged to explore your hidden biases and privileges this summer), we also encourage you to think now—as you read this text—about what basic assumptions, perspectives, biases, prejudices, and privileges you will be bringing to your summer and regional classrooms. When you imagine the students you will be teaching, what and whom do you see? What are your honest, base assumptions about those students and how can you mitigate the effects of those assumptions? Which of your many personal experiences in life will shape—for better and for worse—your perspective of your students, of your classroom, of your school, and of the hard work that will be required of you and your students to succeed?

There were several times that my students told me that I couldn’t understand because I was white. Sometimes they were right – there were things I couldn’t understand initially because of my background- but when I asked them to explain the situation to me, the conversations we had were really powerful for all of us. The fact that I was willing to learn from them made a huge difference in the relationship I had with my students.

**Jessica Murphy, Greater New Orleans ‘99
Behavior Specialist, Indianapolis Public Schools**

At this point, please read “Unpacking Straight Privilege” by Earlham College Students, which can be accessed by visiting the Pre-Institute Work page on the Institute Info Center within TFANet. 

How Racial Identity Affects Performance

Chapter Six

- I. How We Identify Ourselves: Why Race Matters
- II. Stages of Racial Development
- III. Implications for Teachers
- IV. Conclusion: Building Supportive and Responsive Classrooms

Mrs. Johnston, a white woman, comes to pick up her black daughter, Lucy, from kindergarten. Josie, Lucy's classmate, says to her teacher, "Ms. Potts, they don't match." Ms. Potts says, "Shhhh! That's not polite to say."

Mr. Dillon discusses slavery with his third graders as part of their American history lessons. One of his African-American students, Patricia, asks a question: "Did the slaves fight back?" Mr. Dillon says, "How could they? The white people had weapons."

Ms. Katz is used to Alex, a seventh grader, behaving well in her class. One day, Alex starts wearing a hat and a big, puffy coat to class, angrily taking them off only after Ms. Katz tells him to do so twice. He starts challenging the class assignments, asking, "Why do we have to do this?" Ms. Katz calls Alex's mother and tells her that Alex is being disruptive.

Eduardo, a ninth grader, comes into Ms. Singh's class furious. "Ms. Moore's a racist," he fumes. "She gave me a D on this paper." Ms. Singh responds, "You shouldn't throw words around like that. Ms. Moore wouldn't be teaching here if she were a racist."

Mr. Leonard gets Sandra, his top science student, a chance to attend a special summer camp for high school juniors in the state capital. When he shows her the brochure, Sandra says she doesn't want to go. Mr. Leonard is annoyed because he's gone to a lot of trouble to help Sandra, and she appears to be ungrateful.

In the last chapter, we explored the "knowledge base" of ourselves – how we may harbor biases and enjoy privileges that will influence our approach to teaching. In this chapter, we are expanding that discussion to the *development* of identity – both in teachers and students – to see how who we are and how we think about our place in the world changes over time.

The ways in which your students *think* and *feel* about the issue of race and their own racial group membership – hereafter called their "racial identity" – may significantly affect their achievement. It may influence whether individual students tune you in or out, whether they believe they can achieve, whether they believe that school will support or degrade them. As you may have already surmised from the vignettes above, how a teacher treats the issue of race in the classroom can greatly impact a student's development.

Additional Readings

Along with this chapter, please read the Noguera excerpt found on the Institute Info Center within TFANet, and the Tatum chapters found in the Related Reading section:

- "How Racial Identity Affects School Performance" by Pedro Noguera from the *Harvard Educational Letter*
- "The Early Years" and "Critical Issues in Latino, American Indian, and Asian Pacific American Identity Development" from *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?* by Beverly Daniel Tatum

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A discussion of students' racial identity development is complicated by the fact that a teacher's approach to decision-making in the classroom and in the community will be shaped by his or her *own* racial identity development. Ms. Potts might have been taught never to talk about race and feels everyone should be "color-blind" and "just get along." Mr. Leonard may have never thought that he thinks about the world in ways different than Sandra, and that Sandra may be apprehensive about going to a place where there may not be other people who look like her - or where people might subtly question how she got to be there. Keep these teachers in mind as you read through the chapter, and think about the ways in which they might begin to shift their perspectives in order to serve their students effectively.

Racial identity development, both for us and for our students, is all about shifting perspective. Psychologists have developed various theories describing stages of racial identity development that relate to a person's age and his or her life experiences. By understanding these stages - and the potential feelings and attitudes often associated with them - we as teachers can be better equipped to help students navigate their identities and expand their views of their own potential.

I didn't realize when I entered my classroom how much I did have in common with my students. On the surface, it isn't obvious that a white woman from the Midwest, a graduate of a liberal arts college and decidedly upper-middle class, would have much common experience with a group of teenagers in rural North Carolina—and it was obvious on the first day my students didn't think I had much in common with them either! Over the next few days, though, I began to remember experiences I had lived through that allowed me to connect with my students on a different level, things that they couldn't see about me at first glance. When they found out that I was the child of a teenage mother, that I was raised for the first seven years of my life in near-poverty, that I too was from a rural area, relationships began to build and strengthen. Even if I had not shared those facts, or had not realized myself how similar we really were, I know that we would have found common experiences somewhere. Though the obvious differences are the easiest thing to see, the human experiences are where we truly are able to connect with our students on a higher level.

Crystal Brakke, North Carolina '99
Vice President - Institutes
Teach For America

As we proceed, we will survey some scholars' theories on these stages, their implications, and the ways in which you can help students develop a positive self-image, a sense of malleable intelligence, and an internal locus of control. We will follow racial identity development theory through adulthood, so that you can consider how your understanding of your own racial identity will affect the ways in which you present and address issues of cultural pertinence in the classroom.

I. How We Identify Ourselves: Why Race Matters

Do you think of yourself as smart? Do you attribute your success to hard work? How we think about ourselves makes a huge difference in how we perform in the classroom. During childhood, we are bombarded by messages that will ultimately help to form our self-concept during adolescence. As race relations expert and Spelman College President Beverly Daniel Tatum points out in her book, *Why Are The Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria*, adolescence is the stage when we finally have the cognitive ability to reflect on who we are and what we might become. As we sort out these questions, we come to decide whom we will date, what professions we'll pursue, where we will live, and what we believe.⁵⁶ In order to formulate our responses, we focus on aspects of our identity that are salient to us, and we examine these aspects in others in an attempt to form our sense of self.

⁵⁶ Tatum, Beverly Daniel. "Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?" *And Other Conversations About Race*. New York: Basic Books, 1997, p. 20.

Part of students' self-understanding and self-esteem in the classroom involves what psychologists call

I have found that my African-American students are constantly striving to define blackness. I know this all too well for I've been through the very same struggle myself.

*In their attempts to uncover a definition of blackness, they see me—a light-skinned African American woman who to them appears racially ambiguous. I expected their questions about my ethnicity; after all I have been met with them throughout my life. They want to know if I am Black, Hispanic, or mixed so they will be able to "figure me out." I use such questions to facilitate discussion about race. I share my experiences and my family's experiences. I am an open book and they are grateful for it. My African American students want to be black, to act black, to sound black. I feel it is my job to show the beauty and the diversity of the African American experience. It is not any one thing. It does not make you more or less black to come from the inner city or speak using slang. These are only facets of the Black experience—they do not encompass the whole. To suggest otherwise is to do a disservice to all who have come before us. We read texts that examine race and race-mixing such as *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and *The Color of Water*. We talk about race. We do not run away from it. Part of being effective is teaching students to value themselves and one another. Our discussion and reading facilitate this.*

**Dara Crocker, New Jersey '02
Vice Principal
Newark Public Schools**

our "racial identity." Racial identity is not your race, but rather how you *think* about your race. Columbia University Professor Robert T. Carter puts it this way: "The term 'racial identity' refers to one's psychological response to one's own race; it reflects the extent to which one identifies with a particular racial group and how that identification influences perceptions, emotions, and behaviors toward people from other groups."⁵⁷

Theories of racial identity development are pertinent to teachers because depending on how you think about the role of race in who you are and how others view you, you can either develop very positive or negative perspectives on your ability to be successful. Clearly, those perspectives impact students' relationships with their teacher and their school work. In the late 1960s, Iowa classroom teacher Jane Elliott developed a now famous experiment with her students, telling the blue-eyed children that they were less capable than their brown-eyed peers. Very soon afterwards, students began to internalize the meanings associated with the labels of superiority or inferiority to which they had been assigned, dramatically affecting their academic performance.⁵⁸ Within a half-hour, blue-eyed Carol transformed from a "brilliant, self-confident carefree, excited little girl to a frightened, timid, uncertain little almost-person," Elliott later reported. The labels had fundamentally shaped the children's behavior.

We come to think of ourselves through lenses that have proven meaningful to our lives. During one activity commonly used in diversity seminars, participants are asked to select the label that they would use to identify themselves, if they could only pick one. What might you say? Often participants choose "college graduate," "daughter," "gay," "Catholic," "Asian-American," or "black." Only rarely does anyone say "white." Tatum has seen similar dynamics play out in the classes she leads.⁵⁹ She reports:

Researchers have found that adolescents of color are more likely to be engaged in an exploration of their racial or ethnic identity than are White counterparts. Why do Black youths, in particular, think about themselves in terms of race? Our self-perceptions are shaped by the messages that we receive from those around us, and when young Black men and women enter adolescence, the racial content of those messages intensifies. A case in point: if you were to ask my ten-year-old son, David, to describe himself, he would

⁵⁷ Carter, Robert. "Reimagining Race in Education: A New Paradigm from Psychology." *Teachers College Record*, Vol. 102, No. 5, October 2000, p. 874.

⁵⁸ Peters, William. *A Class Divided: Then and Now*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987.

⁵⁹ Tatum, Beverly Daniel. "Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?" *And Other Conversations About Race*. New York: Basic Books, 1997, pp. 20-21.

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tell you many things: that he is smart, that he likes to play computer games, that he has an older brother. Near the top of his list, he would likely mention that he is tall for his age. He would probably not mention that he is Black, though he certainly knows that he is. Why would he mention his height and not his racial group membership? When David meets new adults, one of the first questions they ask is “How old are you?” When David states his age, the inevitable reply is “Gee, you’re tall for your age!” It happens so frequently that I once overheard David say to someone, “Don’t say it. I know. I’m tall for my age.” Height is salient for David because it is salient for others.

When David meets new adults, they don’t say, “Gee, you’re Black for your age!” If you are saying to yourself, of course they don’t, think again. Imagine David at fifteen, six-foot-two, wearing the adolescent attire of the day, passing adults he doesn’t know on the sidewalk. Do the women hold their purses a little tighter, maybe even cross the street to avoid him? Does he hear the sound of the automatic door locks on cars as he passes by? Is he being followed around by the security guards at the local mall? As he stops in town with his new bicycle, does a police officer hassle him, asking where he got it, implying that it might be stolen? Do strangers assume he plays basketball? Each of these experiences convey a racial message. At ten, race is not yet salient for David, because it is not yet salient for society. But it will be.⁶⁰

Tatum explains why, for some white individuals, race may not be a significant piece of identity that influences their larger self-concept. “In the areas where a person is a member of a dominant or advantaged social group, the category is usually not mentioned,” she points out. “That element of their identity is so taken for granted by them that it goes without comment. It is taken for granted by them because it is taken for granted by the dominant culture.”⁶¹ In the last chapter, during the discussion of privilege, you began to consider what aspects of your identity – race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, class, language – you might take for granted. In *whatever* way you represent a dominant or advantaged social group, you may not be able to see the very real and important dimensions that shape the lives of people different from you.

Ignoring students’ backgrounds is like ignoring a huge piece of what makes them who they are. My students knew I was white, and I knew they were not, and we all knew we had a lot to learn from each other. Once we got that out of the way and acknowledged our differences, then we were able to have some really amazing discussions.

Jessica Murphy, Greater New Orleans ‘99 Behavior Specialist, Indianapolis Public Schools

This means that teachers for whom race was never a salient piece of their identity development may fail to recognize the significance of race in their students’ lives. Professor Carter notes that this is most likely the case for white teachers: “Whites generally do not see themselves as members of a racial group. To the extent that their own racial group membership is deemphasized, so too is their awareness regarding the impact of racism on their own psychological development. Consequently, they do not understand or appreciate the significance of race or racism in the lives of People of Color.”⁶² When this occurs in the classroom, teachers may avoid conversations or topics related to race because they are uncomfortable talking about it or do not see its importance.

⁶⁰ Ibid. pp. 53-54.

⁶¹ Ibid. p. 21.

⁶² Carter, Robert. “Reimagining Race in Education: A New Paradigm from Psychology.” *Teachers College Record*, Vol. 102, No. 5, October 2000, p. 874.

But, as we'll see later in the chapter, many students need just the opposite; they need their teachers to *affirm* their racial identity while *acknowledging* and helping them *navigate* the challenges that students of color face. Fulfilling these needs would be difficult, if not impossible, for a teacher who did not recognize the importance of racial identity – or the nuances of its development in children and adolescents. On top of this, you will need to think about how students may perceive your race and interpret your responses to conversations about race.

Tatum and Carter's findings help us as educators of all different backgrounds in two important ways: (1) we learn that race matters more in self-identity development for some people than it does for others, (2) we learn that teachers who are less aware of their own racial identity may have more difficulty understanding *why* it matters to some of the students they teach. In this next section, we will discuss how that difficulty might decrease over time – and what that means for a teacher's instruction and interaction with students.

II. Stages of Racial Development

Some teachers claim to be figuratively “color-blind” in the classroom. In this way of thinking, color is perceived to have no bearing on instruction, how teachers relate to students, and how people in schools communicate with one another. This may be because, as noted earlier, these individuals have never thought about the significance of race in their own lives; others adopt this viewpoint because they think it is impolite or inappropriate to talk about race.

According to most psychologists, these perspectives are part of a developmental process or continuum that we move along as we expand our understanding of racial identity. In fact, some scholars have proposed a patterned cycle of racial identity awareness – one for white people, who typically begin to understand their “whiteness” after adolescent development, and another for people of color, who often begin that process much earlier in life. Below, we will critically explore one set of these theories that suggests some possible stages that individuals may go through as they engage their racial identity over time.

Of course, as with most theories of psychological development, any proposed system of racial identity development does not precisely describe the development of every person in every case. And, perhaps more importantly, delineating this process into “stages” is not intended to impose a value judgment on our, or our students', many different perspectives and experiences. Our individual experiences may lead to different ways and patterns of thinking about our racial identity, and what is mapped out below is just one (or actually several) racial identity theorists' ways of thinking about the process individuals go through as they consider their own racial identity.

Moreover, Carter reminds us that members of the same race do not have the same racial identity. “Simply that someone is Black, White, or Latino does not tell us about the nature of his or her psychological involvement in his or her cultural group,” he writes. “And indeed, what is more important for each person within the context of the school environment is his or her psychological orientation to his or her race; that is, that person's own racial identity of other educators and students.”⁶³

In this respect, these stages are intended to be considered critically. You should consider whether you find them to be useful tools for your thinking about broad psychological processes; they should not be viewed as cut-and-dry blueprints for how all people have understood their racial identities since the dawn

⁶³ Ibid. p. 875.

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of time. With that context in mind, we are asking you to look at these stages with the particular purpose of thinking about how your and your students' racial identity will affect your interactions and decisions in the classroom and the community. Do these stages inform your thinking about that question? Do they seem recognizable to you? Where might you place yourself along one of these spectra? Where do you think your students are? How could you know? How does your students' racial identity development impact your instructional and managerial decision-making?

The origin of these ideas comes from psychologist William Cross, who developed a theory of African-American racial identity development in the 1970s. Other scholars have since expanded upon Cross's work, and although they use slightly different terms, psychologists believe that members of other American racial minorities often experience a similar process of identity awareness. This does not discount the fact that, as Professor Prichy Smith points out in *Common Sense About Uncommon Knowledge*, "important differences in attitudes, values, and behaviors distinguish ethnic groups; these differences affect the socialization of children within their own group and the attitudes and responses to other groups."⁶⁴ And, as mentioned above, considerable variation of perspective and experience does, of course, occur for individuals within any one of these groups. The general premise of this research is simply that members of different minority groups may experience similar underlying feelings *about* their identity and their relationship to the majority.

The chart that follows is a synthesis of several interpretations of Cross's original model. Review it critically. Does this approach to thinking about racial identity resonate with you? Why or why not? If you are a person of color, which aspects of this model align with your own experience? Which do not? And, as you examine this proposed framework, think about two things:

- (1) If you were a student at one of the first two stages, what might you need from your teacher?
- (2) If you were a teacher at each of the stages, what would that suggest about how you would respond to issues of race in the classroom?

Stages of Minority Racial Identity Development

Stage	What It Looks Like
Pre-encounter	In this phase, the individual idealizes the dominant identity or does not recognize the relevance of race. An African-American child might express a desire to be white. A child from a Spanish-speaking family might not want to learn Spanish.
Encounter	The individual encounters racism and is made to feel inferior, realizing that race alone can lead to negative treatment. The individual may develop a mistrust, or even hatred, toward the dominant group as a result.
Immersion-emersion	Exposed to new thinking about his or her race, the individual becomes engaged in self-research, ignoring the dominant group and beginning to develop a positive self-image. The individual might pursue ethnic studies in college, unlearning negative stereotypes about his or her racial group and discovering, as Tatum puts it, "there is more to Africa than Tarzan movies." ⁶⁵
Internalization	The individual is able to represent him or herself with a sense of confidence, security and pride in multiracial settings.
Internalization-commitment	The individual makes a commitment to promote his or her community within the larger society.

⁶⁴ Smith, G. Prichy. *Common Sense About Uncommon Knowledge*. American Association of College Teacher Educators, January 1998, p. 28.

⁶⁵ Tatum, Beverly Daniel. "Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?" *And Other Conversations About Race*. New York: Basic Books, 1997, pp. 76.

A similar (but different) framework is proposed for White people who (as members of a majority system) may not confront their race in the same way as members of minority groups. White people, some suggest, may have a different process of racial identity understanding.⁶⁶ Do you agree? Whether you identify as White or as a person of color, consider critically the following proposed stages of identity development. Do these stages ring familiar? How would you change them to more closely match your own experience with White persons' racial identity development? Also, please continue to consider the same two questions from above:

- (1) If you were a student at one of the first two stages, what might you need from your teacher?
- (2) If you were a teacher at each of the stages, what would that suggest about how you would respond to issues of race in the classroom?

White Racial Identity Development

Stages	What It Looks Like
Contact	The individual sees nothing wrong with the status quo. Often claiming "color-blindness," he or she is oblivious to racism and participates in it.
Disintegration	The individual, sometimes as a result of moving to a new place or beginning a friendship or romantic relationship with a member of another race, begins to see a system of racism at work, resulting in feelings of shame or confusion. He or she might start pointing out acts of prejudice or discrimination to others, or may try to ignore racism.
Reintegration	If the individual has attempted to point out acts of prejudice, he or she may find him or herself isolated from friends and may retreat into old patterns of accepting the status quo. If the individual has tried to ignore racism but cannot, he or she might blame people of color for their plight in society, absolving white people (and thus him or herself) of responsibility for ending racism. They are engaged what Professor Lawrence Bobo calls "laissez-faire racism," where they are conscious that oppression exists but do nothing about it.
Pseudo-independence	Often as a result of cross-racial interactions, the individual ultimately cannot ignore the system of privilege afforded to white people – and becomes paralyzed by his or her guilt. He or she may try to escape "whiteness" by befriending members of minority groups, pointing out the ways in which he or she is also subject to discrimination, and securing assurances that he or she is not racist.
Immersion-Emersion	The individual seeks new information about what it means to be white, searching for alternative, positive models as opposed to "victimizer."
Autonomy	The individual now views being white as a positive opportunity to dismantle oppression and makes a commitment to do so.

While we must again emphasize that these stages are not necessarily linear but rather fluid, and that they do not necessarily apply equally well to everyone, one of the benefits of these identity development theories is that they help place some of the attitudes we have either felt or witnessed into a larger framework. These theories lay bare and offer explanations for some of the reluctance, fear, anger or shame that different people feel when thinking or talking about race – an important hurdle to clear if we're going to be able to speak openly and supportively to students about their own self-image.

⁶⁶ Ibid. p. 93.

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Examining these processes is also useful because it allows us to see the ways in which people, both of different races and within the same race, can differ in their understanding of racial identity. Here are some important ideas to think about with respect to the charts we've just examined:

- Depending on a student's race, age and particular circumstances, racial identity can play a big part in forming his or her attitudes and behaviors. In this way, racial identity affects learning and motivation for learning. For instance, a student in the "Encounter" phase of minority racial identity development might internalize the stereotypes about her racial group and begin to question her ability to perform well on academic tasks that say they measure her natural ability.
- All of us go through stages of racial identity development. The transition from one state to another is an unpredictable time spurred by interactions and events that create shifts in our thinking. As a result, teachers may find themselves working with students who are, without warning, coping with particular and important aspects of their identity development.
- Teachers are going through stages of racial identity development themselves, which can affect the responses that they may give a student who raises issues of race in the classroom. According to scholar Robert Carter, "Whites [in the Reintegration and Pseudo-independence stages] do not see how they are using their own racial background and experiences as the standard for other racial groups...People of Color [in the Immersion-Emerson stage] are overzealous due to the fact that they are still in the process of evolving a positive internal racial identity, so they also distort information and tend to be less able to be balanced in their understanding of complex racial relationships."⁶⁷ We must all be conscious of the ways in which our own perspectives influence the ideas we advance and approaches we use in our classrooms.
- Because of the different stages and patterns of racial identity development, students may be at a different stage – or a completely different system – than their teachers, meaning that teachers should avoid applying their own feelings onto a child's experience.
- Given the developmental nature of racial identity, all teachers can play an important role in shaping a student's sense of identity and pride.

I explained color difference as follows to my five and six-year-old first graders: I would hold up two pieces of construction paper, one black and one white. Then I would hold my forearm next to a first grade student. Our conversation sounded like this:

"Faith, what color is the paper on the right?"

"Black"

"And what color is the paper on the left?"

"White"

"What color is your arm?"

"Dark brown"

"And what color is my arm?"

"Light brown"

"What color is your blood?"

"Red"

"And what color is mine?"

"I think it's red?"

"So what does that make you think?"

This type of direct observation allowed our "family" to start talking about the real issues of the color line - in first grade! This dialogue allowed us to analyze all of our differences and similarities including race.

**Justin May, Greater New Orleans '00
Second Grade Teacher, Addison Northeast
Supervisory Union**

In this next section, we will zoom in on the racial identity development of children and adolescents of color, and the ways in which teachers can help or hinder this process.

⁶⁷ Carter, Robert. "Reimagining Race in Education: A New Paradigm from Psychology." *Teachers College Record*, Vol. 102, No. 5, October 2000, p. 887.

Young children and pre-encounter experiences. Remember Ms. Potts, from the beginning of our chapter? She thought it was a better idea to silence the dialogue about race than to attempt to explain the diversity of families. Race can be a confusing concept for young children. They observe physical differences between one another at a very early age, but they do not yet have the social or historical vocabulary or abstract thinking capabilities to understand why they hear terms like “black,” when they are looking at someone more tan-colored. They will be listening intently to stories that describe the physical appearance of characters. Who is described as beautiful? How children hear adults talk about identity (or not talk about it) ends up shaping their future perceptions and attitudes.

As students learn about slavery or oppression – sadly, the only place that many children see people who look like them represented in the curriculum – it is important for teachers to ensure that students do not see members of their race cast as weak and docile masses, but rather individuals who often found ways to resist persecution. Mr. Dillon, from our fourth grade example, didn’t realize that Patricia might have asked her question about whether slaves “fought back” with the hopes of exploring and dignifying slaves’ struggle for independence (as opposed to as a criticism). In a different example, from whose perspective is the story of Thanksgiving – or the era of colonization – usually told?

Adolescence. There is no stage more critical to identity formation than adolescence. Starting with the pioneering psychologist Erik Erikson, researchers have explored this phase of human development as the time in which children begin figuring out who they are and the people after whom they would like to model themselves.⁶⁸ When thinking about students of color, then, it is important to dissect the messages that they are receiving about who they can and should become.

First, what are these messages, and where do they come from? Tatum points out that the media soaks children with limited and often negative role models to emulate:

In adolescence, as race becomes personally salient for Black youth, finding the answer to questions such as, “What does it mean to be a young Black person? How should I act? What should I do?” is particularly important. And although Black fathers, mothers, aunts and uncles may hold the answers by offering themselves as role models, they hold little appeal for most adolescents. The last thing many fourteen-year-olds want to do is grow up to be like their parents. It is the peer group, the kids in the cafeteria, who holds the answers to these questions. They know how to be Black. They have absorbed the stereotypical images of Black youth in the popular culture and are reflecting those images in their self-representation.⁶⁹

She contends that, if you were just to watch television, you might think that African-American children only grow up to be teenage welfare mothers, drug addicts, criminals, athletes and rap artists. Students also look around their school and begin to notice certain “environmental cues” that imply differences between races. In racially integrated schools, students may see the racial lines upon which schools with “ability-grouped” classrooms are drawn. They may see that students who look like them are severely under-represented in honors classes and over-represented in special education. They may see that they are not taken seriously when they believe a prejudicial incident has occurred.⁷⁰

How do students interpret these images and messages? You will get a personal account of what this might look like as you read Pedro Noguera’s piece, “How Racial Identity Affects School Performance”

⁶⁸ Erikson, Erik. *Childhood and Society*. New York: Norton, 1993.

⁶⁹ Tatum, Beverly Daniel. “*Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?*” *And Other Conversations About Race*. New York: Basic Books, 1997, pp. 760.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* pp. 56-57.

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from the *Harvard Education Letter*. In it, he describes how his teenage son, Joaquin, grappled with what it meant to become an African-American man. Noguera shows how Joaquin's journey to discover himself represents the struggles of many children of color who attempt to negotiate the personas they believe are expected of them. Ms. Katz may have failed to recognize similar issues with Alex, in our example at the beginning of the chapter.

As Noguera points out in his piece, researchers see a *variety* of responses to the many, often conflicting messages about what it means to be a minority student, and there is scholarly disagreement over the meaning of these responses. As you read, it may be helpful to think about these concepts as coping mechanisms that adolescents of color may use during the "encounter" phase of their racial identity development, in which students begin to understand the existence of racism and fold that understanding into their identity.

For another perspective on the variety of ways that adolescents develop their racial identity, in an excerpt from Beverly Daniel Tatum's chapter, "Critical Issues in Latino, American Indian, and Asian Pacific American Identity Development" (Chapter 8 of *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?*), Tatum explains some ways in which Latino and Native American students seek to develop a racial identity throughout their adolescence in a society where they have been subject to racial and cultural oppression. Tatum focuses on high schoolers from each of these racial/ethnic groups in turn, identifying key issues that those students face when struggling to define themselves and determine what part their racial identity will play in that definition.

Stereotype threat. As you read about briefly in *Teaching As Leadership*, Claude Steele and Joshua Aronson have shown that students perform poorly when they believe that the task they're completing may confirm a negative stereotype about them. African-American students told that a standardized test was measuring their ability performed worse than African-American students told that a test was a "non-evaluative problem-solving task." The mere fact that standardized tests have a history of a racial performance gap, the researchers were able to conclude, negatively affected the African-American students' test-taking strategies; the students second-guessed themselves and worked inefficiently.⁷¹ Aaronson and Salinas have seen similar results with Latino students.⁷²

In a more recent study, Aaronson and Steele were able to induce poor math performance in white male students, who do not normally suffer a societal stereotype in that domain. This study showed that stereotype threat "is a predicament that stems from quite normal responses to the low and demeaning expectations that come to the individual in the form of negative stereotypes."⁷³

While the stereotype threat is not likely to disappear given the negative messages pervasive in our society, you can ensure that your classroom is a place where students are inundated with the images and achievements of people who look like them. Joshua Aronson (one of the psychologists involved in identifying the stereotype threat) and several of his colleagues have also documented the effects of teaching students about the malleable nature of intelligence, which leads students to discard society's messages about their purported deficiencies.⁷⁴ A third important strategy for curbing the effects of the stereotype threat is being clear about your expectations for success on all assignments and tests that you

⁷¹ Steele, C. M. & Aronson, J. "Stereotype threat and the intellectual test performance of African-Americans." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. Vol. 69, No. 5, 1995, pp. 797-811.

⁷² Salinas, M.F. & Aronson, J. *Stereotype Vulnerability, Attributional Ambiguity and Latino Underperformance*. Paper presented at the annual convention of the Western Psychological Association, April 1997.

⁷³ Aronson, Joshua, et al. "When White Men Can't Do Math: Necessary and Sufficient Factors in Stereotype Threat." *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*. Vol. 35, 1999, p. 44.

⁷⁴ <http://www.psychologymatters.org/aronson.html>, accessed 1/31/07.

give. Outlining exactly what students need to do to prepare for an assessment will help show students that it is their effort – rather than some race-based ability quotient – that will determine their score.

Disidentification. A related adolescent response is called “academic disidentification,” in which students who do not experience consistent academic success lose their investment in doing well because, if they were to pin their self-concept on good grades, they would constantly let themselves down. In order to preserve their dignity, they no longer identify academic success as an indicator of their self-worth. Researchers have found that African-American and Latino students disengage more often than their white and Asian counterparts, asserting that students are “disidentifying” from academic success as a defensive mechanism against the stereotype threat.⁷⁵ Tracking students in ossified ability groups, which often leads to rote-based, repetitive instruction, has contributed to disidentification; teachers need to ensure that all students receive an engaging, challenging curriculum and have the opportunity to advance quickly to new material when they have mastered certain objectives. By carefully gauging current performance levels and by matching assignments appropriately to have students experience consistent success while still maintaining high expectations, teachers may be able to counteract this debilitating phenomenon.

Oppositional behavior. According to some scholars, students in the “encounter” phase might also respond to poor treatment by deciding not to engage in the expected work. In his book, *I Won't Learn From You*, Herbert Kohl writes, “To agree to learn from a stranger who does not respect your integrity causes a major loss of self. The only alternative is not to learn and reject the strangers.”⁷⁶ Nilda Flores-Gonzalez synthesizes research from the 1980s and early 1990s on how a profound doubt in the American meritocracy can cause students to shut down:

Proponents of this view argue that students develop identities in opposition to school culture when they believe that high school graduation will not improve their socioeconomic status, and/or the behaviors required from academic achievement are deemed incompatible with their racial/ethnic or class identity. Low achievers are said to have developed a critical consciousness that rejects the false promises of the educational system. These students may have a high regard for education, but they do not believe that it is a means for social mobility. For them, hard work in school does not necessarily translate into success later in life because structural forces such as gender, class, and ethnicity circumscribe one’s opportunities.⁷⁷

So, how does a teacher prevent and reverse this “oppositional culture” in and for his or her students?

Students need support by having someone with whom to talk through concerns and help them see that they are not alone. Educators argue over the extent to which teachers should proactively bring up the ways in which students will face oppression growing up; some believe that children do not need to be reminded of the discrimination they may face in society. But teachers must support their students as they experience anxiety or frustration about bias and privilege in the outside world. Rather than simply telling Horatio Alger stories of people “picking themselves up by their bootstraps,” teachers can lend their ears to students’ frustrations, as well as develop forums and spaces in which students can discuss and ally on these issues together.

⁷⁵ Steele, Claude. “Race and the Schooling of African-American Americans.” *The Atlantic Monthly*. Vol. 269, No. 4, April 1992, pp. 68-78.

⁷⁶ Kohl, Herbert. “I Won't Learn From You: Confronting Student Resistance.” *Rethinking Our Classrooms: Teaching for Equity and Justice*. Milwaukee: Rethinking Our Schools, 1994, p. 134.

⁷⁷ Flores-Gonzalez, Nilda. *School Kids/Street Kids: Identity Development in Latino Students*. New York: Teachers College Pr., 2002, p. 8.

How Racial Identify Affects Performance

In her essay from *Young, Gifted and Black: Promoting High Achievement Among African-American Students*, Theresa Perry notes that success means somehow negotiating the dilemmas that characterize the notion of achievement for many students of color. Perry poses four questions that she believes students must be taught to ask themselves:

How do I commit myself to achieve, to work hard over time in school, if I cannot predict (in school or out of school) when or under what circumstances this hard work will be acknowledged and recognized?

How do I commit myself to do work that is predicated on a belief in the power of the mind, when African-American intellectual inferiority is so much a part of the taken-for-granted notions of the larger society that individuals in and out of school, even good and well-intentioned people, individuals who purport to be acting on my behalf, routinely register doubts about my intellectual competence?

How can I aspire to and work toward excellence when it is unclear whether or when evaluations of my work can or should be taken seriously?

Can I invest in and engage my full personhood, with all of my cultural formations, in my class, my work, my school if my teachers and the adults in the building are both attracted to and repulsed by these cultural formations—the way I walk, the way I use language, my relationship to my body, my physicality and so on?⁷⁸

These questions, Perry argues, require African-American students to summon extra emotional, social and physical strength to remain committed to success. She writes, “The task of achievement requires that you and others believe that the intellectual work that you engage in affirms you as a social being and is compatible with who you are.”⁷⁹

Such strength is difficult to maintain on your own, and students of color may avoid big competitions or gifted programs in which they do not see their peers included. Susan Asiyani '01, now the Philadelphia Institute Director, taught fourth grade math in Newark, New Jersey. She describes what this looked like in her classroom:

One of my students, Aaliyah, was a very bright young girl. She was very strategic in her thinking and her ability to break problems down. Aaliyah was content with doing the minimum to get by because she had always done so. During class discussions, Aaliyah often questioned the use of committing hard work, knowing her background would always be a product that stifled her growth. Knowing that Aaliyah felt this way, I made sure to prove to her that she could actualize her dreams. I forced her to apply for summer programs and competitions. As she began this process, the pressure was on for her to focus and really dedicate time and energy to succeeding. Competing and working with others from different schools and backgrounds was just what Aaliyah needed. This was the first time she felt she could not only keep up, but do just as well as anyone else despite societal conditions and/or community and racial background.

⁷⁸ Perry, Theresa, et al. *Young, Gifted and Black*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2003, p. 4.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* p. 6.

The “acting white” hypothesis. You have already learned about some of the work by John Ogbu, who suggests that some minority students reject academic success because they would be seen as “acting white.” Tatum makes similar conclusions in *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?* Other scholars have shown that successful African-American students deemphasized attributes that would signal their “Blackness” and asserted that race was not an important part of their identity.⁸⁰

While this may be true for some students, more recent studies have suggested that “racial/ethnic minorities do not necessarily associate school success with ‘Whiteness,’ nor are they subjected to peer pressure that leads to not doing well.”⁸¹ Flores-Gonzalez argues that it is not necessary to give up one’s background in order to be academically successful, indicating that students learn to manage both a “school” identity and a “home” identity at once and that these are not contradictory or incompatible.⁸² In a recent critique of the “acting white” hypothesis, the University of Pennsylvania’s Vinay Harpalani pointed to data that showed students who were judged to be in the “pre-encounter” phase of Cross’s racial

I will never forget the time one of my students told me I was the only white person they had met who they liked. It was devastating. Obviously I wanted my students to like me, but not at the exclusion of the rest of my race. We talked about why they felt that way, and I challenged them to think about whether they think they might like my parents or siblings. We talked about why we like people, and why we do not sometimes. We made it a continuing conversation.

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identity development were less academically successful than those shown to have attitudes of the “internalization” stage. This means that students who more strongly associated themselves with positive African-American identity performed better than those who viewed themselves from a Eurocentric frame of reference.⁸³ Scholars have recently made similar arguments for encouraging native Spanish speakers to maintain their home language, rather than simply abandoning it for English.⁸⁴ Native American students, once asked to deny their heritage and adopt the goals and values of Western education, show progress in schools where children are encouraged and shown how to use Native knowledge and language while also pursuing national curriculum standards.⁸⁵

Harvard sociologist Prudence Carter suggests that, while some students of color may not wish to relinquish their own clothing, styles and language, they do not necessarily see their culture or race in opposition to academic success.⁸⁶ In fact, in one national study, scholars found that African-American students had higher aspirations than their white peers.⁸⁷ It may be that adults, looking at students who project an outward appearance that is different from white, middle-class “norms,” come to presume and perpetuate the idea that those students are not interested in success. Ask yourself: Are there certain assumptions you hold about what an intellectually curious student looks or sounds like?

⁸⁰ Fordham, S. “Racelessness as a Factor in Black Students’ School Success: Pragmatic Strategy or Pyrrhic Victory?” *Harvard Educational Review*, Vol. 58, No. 1, 1988, pp. 54-83.

⁸¹ Flores-Gonzalez, Nilda. *School Kids/Street Kids: Identity Development in Latino Students*. New York: Teachers College Pr., 2002, p. 9.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ <http://www.urbanedjournal.org/archive/Issue%201/Commentaries/comment0001.html>, accessed 7/1/2010. For a Miami-specific example refuting the “acting white” hypothesis, see <http://www.fiu.edu/~iei/index/working3.html>, accessed 7/1/2010.

⁸⁴ Nieto, Sonia. *Affirming Diversity*, 4th ed. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2004, pp. 214-216.

⁸⁵ Lipka, Jerry. “Schooling for Self-Determination.” ERIC Digest, EDO-RC-01-12, January 2002.

⁸⁶ <http://www.ksg.harvard.edu/inequality/Seminar/Papers/Carter.pdf>, accessed 7/1/2010.

⁸⁷ Ainsworth-Darnell, James W. and Downey, Douglas B. “Assessing the Oppositional Cultural Explanation for Racial/Ethnic Differences in School Performance.” *American Sociological Review*. Vol. 63, No. 4, August 1998, pp. 536-553.

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Culturally specific challenges. While many of the aforementioned issues may cross racial lines, it is important to highlight that children from different racial groups face stigmas and challenges particular to their own experiences. For example, the “model minority myth,” which lumps Asian Americans together into a single group of super-intelligent, hard-working future scientists and mathematicians, creates unrealistic and limiting expectations and masks the very real problems of gangs, high dropout rates, and the more meaningful patterns of success and struggle apparent when you disaggregate “Asian-Americans” by country of origin. Asian-American children also face the problem of being seen as “perpetual foreigners,” rather than having their long and complex history as contributors to America affirmed in school.

In many immigrant groups, children must come to grips with school’s demands to assimilate (which often reject and demean their native language), while deciding where there is still a place for their own ethnicity. Native Americans, for whom school has a history of being an instrument of forced assimilation, face the additional challenge of a curriculum that often represents their identity as something primitive and museum-like rather than modern and relevant. Native American male adolescents also have a suicide rate that is more than 150 percent higher than the national average.⁸⁸ Many biracial or bicultural students face the challenge of a society that expects them to pick (or places them in) one race or the other, all the while not being fully accepted into either one. Indeed, the existing theories for racial identity development do not fully accommodate individuals of biracial backgrounds, given the complexities and individual circumstances involved.⁸⁹

It is crucial for you to investigate the particular challenges facing students in your school through additional reading, as well as conversations with colleagues and community members.

In first grade, Angel had more character than many of the adults I know. He often manipulated assignments to better highlight his interests. He carefully considered the topics of his journal entries and relentlessly researched new interests in the school library – seeking the supervision of adults who could answer his many questions and the partnership of his classmates to whom he could teach his newfound knowledge. Angel loved to talk – and in these conversations with adults and his peers, his English language fluency rapidly improved. One morning Angel came to school with an uncharacteristic crease across his brow. He greeted me, “Buenos dias maestra,” which was the first of what was to be an entire day of Spanish-only participation. My students often conducted their social conversations in Spanish, but Angel refused to participate in any class discussion that called for English responses. After school I pulled Angel aside to inquire about the shift. With prodding in English and then Spanish, he eventually revealed that he had had a dream that he had forgotten how to speak Spanish. Afraid that his dream would come true and that in turn, he would no longer be able to speak to his mother, he was determined to speak only in Spanish. At the mature age of 7 Angel was aware of the impact that learning academic English could have on his status in his family. At age 7, Angel was frightened to learn what his mother didn’t know.

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Principal, Camino Nuevo Charter Academy

⁸⁸ The Surgeon General’s Call To Action To Prevent Suicide, 1999.

<http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/calltoaction/calltoaction.htm>, accessed 7/1/2010.

⁸⁹ Root, Maria. “The Biracial Baby Boom: Understanding Ecological Constructions of Racial Identity in the 21st Century.” In *Racial and Ethnic Identity in School Practices: Aspects of Human Development*, by Sheers and Hollins, Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum Associates, 1999.

III. Implications for Teachers

You may feel daunted by the section you just read. There are so many forces that complicate the assumptions students of color make about their potential academic success. How can you as a teacher reverse it all?

Before the prospect of these psychological phenomena gets too overwhelming, it's important to start by acknowledging that many things are out of your control. In the next two years, you cannot stop America from pre-judging the abilities of students who we know can absolutely succeed, or Hollywood from perpetuating messages that stereotype our children and shake their confidence in themselves.

But you do control everything that goes on in your classroom. You control how you choose your instructional content and strategies, how you interpret and respond to your students' behaviors, how you communicate your confidence in your students, and how you address your students' own comments and feelings about race when they arise. Here are some initial strategies—that apply both to developing your classroom and to pushing your own thinking—to consider when creating a classroom that conveys that all students can achieve:

- **Scaffold instruction.** By starting with simpler concepts and building up, you can help students build confidence in their abilities by ensuring that you are analyzing assessments and developing instruction that meets students where they are. Students are far more likely to exert effort when they believe that they have a chance to succeed – a belief you can build by helping students experience smaller successes first.
- **Show your students how they can succeed in your classroom.** Be transparent about your criteria for assessments and your grading methods. This way, students can believe that their work in your class will be evaluated based on their effort, not on a race-based perception of their ability.
- **Show your students how they can succeed in the outside world.** Help students learn the steps they need to achieve their dreams. Some may not have the opportunity to take college tours – let alone know words like GRE, LSAT or MCAT, or the processes that go along with college and graduate school admissions. Expose your students to people of different professions, and ask these guests to share how they reached their positions. You'll not only be sharing some valuable strategies, but you'll be demonstrating that you believe they can be successful.
- **Do your research.** Don't know much about history? Deepen your understanding of your students' background and their past. Share what you learn with your students, and not just on Black History or Hispanic Heritage Month, but throughout your curriculum. Highlight the ways in which the past is laden with multicultural stories of intellectual curiosity and resistance through education. You'll be building a counter-narrative to the messages your students may be receiving from other sources. Along those lines, examine the perspective from which your textbooks and school celebrations view historical events. For example, you might challenge the traditional notion that Columbus "discovered" America by noting that indigenous people had lived in this hemisphere for centuries.

Having Community Meetings was the most effective method of researching my students' backgrounds and cultures. Giving the children the opportunity to interact in a respectful, group-building setting allows them to open up. Daily they reveal to me some insight – whether it is a colloquialism of the region and its meaning or their definition of love. During a Community Meeting they always educate me and one another.

Brianna Twofoot, Delta '04
Field Organizer, Maine Civil Liberties Union

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- **Look within.** Perhaps you have a very narrow conception of what a “good student” looks like. Just because students dress or speak in a certain way does not mean that they are not interested in success. Take a hard look at your own preconceived notions – and talk honestly with students – before making judgments about them.
- **Don’t hide from conversations about race.** Instead of saying “if you work hard, you will succeed” to students who communicate a lack of faith in the system, acknowledge the wrongs of the past and point out the ways in which people have resisted and overcome societal stigmas. Truly listen to your students and hear their concerns, without defensiveness. Call in “backup” in the form of community members or recent alumni from your school who can demonstrate the strength and perseverance that they used to be successful. When possible and appropriate, integrate lessons about race, identity and stereotypes into your curriculum. In one example, educator Linda Christensen had her students write poems in the style of Margaret Walker’s “For My People,” to respond to stereotypes head-on. You’ll find an article about Christensen’s “Lesson on Addressing Stereotypes” on pages 3-6 of the **Diversity, Community, & Achievement Toolkit**; this Toolkit can be found online at the Resource Exchange on TFANet. ✖

IV. Conclusion: Building Supportive and Responsive Classrooms

This chapter has argued that, for students of color, racial identity represents a significant aspect of self-perception and self-esteem. This chapter and its accompanying articles aim to give you a broader understanding of the ways in which your students may be thinking about their racial identity – and the impact of their perceptions on their larger sense of self and, as a result, their academic performance.

At several stages of development, the teacher has the opportunity to help students navigate their self-understandings by being supportive and responsive in a number of ways. As a teacher of younger students, you can jumpstart the identity development process by affirming your students and their racial background through positive stories and explanations of human differences. For adolescents, you can counteract the degrading messages that influence students’ self-perceptions, critically examine biased and stereotyped texts, consistently communicate your confidence in your students’ abilities, and celebrate their rich intellectual heritage.

We have also brought up the racial identity development that you yourself may be going through. Depending on your current feelings about your own racial group, you may believe that there is no need to focus on racial-cultural differences. If that is the case, this chapter has hopefully spurred your thinking about the ways in which the psychology of racial identity makes a significant impact on teaching and learning.

Please pause in your reading and read “How Racial Identity Affects School Performance” by Pedro Noguera, which can be accessed by visiting the Pre-Institute Work page on the Institute Info Center within TFANet. Please also read both “The Early Years” and “Critical Issues in Latino, American Indian, and Asian Pacific American Identity Development” by Beverly Daniel Tatum, which are found in the Related Readings section. 📖

“Cultural Learning Styles”: Should Students’ Culture Inform Instructional Choices?

Chapter Seven

- I. “Good Teaching Is Good Teaching” for Whom?
- II. General Principles of “Cultural Learning Styles” for Low-Income and Minority Students
- III. Group-Specific Theories and Their Critique
- IV. Conclusion: Treating Culture with Care

I. “Good Teaching Is Good Teaching” for Whom?

Among teacher educators in this country, there are two conflicting perspectives on the relevance of students’ culture to classroom decision-making. Probably the majority (and more traditional) view stresses that “good teaching is good teaching”—that the methods, strategies, and techniques that good teachers learn and master are equally valuable for students of a variety of cultures. This theory holds that “no special knowledge and skills other than the mainstream, traditional knowledge bases of teacher education are needed to train teachers for classrooms of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.”⁹⁰ The key to serving students of diverse backgrounds, according to this view, is simply vigorous and intense work, using the same techniques as you would with a non-diverse class.

Additional Readings

After this chapter, please read the following selections found on the Institute Info Center within TFANet:

- *Speaking, Relating and Learning: A Study of Hawaiian Children at Home and at School* (abstract) by Steven Bogs, Karen Watson-Gegeo, and G. McMillen
- “An Indian Father’s Plea” by Robert Lake (Medicine Grizzlybear)
- “American Indian/Alaskan Native Learning Styles: Research and Practice” from ERIC Digest by Karen Swisher
- “Culture, Identity, and Learning,” by Sonia Nieto and Patty Bode from *Affirming Diversity: The Sociopolitical Context of Multicultural Education*

A competing perspective, however, argues that what works for White, middle-class students (which, some would argue, represents the conventional canon of teaching methods taught to new teachers) may not necessarily work for less affluent, minority students. This research on “cultural learning styles” (which was in large part originated by African-American scholars in the 70’s and 80’s who were concerned that schools were not meeting the needs of children of color), holds that “there really is a body of special knowledge, skills, processes, and experiences that is different from the knowledge bases of most traditional teacher education programs and that is essential for preparing teachers to be successful with culturally and linguistically diverse student populations.”⁹¹ According to this view, teachers must learn the ways in which students’ cultures impact their learning styles and must study students’ cultural backgrounds because “matching the contextual conditions for learning to the cultural experiences of the learner increases task engagement and hence increases task performance.”⁹²

⁹⁰ Smith, G. Pritchey, *Common Sense about Uncommon Knowledge: The Knowledge Bases for Diversity*. The American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education. 1998. p. 17.

⁹¹ Ibid. p. 18.

⁹² Allen, B. A., & Butler, L. “The effects of music and movement opportunity on the analogical reasoning performance of African American and White school children: A preliminary study.” *Journal of Black Psychology*, 22(3), 1996, p. 317.

“Cultural Learning Styles”

Education scholar Geneva Gay argues that the nexus of cultural influence is a student’s “learning style,” shaping the way children receive and process information most effectively. “[T]eachers must understand cultural characteristics of different ethnic, racial, and social groups so they can develop instructional practices that are more responsive to cultural pluralism. Cultural characteristics of particular significance in this undertaking are communication styles, thinking styles, value systems, socialization processes, relational patterns, and performance styles.”⁹³ Thus, the theory holds, by knowing about a student’s culture, one can make predictions about the student’s receptivity to various styles of teaching.

Note that this perspective does not discard traditional teacher training models altogether. Rather, it holds that those conventional knowledge bases (instructional planning, classroom management, etc.) must be supplemented with additional cultural and social knowledge to most effectively lead students of color.

Proponents of culture’s power to inform instructional choices point to examples of classrooms and schools in which educators have studied students’ cultural norms and then tailored instructional methods to align with those norms. Consider, for example, a well-known study conducted in Hawaii:

One graphic illustration of these effects is the Kamehameha Early Education Program (KEEP). Several researchers have been documenting the effects of this language arts program for young native Hawaiian children. The results have been phenomenal. When the communication, interpersonal, and learning styles of native Hawaiian students were employed in the classroom, both their social and academic skills (including time on task, attention span, quality and quantity of participation, school attendance, reading ability, and language arts skills) improved significantly. Reading test scores increased from the 13th to the 67th percentile in four years.⁹⁴

[For more on studies of native Hawaiian children’s learning styles, and for a more thorough model of this “cultural learning style” reasoning, please read the short abstract *Speaking, Relating and Learning: A Study of Hawaiian Children at Home and at School.*]

For some, the notion that we can generalize about the learning styles of an entire ethnic or racial group is mistaken, if not offensive. Other skeptics of this culture-focused approach do not question the success of the applied teaching methods (for the numbers are unquestionably impressive); rather, they contend that these same methods when applied deliberately in any classroom with any group of students would produce good results. As one researcher labels it, “culturally contextualized instructional variability” (meaning an instructional approach that considers cultural propensities but also greatly varies instructional methods) may hold great promise of academic achievement for both minority and White students.

In this chapter, we will explore both sides of this debate in hopes of giving you the knowledge you need to decide whether “cultural learning styles” will present a net-benefit to your students. We will begin this discussion with a general overview of some of the lessons that theories of “cultural learning styles” claim to teach us. Then we will simultaneously consider (a) some specific guidelines these theories suggests for teaching African-American, Latino, and Native American students and (b) some common critiques of the idea that different ethnic and cultural groups have different “cultural learning styles.” Finally, we still step back and discuss the implications of this debate for your classroom.

⁹³ Gay, Geneva. *At the Essence of Learning: Multicultural Education*. West Lafayette, IN: Kappa Delta Pi, 1994, p. 2.

⁹⁴ Smith, G. Pritch, *Common Sense about Uncommon Knowledge: The Knowledge Bases for Diversity*. The American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 1998, p. 19.

II. General Principles of “Cultural Learning Styles” for Low-Income and Minority Students

Setting aside for the moment the scholarly and practical disagreements about whether or not a teacher should consider a student’s culture, race, ethnicity, or gender in his or her instructional planning, let us briefly survey the lessons purportedly learned by the multicultural education researchers about how to most effectively teach students of color or low-income students. What techniques or strategies are reported to be more effective with our students than with middle-class, White students?

One general finding of this research has been that minority students (which in most studies include African-American or Latino students) generally do not respond as well to traditional lecture formats as do middle-class White students. As one reviewer put it, “[I]f research has shown anything at all, it has shown that dull didactic instruction consisting only of teacher talk and seatwork is not effective with most minority students.”⁹⁶ Such findings counsel teachers of students of color to use more interactive methods than lectures and worksheets.

Cooperative learning is often cited as an excellent alternative to “dull didactic instruction” for minority and low-income students:

Cooperative learning leads to more positive racial attitudes for all students, more interracial friendship choices, and academic gains for students of color (especially Hispanics and African-Americans). It has no apparent effects on the academic achievement of Anglo students, since they perform about the same in cooperative and competitive learning environments. Cooperative, cross-racial learning also increases student instruction, self-esteem, and ability to empathize.⁹⁷

Are Teachers Who Share Their Students’ Race or Ethnicity More Effective?

One possible implication of the “cultural learning style” perspective is that teachers who share their students’ culture are more effective. Although a teacher who shares his or her students’ culture may more quickly understand and appreciate that culture, our experience over the years working with diverse groups of new teachers has demonstrated that teachers who do not share their students’ culture certainly have the ability to appreciate and engage with that culture in ways that are beneficial to their students’ learning. As one researcher explained, “White teachers are more likely than Black teachers to be out of cultural sync with the Black students they teach. These conclusions do not ignore the fact that some White teachers are excellent teachers of Black children or that some Black teachers are ineffective with Black children...”⁹⁵ We also believe that there are other factors at play that make teacher diversity important. Students should, for example, have educated and responsible role models who share their racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds; such role models can serve as an important source of motivation for students. At the same time, students need to have role models who are diverse in every respect—race, class, gender, religion, age, sexual orientation, and other forms of diversity—for this exposure will help break down students’ assumptions about people from different backgrounds. Thus, while we believe that this country needs more teachers who represent the identities of minority and low-income students, we are confident—given the fact that in our experience at Teach For America we have seen teachers of all different backgrounds with students of all different backgrounds make dramatic academic gains—that one does not have to share the same race, class, gender, or orientation identity as one’s students to successfully lead students to dramatic academic gains.

A related strand of research has found that “cross-age peer teaching and role modeling are effective strategies that are significant factors in the lives of minority students who have overcome the odds to

⁹⁵ Irvine, Jacqueline Jordan. *Black Students and School Failure: Policies, Practice, and Prescriptions*. Oxford: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1990, p. 61.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.* p. 60

⁹⁷ Gay, Geneva. “A Synthesis of Scholarship in Multicultural Education,” North Central Regional Educational Library, p. 18. Available online at <http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/educatrs/leadrshp/le0qay.htm>, accessed 7/1/2010.

“Cultural Learning Styles”

become successful academic achievers.”⁹⁸ (Below, we will consider more specifically the reasons researchers believe these techniques are more effective.)

As mentioned above, a primary critique of this line of reasoning is not that these techniques are ineffective, but that it is wrong to think of them as effective with only one subset of students. In fact, especially when we consider teaching techniques for a group as ill-defined as “minority” or “low-income,” some of the same scholars who develop these ideas assert that “much of the present research indicates that effective strategies for minority students—except for the deadly combination of didactic teacher talk (lecturing, asking simple questions, and giving instructions) and pencil-paper seatwork—are also effective strategies for most White middle class students.”⁹⁹

III. Group-Specific Theories and Their Critique

More targeted suggestions for teachers come from research that focuses on a more distinct cultural group (than the catch-all notion of “minority” or “low-income” students). African-American and Latino students in particular have been the subjects of many studies looking for a connection between culture and learning style, and a number of studies have claimed to have discovered that certain teaching methods are particularly effective with those groups.

While these studies take many forms and are conducted in many contexts, they are similar in their attempts to (a) identify meaningful commonalities in a given cultural group and (b) discern the impacts of those commonalities on how members of that group best learn. They also have in common some degree of controversy; some scholars vehemently deny that the concept of “cultural learning styles” has any meaning to educators.

Consider, for example, some of the reported findings on the best ways to teach African-American students.¹⁰⁰ We are told that “Many African-American students “tune in” more in a classroom that encourages interpersonal interaction, multiple activities, and multiple modality preferences than in quiet classrooms in which students are supposed to pay attention to tasks more than sound, and only one thing at a time (Shade, 1989).”¹⁰¹ Shade distinguishes between two different cognitive styles: analytical and synergetic. Her primary thesis is that schools are designed for an “analytical style” of learning while most African-American students (and she extrapolates to minority students including Latino or Native American) students tend to function in a “synergetic style:”

Analytical learners are competitive and independent, and they focus well on impersonal tasks. They learn well through print, focus best on one task at a time, and work in a step-by-step sequence. Synergetic learners, on the other hand, prefer to work cooperatively rather than independently; they do not block out their peers, but rather attempt to integrate personal relationships into learning tasks. Synergetic learners are stimulated by multiple activities and become bored when only one thing is happening. They often prefer kinesthetic and tactile involvement as well as discussion.¹⁰²

⁹⁸ Smith, G. Pritchey, *Common Sense about Uncommon Knowledge: The Knowledge Bases for Diversity*. The American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 1998, p. 66.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* p. 61.

¹⁰⁰ Of course, not all Black students are “African-American.” Consider, for example, the degree to which West Indians and other immigrants from the Caribbean should or should not be lumped together with these generalizations.

¹⁰¹ Sleeter, Christine and Grant, Carl. *Making Choices for Multicultural Education: Five Approaches to Race, Class, and Gender*. New York: Wiley Text Books, 2002, p. 66.

¹⁰² *Ibid.* p. 55.

Native American “Cultural Learning Styles”?

As with African-American and Latino students, some would say that the notion of any common “Native American culture” is a fallacy given all of the rich, independent cultures represented in that group. And yet, a considerable body of research does claim that its results can be extrapolated from the particular tribal group studied to Native Americans generally. Some of the seminal research, moreover, has focused more on the *inappropriateness* of conventional teaching strategies for Native American children, rather than the particular teaching methods that are uniquely suited for Native Americans.

For her 1983 work, *The Invisible Culture*, researcher Susan Urmstrom Philips studied Native American children in Warm Springs, Oregon and observed that they generally hesitated to participate in large- and small-group recitations. On the other hand, they were more talkative than non-Indian children when they started interactions with the teacher or worked on student-led group projects. According to Philips, those “learning styles” were directly linked to a set of cultural norms that includes observation, careful listening, supervised participation, and individualized self-correction or testing.¹⁰⁵ A similar description of cultural patterns had been previously reported by other researchers studying classrooms attended by Sioux and Cherokee children.

Some scholars have latched on to “whole language” instruction as particularly aligned with traditional Native American culture, on the grounds that it is “compatible with the style of Native American children because whole language emphasizes meaning and process over product, uses cooperative work, capitalizes on oral language, and integrates subject areas. These features are compatible with Native American students’ preference for communal learning and personal meaning, use of time, and holistic world view (Kasten, 1992).”¹⁰⁶ For a brief overview of some of that research, please read “American Indian/Alaskan Native Learning Styles: Research and Practice” from ERIC Digest by Karen Swisher. In addition, read “An Indian Father’s Plea” by Robert Lake (Medicine Grizzlybear).

Similar findings are suggested for Latino students. Teachers are advised to create heterogeneous (rather than homogenous) learning groups on the theory that such methods can help their Latino students feel valued and feel that social pressures have been lifted, leading them to perform better.¹⁰³ This type of grouping should be utilized often, the theory goes, as Latino culture places an emphasis on cooperation rather than competition when working towards the attainment of goals.¹⁰⁴

As just mentioned, not all educators are bought into, or comfortable with, this line of research. For a number of reasons, some teachers and scholars bristle at the notion that Black, or Latino, or Native American students need different forms of instruction to succeed.

First, as mentioned before, many educators look at these lists of teaching methods and, instead of seeing a list of strategies tailored to a particular group, they see a list of strategies that all teachers in all classrooms, no matter what the cultural make up of the class, would benefit from.

Second, many educators and scholars would argue (and some researchers have reported) that this whole line of reasoning is shaky because of the great variation in “culture” within these supposedly culturally-defined groups. In fact, some commentators go so far as to argue that

over-zealous attempts at “cultural learning styles” amount to cultural bias themselves:

Instructional materials frequently reflect cultural bias through one size fits all generalization, by implying that there is a single Hispanic, African, Asian, and Native culture. This view fails to recognize that considerable cultural diversity exists within each of these groups and that even within a cultural subgroup, culture changes over time [Escamilla, 1993].¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ Trueba, Enrique T. and Lilia Bartolome. “The Education of Latino Students: Is School Reform Enough?” *ERIC Digest*, No. 123, July 1997. (ED 410 367)

¹⁰⁴ Griggs, Shirley and Rita Dunn. “Hispanic-American Students and Learning Style.” *ERIC Digest*, May 1996. (ED 393 607)

¹⁰⁵ Philips, S. *The Invisible Culture*. New York: Longman Press, 1983.

¹⁰⁶ Sleeter, Christine and Grant, Carl. *Making Choices for Multicultural Education; Five Approaches to Race, Class, and Gender*. New York: Wiley Text Books, 2002, p. 66.

¹⁰⁷ Abdal-Haqq, Ismat, “Culturally Responsive Curriculum.” *ERIC Digest*, June 1994. (ED 370 936)

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Is there enough of a generalized “African-American culture” to inform instruction? Are there enough common characteristics of Latino or Hispanic students to justify attempts to make generalities about how to teach these students? Or, is this research at its foundation a disrespectful and misguided attempt to lump together many distinct, rich, independent cultures into one, or to over-generalize about individuals within a group, when the differences among individuals within a group may exceed those among groups? One team of researchers who studied the education-related activities of four ethnic groups in Boston (Puerto Ricans, African-Americans, Chinese Americans, and Irish Americans) felt compelled to begin the summary of their research with the caveat that “[d]ifferences within racial or ethnic groups may be greater than differences between them on all of these family factors, including support for their children’s education, use of extended families and community networks, and involvement in schools.”¹⁰⁹

Finally, other teachers and scholars are dissatisfied with this “cultural learning style” approach to teaching because they see its process and results lending themselves to racially and culturally divisive thinking. As one commentator argues, there may be limitations and dangers to the culture-focused approach:

The dangers come from the likelihood that such knowledge will contribute only stereotyped categories and labels that then become barriers to understanding the behavior of a particular child working on a particular school task, and contribute to lowered expectations about that child’s possible achievement.¹¹⁰

Some academics and educators go so far as to consider these attempts to discern education-meaningful commonalities to be dangerously close to traditional racism. School Psychology professor Craig Frisby, for example, in his article “One Giant Step Backward: Myths of Black Cultural Learning Styles,” surveys all of the “learning characteristics” of Black children that various researchers have claimed to find in their research. Frisby argues that in addition to relatively neutral learning characteristics (i.e., “prefers cooperative learning situations”), that list is rife with negative stereotypes of Black children, (i.e., “behaviors appear impulsive” and “not motivated by achievement related goals”) that actually only perpetuate damaging lowered expectations. To make his point that this is little more than *nouveaux-*

Theories on Teaching Girls and Boys

While gender has not been our focus in this chapter, it is worth noting that in addition to these studies on how students of different racial and ethnic groups best learn, there are also instructional strategies that are supposedly more appropriate/effective with girls than boys, and vice versa. For example, some research indicates that boys may be more interested in objects and things while girls tend to focus on people and relationships; some teachers use these basic tenets to drive instructional decisions or to allow for differentiation of a lesson based on gender to ensure that boys and girls are both able to access the information. One study by Dr. Michael Gurian, author of *Boys and Girls Learn Differently*, suggested that teachers may want to take care to ensure girls have a variety of leadership roles in the classroom during learning activities. Also, since girls tend to express their emotions with words rather than actions, they could benefit from more writing assignments or opportunities throughout all subjects. Of course, not every researcher in the areas of education or child development agrees that it is necessary to teach boys and girls in different ways; some have found that it can do more harm than good to girls if educators continue to expect of them what society has, and that teaching to gender stereotypes can only serve to reinforce them.¹⁰⁸

For more information on the differences in learning styles between girls and boys, please see the **Diversity, Community, & Achievement Toolkit** (p. 7: “Resources for Gender Equity in the Classroom”); this Toolkit can be found online at the Resource Exchange on TFANet. ✖

¹⁰⁸ From “Parenting Debates” section of Parent Soup website. <http://parenting.ivillage.com/>, accessed 7/1/2010.

¹⁰⁹ Hidalgo, Nitza m. et al., “Research on Families, Schools and Communities: A Multicultural Perspective.” Published in Banks, James A. and Cherry Banks (eds.) *Handbook of Research on Multicultural Education*. New York: MacMillan, 1995, p. 498.

¹¹⁰ Cazden, C. B., and Mehan, H. “Principles from sociology and anthropology: Context, code, classroom, and culture.” In M.C. Reynolds (Ed.). *Knowledge Base for the Beginning Teacher*. New York: Pergamon, 1989, pp. 54-55.

racism, Frisby puts side-by-side two quotes: one from a modern day proponent of the notion of a Black cultural learning style and one from a nineteenth century, overtly racist education commentator. To Frisby, the juxtaposition of these two (arguably similar) perspectives makes his point that this line of thinking will do more harm than good for students:

To characterize Afro-Americans as culturally different from Euro-Americans is not graphic enough. To the extent that the Black experience reflects a traditional West African cultural ethos, the two frames of reference are noncommensurable. There are fundamental incompatibilities between them: they are not quite polar opposites, but they are almost dialectically related. . . . This incommensurability makes it difficult to put Black cultural reality in the service of attainment in Euro-American cultural institutions, such as schools. The ideology that informs those institutes is a profound negation of the most central attributes of African culture.

From Boykin, A.W.

“The triple quandary and the schooling of Afro-American children.”

In U. Neisser (ed.) *The school achievement of minority children: new perspectives*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1986, pp. 57-92.

The ground of distinction . . . is one of races, not of colors, merely. The distinction is one which the All-wise creator has seen fit to establish and it is founded deep in the physical, mental and moral natures of the two races. No legislation, no social customs, can efface this distinction. . . We maintain that the true interests of both races require that they should be kept distinct. Amalgamation is degradation. We would urge our brethren of the African race, the duty of cultivating the genuine virtues peculiar to that race.

From Crowell, W., Ingraham, J.W., & Kimball, D. “Extracts from the majority report on the caste schools.” *The Liberator*, Vol. 16, No. 34, 1846.

Thus, to some scholars and educators, the downsides of attempting to discern universal cultural generalizations about certain racial or ethnic groups are simply not worth the risk of perpetuating negative stereotypes. These individuals believe that “[I]t is high time that BCLS (Black cultural learning style) models be laid to rest. Failure to do so may result in the realization that, instead of making significant steps forward, we have indeed made one giant step backward.”¹¹¹

IV. Conclusion: Treating Culture with Care

What are your reactions to these criticisms? Given the benefits and risks of utilizing cultural learning styles, what approach do you think you will take? To what degree, if any, will you tailor your teaching methods based on generalizations you make about how African-American, or Latino, or Native American students best learn? We encourage you to engage in discussions of these complex questions this summer with your instructors and co-workers.

As you have heard repeatedly in these various training texts, excellent teachers get to know their students. Knowing your students’ cultures and backgrounds, individually and collectively, is an important part of that process, and getting to know your students as individuals is, ultimately, the most effective

¹¹¹ Frisby, C.L. “One giant step backward: Myths of Black cultural learning styles.” *School Psychology Review*, Vol. 22, 1993, pp. 535-557.

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means of adjusting your methods to maximize each student’s learning. The degree to which “cultural learning styles” are a part of that calculation is a difficult question that you must continue to explore in your teaching practice.

To provide you with an additional perspective on the complexities of this issue, please read an excerpt of the book, *Affirming Diversity: The Sociopolitical Context of Multicultural Education*. This chapter, titled “Culture, Identity, and Learning,” focuses on the dangers of *not* appreciating students’ culture, race, or ethnicity in the classroom. Nieto encourages teachers to reject the “color-blind” mentality that ignores students’ culture. And, on the complex question of instructional decision-making, Nieto comes down squarely on the side of using one’s knowledge of students’ culture to affect instructional planning and delivery. For Nieto, this issue is closely related to the notion of differentiation: like any good teacher who differentiates a classroom based on multiple intelligences or different learning modalities, Nieto argues those practices can be applicable to cultural differences, if a teacher keeps in mind the all-important individual differences among students.

As you consider this chapter and Nieto’s perspective, think about what you already know and do not know about the culture and background of the students whom you will be teaching. How will you improve that knowledge? In what ways, if at all, can you imagine using it to improve your effectiveness as a teacher?

Once again, please stop at this point to read four short selections or articles, which have all been mentioned throughout what you just read: Abstract of *Speaking, Relating, and Learning: A Study of Hawaiian Children at Home and at School* by Boggs, Watson-Gegeo, and McMillen; “An Indian Father’s Plea” by Robert Lake; “American Indian/Alaskan Native Learning Styles” by Swisher; and “Culture, Identity, and Learning” by Nieto and Bode. These selections can be accessed by visiting the Pre-Institute Work page on the Institute Info Center within TFANet. 

Multicultural Education

Chapter Eight

- I. What Is “Multicultural Education”?
- II. “But Can They Do Math?”—Multicultural and Equitable Education
- III. So What Does “Multicultural Education” Mean in My Classroom
- IV. Conclusion

Thus far, we have discussed several of the important “knowledge bases” that teachers must develop in order to harness the potential of diversity as a path to student achievement. After the introduction to “dynamics of difference and sameness” in Chapter Four, we explored in Chapter Five the importance of learning about one’s self—one’s own biases and privileges—as a means of maintaining high expectations for our students. In Chapter Six, we considered students’ and teachers’ racial identity development, and in the last chapter we considered the lessons suggested by, and debate surrounding, the idea that students’ cultures should influence a teacher’s instructional methods.

Additional Readings

Along with this chapter, please take a few minutes to read the following selection found on the Institute Info Center within TFANet:

- “Profoundly Multicultural Questions” by Sonia Nieto, from *Educational Leadership*, Vol. 60 No. 4, December 2002/ January 2003, pp 6-10

In this chapter, we step back to approach the practice of “multicultural education” more broadly. Over the past several decades, a body of knowledge and teaching methods that falls under that heading has developed—a body of knowledge that is meant to improve teachers’ abilities to lead their students to academic success and personal growth. Next, we will consider what is meant by “multicultural education” and explore some of the specific ways that teachers can implement its principles in the classroom.

I. What Is “Multicultural Education”?

In the most general sense, multicultural education is an approach to teaching that values diversity in the classroom—diversity in content, methods, perspectives, educators, students, and cultures. Being a multicultural educator means embracing your students’ and others’ cultural diversity as a means of nurturing your students’ academic and personal growth.

Of course, within this broad framework, “[m]ulticultural education means different things to different people”¹¹² (and it is worth noting that we will be able to explore only a small slice of that complex network of meanings here). Given its broad definitions, teachers implement “multicultural education” in a variety of ways:

Some definitions rely on the cultural characteristics of diverse groups, while others emphasize social problems (particularly those associated with oppression), political power, and the reallocation of economic resources. Some restrict their focus to people of color, while others include all major groups that are different in any way from mainstream Americans. Other definitions limit multicultural education to characteristics

¹¹² Gay, Geneva. “A Synthesis of Scholarship in Multicultural Education.” North Central Regional Educational Laboratory. Urban Educatino Program, 1994. <http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/educatrs/leadrshp/le0gay.htm>, accessed 7/10/2010.

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of local schools, and still others provide directions for school reform in all settings regardless of their characteristics.¹¹³

Some of the Defining Motivations of Multicultural Education. Perhaps the most meaningful way to come to grips with the rather expansive scope of approaches and practices that make up the notion of “multicultural education” is to consider some of the various reasons that educators incorporate those approaches into their classrooms. While we will save the most important motivation—increasing instructional effectiveness—for last, here we will briefly review some of other the reasons that teachers incorporate multicultural education into their classroom. Education expert Geneva Gay, in her survey of research on and the parameters of multicultural education called “A Synthesis of Scholarship in Multicultural Education,” helpfully delineates various purposes of multicultural education as follows:

Developing Ethnic and Cultural Literacy. In some cases, exploring and engaging diverse cultures is valued for the content of that knowledge. As Gay explains, in this way, students “learn about the historical backgrounds, languages, cultural characteristics, contributions, critical events, significant individuals, and social, political, and economic conditions of various majority and minority ethnic groups,” including those that may have traditionally been excluded from texts and lessons.

Personal Development. Another value of multicultural education is that—especially when those otherwise-underrepresented groups are brought into texts and lessons—students are offered more opportunity to see positive representations of aspects of themselves, leading students to “greater self-understanding, positive self-concepts, and pride in one’s ethnic identity.” Educators stress that these personal development benefits directly translate to academic achievement benefits as students are more inclined to be motivated to work hard and succeed.

Attitudes and Value Clarification. Another intention of multicultural education is to better prepare students for living in a diverse community. For this purpose, the “intent is to teach youths to respect and embrace ethnic pluralism, to realize that cultural differences are not synonymous with deficiencies or inferiorities, and to recognize that diversity is an integral part of the human condition and U.S. life.”

Multicultural Social Competence. Closely related to the previous purpose, another sub-intention of multicultural education is to teach students concrete techniques for interacting with people who are different from themselves. This idea extrapolates to a whole range of important academic and analytical skills and is achieved “by teaching skills in cross cultural communication, interpersonal relations, perspective taking, contextual analysis, understanding alternative points of view and frames of reference, and analyzing how cultural conditions affect values, attitudes, beliefs, preferences, expectations, and behaviors.”

In addition to these classroom motivations for multicultural education, many educators and scholars point to extra-classroom purposes, including the broader quest for educational equity and excellence and personal empowerment for social reform. These “social change” motivations focus on the long-term impact of developing students who will, through their lives, help to improve society by eradicating such social ills as racism, sexism and classism. Such teachers see themselves as those engaged “in the ongoing struggle to advance social justice for the various groups who fail to get their adequate share of resources and decision-making power in the larger society.”¹¹⁴

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Montecions, Carmen and Francisco A. Rios. “Assessing Preservice Teachers’ Zones of Concern and Comfort in Multicultural Education.” *Teacher Education Quarterly*, Summer 1999, Vol. 26, No. 3.

As mentioned previously, while all of these various motivations for multicultural education are important to understanding what it is and why it is important, the ultimate purpose of multicultural education explains why we stress its methods to new corps members—multicultural education can be a means of increasing your effectiveness as an instructional leader in your classroom.

The Bottom Line—Multicultural Education Drives Student Growth and Achievement. By engaging and appreciating diverse cultures and perspectives in the classroom, teachers broaden the menu of possible connections to students that can be leveraged into greater, more efficient teaching and learning. For example, cultural learning styles (as discussed in Chapter Seven) may be considered a component of multicultural education, and its proponents claim that teachers are more effective when they align their methods with the learning propensities of his or her students' cultures. Moreover, by creating an atmosphere of achievement that is inclusive of all cultures and perspectives, a teacher helps students overcome some of the challenges to hard work and learning (lack of motivation, low expectations, low self-esteem) that may hold them back. As Gay explains,

Multicultural education can improve mastery of reading, writing, and mathematical skills; subject matter content; and intellectual process skills such as problem solving, critical thinking, and conflict resolution by providing content and techniques that are more meaningful to the lives and frames of reference of ethnically different students. Using ethnic materials, experiences, and examples as the contexts for teaching, practicing, and demonstrating mastery of academic and subject matter skills increases the appeal of the tools of instruction, heightens the practical relevance of the skills to be learned, and improves students' time on task. This combination of conditions leads to greater focused efforts, task persistence, skill mastery, and academic achievement (Cazden, John, & Hymes, 1985; Garcia, 1982; Boggs, WatsonGrege, & McMillen, 1985).¹¹⁵

There is a growing body of evidence that directly links multicultural education to improved teacher effectiveness and student achievement.¹¹⁶ One study, for example, found favorable results in a pre-school program that integrated material on African American culture throughout the curriculum.¹¹⁷ Another found that elements of African and other cultural traditions were useful for teaching complex math concepts to urban children.¹¹⁸ Another researcher looked at three elementary programs for Hispanic children who were not English-proficient, and discovered that the math, reading, and language scores of students in bilingual and multi-culturally-integrated English As a Second Language (ESL) programs were significantly superior to scores of students enrolled in bilingual ESL without the multicultural integration.¹¹⁹ (Note that these approaches are somewhat different from the "cultural learning style" approaches debated in the previous chapter; here the focus is on culturally diverse and representative materials as springboards for learning, rather than on students' learning styles.)

In addition to the direct applicability of diverse cultures to the instructional process as described in these studies, research suggests that multicultural education leads to greater learning because it creates a more comfortable, inclusive, supportive environment where students feel validated, and where their race, ethnicity, gender and other identities are respected and valued. Students are said to be better positioned to take the academic risks necessary for intensive learning.

¹¹⁵ Gay, Geneva. "A Synthesis of Scholarship in Multicultural Education." North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, p. 13.

¹¹⁶ Web, Michael. "Multicultural Education in Elementary and Secondary Schools." ERIC Digest, Number 67. (ED 327 813) Available online at <http://www.ericdigests.org/pre-9218/secondary.htm>, accessed 7/1/2010.

¹¹⁷ Hale-Benson, J. "Visions for children: African American early childhood education program." ERIC Digest, 1989. (ED 270 235)

¹¹⁸ Zaslavsky, C. "Integrating mathematics with the study of cultural traditions." Paper presented to the 6th Annual International Conference on Mathematical Education, Budapest, Hungary: July 1988. (ED 303 540)

¹¹⁹ Fulton-Scott, M. "Bilingual multicultural education vs. integrated and non-integrated ESL instruction." *NAME Journal*, Vol. 11, No. 3, 1983, pp. 1-12.

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II. “But Can They Do Math?”—Multicultural and Equitable Education

This core purpose of multicultural education—to improve students’ learning and teachers’ instruction—highlights a certain tension in the implementation of multicultural methods. As important as it is to incorporate multicultural education into your classroom, you must do so not at the *expense* of other areas of learning, but rather for the *benefit* of those other areas of learning.

As you contemplate your own approach to multicultural education in your classroom, an important principle to remember is that multicultural education—like this diversity text—is ultimately a means to the end of academic achievement. Thus, as the instructional leader of your classroom, you must try to take advantage of synergies between multicultural education methods and your students’ needs for intense instruction in academic skills.

Consider the repercussions if this balance is unsettled. On the one hand, a teacher who views multicultural education as the ultimate goal of his or her classroom might end the year with self-confident, culturally aware students who cannot read. On the other hand, a teacher who ignores the strategies and benefits of multicultural education altogether could easily end the year not reaching the students’ reading goals because students have not become as invested in the goals themselves as they would have if the classroom had more inclusive.

Along with this chapter, you are asked to read an essay called “Profoundly Multicultural Questions,” by Sonia Nieto, one of the country’s leading thinkers on and proponents of multicultural education. Nieto ponders the need for multicultural education that complements rather than replaces rigorous, effective teaching of basic academic skills, while contemplating the all-important question posed by one of her friends who had observed an innovative multicultural program: “But can they do math?”

As you read Nieto’s essay, think about this question yourself. If you are one who thinks you may tend toward an emphasis on multicultural education to the exclusion of basic academic skills, how will you check that tendency in order to assure that you are using multicultural education techniques to *reach*, not replace, your academic goals? If you are one who may naturally tend to focus on academic skills to the exclusion of diverse materials and perspectives, how will you ensure that you are reaping the education benefits of multicultural education for your students? How will you ensure the right integration of academic skills and valuing diversity so that your students can, in fact, “do math?”

The language my students speak is vital and valuable part of who they are, where they come from, and what makes the Mississippi Delta unique. But the reality of life is that the language they speak is not the language that gives them access to power. As my student Ken pointed out, “If this test was in my language, I’d get a 100.” And he’s probably right. But I know and my students know that power is controlled by those who can speak ‘formal’ English. My students, colleagues, and I make a point of speaking only ‘formal’ English in the classroom and in the office. Our reading is more varied. We read authors who speak in a very similar style to my students and also those who speak in a more ‘formal’ manner. We talk very candidly about using the right language at the right time. The longer I’ve lived in the Delta, the more local language I’ve been able to pick up. Frequently, in the cafeteria or on the streets I impress my students with words I’ve learned from them. But most of all, I make sure that they know that the language they speak at home is not bad, wrong, or incorrect. My students’ language holds a rich history and they need to know that.

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III. So What Does “Multicultural Education” Mean in My Classroom?

Each of us could probably quickly brainstorm a whole list of somewhat atomized ways to annex multicultural methods into our classroom practices—we could collect and use articles from newspapers and magazines that deal with one or more groups, make maps showing origins of various groups, maintain a multicultural calendar, learn songs in different languages, and incorporate articles and texts from diverse authors, to name a few.¹²⁰ But how does a teacher systemically create a classroom that values diversity and that benefits at all levels from the incorporation of multicultural education?

The fact is that translating the various definitions and motivations for multicultural education into actual practices and behaviors in your classroom takes considerable planning and work. And as mentioned above, we believe that each new teacher must develop his or her own approach to these issues based on the unique circumstances of his or her background, classroom, school, and community. That being said, there are five general methods for implementing multicultural education that teachers should consider:

- (1) Recognize and appreciate the particular cultures and backgrounds represented in your classroom through you and your students.
- (2) Make recognition and appreciation of diverse background, cultures, and perspectives (including those not represented by you or your students) a constant theme of your classroom.
- (3) Consider the potential insights of research on the “cultural learning style” of your students.
- (4) Teach and model norms of positive, inclusive interactions among members of the class.
- (5) Evaluate materials for their inclusiveness and cultural relevance.

Below, we’ll expound on each of these aspects of multicultural education in turn.

METHOD #1: Recognize and appreciate the particular cultures and backgrounds represented in your classroom by you and your students. One of your charges as the instructional leader of your classroom is to enter an ongoing process of learning about the backgrounds and cultures of the students you are teaching. As you do, you will inevitably encounter in your instructional planning various means of highlighting or celebrating those backgrounds and cultures represented in your classroom. These means might be as simple as building a classroom library that includes books involving the cultures, backgrounds and identities represented by your second graders, or constantly collecting and periodically sharing news articles about the impacts of medical and biological research on the communities where your tenth graders live.

While a teacher should be careful to avoid a superficial “heroes and holidays” approach to multicultural education, there is considerable benefit to a well-developed strategy for consistently highlighting the contributions of individuals with whom students identify. Consider, for example, the following discussion of the benefits and means of highlighting African-American contributors for African-American students:

Chronicling the accomplishments of African-Americans in the classroom provides encouragement and motivation for students (Diller 1999; Chandler 1995). Scientists such as the laser physicists and astronaut Ronald McNair, the chemist Percy Lavon Julian, and the physician and astronaut Mae Jemison demonstrate to students that Blacks can excel in science, have done so in the past, and are doing so in the present. There are examples of Black doctors including Charles Drew, who discovered the importance of the use of blood plasma in transfusions, Daniel Hale Williams, who performed the first successful

¹²⁰ Hylton, V.W. and Dummet, L. *Multiethnic/multicultural materials*. Richmond, VA: Virginia State Department of Education, Division of Technical Assistance for Equity in Education, 1986. (ED 272 440)

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heart operation; and David Satcher, a genetics researcher who [served] as the Surgeon General for the United States. The lives of these phenomenal African-Americans can empower Black youth by demonstrating that they too have the option to choose a career in medicine. Inventors such as Lewis Latimer, who designed the carbon filament for light bulbs, and Jan Matzeliger, who designed a shoe-lacing machine, have added to the quality of U.S. life, but few students know this. These role models are important to all students, especially to those who live in economically depressed neighborhoods where academics compete with hopelessness, gang activity, and overemphasis on athletic and entertainment careers.¹²¹

Of course, any time a teacher is considering adding materials and methods to the curriculum, a tension arises regarding how to best synthesize the traditional “canon” of materials (whatever that may include) and the more diverse collection of materials, texts, and perspectives. At a fundamental level, a teacher must find a balance between the urge to build on and validate the students’ background and culture, and preparing students to live in a world where their background and culture may not be the dominant one. As multicultural education scholar Marilyn Cochran-Smith explains, “children need to know something about the ‘canon’ of history and literature and how and when to utilize the conventions of standard English, but they also need to see their own experiences reflected in novels and history books...How to do both...is, I would venture, a life-long theme for many teachers and teacher educators.”¹²²

METHOD #2: Recognize and appreciate diverse backgrounds, cultures, and perspectives (including those not represented by the individuals in your classroom). The most effective classrooms not only highlight those backgrounds and cultures that are represented in the classroom, but also—to some degree—recognize and appreciate other backgrounds and cultures that may be new and unfamiliar to the students. Many cultures and backgrounds are brought to students from outside the classroom to students through strategic choices of books, materials, and lessons. The process of exploring and engaging different backgrounds and cultures is in and of itself a valued learning experience that can offer many synergies to accelerate students’ learning.¹²³

The best way to understand your students’ backgrounds and cultures is to take as many opportunities as possible to interact with the community, and to approach those opportunities with humility, respect, and an eagerness to learn. Get to know the people in and around your school: janitors, secretaries, crossing guards, local librarians, park administrators, clerics, businesspeople. Form relationships. Ask them questions about the neighborhood, its history, their experiences. Understanding the way your kids understand their community will allow you to make more effective connections between academic concepts and students’ lives outside of school.

Andrew Clark, Chicago ‘02
Associate Regional Planner, Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning

¹²¹ Teixeira, Mary Thierry, and Pamela Merchant Christian. “And Still They Rise: Practice Advice for Increasing African American Enrollments in Higher Education.” *Educational HORIZONS*, Spring 2002, p. 122.

¹²² Cochran-Smith, Marilyn. “Uncertain Allies: Understanding the Boundaries of Race and Teaching.” *Harvard Education Review*, Vol., 65, No. 4., Winter 1995, p. 13.

¹²³ For great ideas regarding a number of multicultural lesson plans for all grades and subject areas, visit www.RethinkingSchools.org.

METHOD #3: Consider and benefit from the potential insights of research on the “cultural learning style” of your students. In chapter seven of this text, we explored the debate over, and some of the findings of, research that suggests that students of a given culture learn differently than do students of another culture. We will not rehash those ideas and debates here, but as you recall, there were a number of purported insights about the learning styles of African-American, Latino, and Native American students. Whether or not you find those generalizations about how these various groups best learn useful, you should familiarize yourself with both the research findings and the cultural backgrounds of your students. At the very least, that information will likely serve as meaningful background for your individual interactions with your African American, Latino, and Native American students.

METHOD #4: Teach and model norms of positive, inclusive interactions among members of the class. In chapter five of the *Classroom Management & Culture* text, a number of ways of creating a positive, inclusive atmosphere are presented. Without restating those methods here, we would like to highlight some of the key strategies that corps members have found to be successful in their attempt to create a classroom community that values diverse cultures and perspectives.

As you read in that chapter, the four main goals you must accomplish as a teacher in order to form a culture of community are establishing a respectful tone, establishing a bond with and among your students, creating a community that values all students, and helping students resolve conflicts. A few strategies that corps members have relied on as “best practices” in working towards these goals are revisited briefly here as a review:

Establishing a Respectful Tone

- Model this behavior by maintaining a tone of respect with your students, regardless of what you might see them doing.
- Speak in your own natural voice at all times - do not yell or use a condescending tone.
- Err on the side of being “overly” sensitive to your students’ feelings.

Beware of using sarcasm, even in a joking manner.

Establishing a Bond With and Among Your Students

- Attend or lead student activities to demonstrate an interest in their lives while gaining greater knowledge of your students’ strengths, personalities, and abilities.
- Use a suggestion box or other way to collect student feedback in your classroom; this will help make your students feel respected and valued.
- Utilize “getting-to-know-you” and team-building activities to facilitate your students working together and learning with and about each other.
- Set aside time for daily or weekly meetings to create a safe, respectful place for communication.

I discovered that one of the most important ways I could create a community in which diversity was valued was to respond every time diversity wasn't being valued. At the beginning of each school year, I sometimes heard my students say things that were racist or heterosexist. I knew that if I didn't respond to these comments, I would be teaching my students that it was okay to say these things. The comments quickly subsided. At first, I think this was because students thought that the comments upset me. (Students would say things like, "Don't say that; it makes Ms. Crement angry.") As the year went on, the comments stopped because my students began to value diversity and to see that if they were going to feel safe, valued, and respected in our classroom, they needed to take responsibility to create a culture that promoted this.

**Stephanie Crement, Bay Area '99
Special Education English/Language Arts Teacher,
Boston Public Schools**

Multicultural Education

Creating a Community that Values All Students

- Deconstruct your personal biases (see the chapter in this text on Unpacking Privilege).
- Ensure you are involving all students by looking for patterns of preference in your classroom.
- Capitalize on any opportunity to incorporate messages of tolerance into the curriculum.
- Respond to insensitive comments - do not allow them to go unnoticed, and recognize the "teachable" moments that they create.

Helping Students Resolve Conflict

- Teach students how to use "I" statements to explain their actions and feelings to each other. Possibly have them record their thoughts in writing before a discussion about a conflict.
- Teach and model "active listening" strategies for your students so that they all feel they are being heard and understood.

METHOD #5: Evaluate materials for their inclusiveness and cultural relevance. The fifth method for infusing principles of multicultural education into your classroom involves assessing all of the materials you use in your classroom to ensure that they do not somehow undermine messages of inclusiveness. A number of multicultural scholars have proposed lists for identifying forms of subtle and blatant bias that teachers should look for in textbooks and other materials. Consider for example, the following guidelines for assessing the inclusiveness of education materials, proposed by the Intercultural Development Research Association:¹²⁴

- **Invisibility.** Certain groups may be underrepresented in curricular materials. The significant omission of women and minority groups has become so great as to imply that these groups are of less value, importance and significance in our society.
- **Stereotyping.** By assigning traditional and rigid roles or attributes to a group, instructional materials may stereotype and limit the abilities and potential of that group. Children who see themselves portrayed only in stereotypical ways may internalize those stereotypes and fail to develop their own unique abilities, interests, and full potential.
- **Imbalance and Selectivity.** Textbooks can perpetuate bias by presenting only one interpretation of an issue, situation or group of people. This imbalanced account restricts the knowledge of students regarding the varied perspectives that may apply to a particular situation. Through selective presentation of materials, textbooks may distort reality and ignore complex and differing viewpoints. As a result, millions of students have been given limited perspectives concerning the contributions, struggles and participation of certain groups in society.
- **Unreality.** Textbooks sometimes present an unrealistic portrayal of our history and our contemporary life experience. Controversial topics may be glossed over, and discussions of discrimination and prejudice may be avoided. This unrealistic coverage denies children the information they need to recognize, understand and perhaps someday conquer the problems that plague our society.
- **Fragmentation and Isolation.** By separating issues related to minorities and women from the main body of the text, instructional materials imply that these issues are less important than and not a part of the cultural mainstream.
- **Linguistic Bias.** Curricular materials can sometimes reflect the discriminatory nature of our language. Older texts about Native Americans might use terms like "savage" or "simple" to describe their lifestyle, for example. Common masculine terms, including the generic "he," also arguably deny the participation of women in our society. Imbalance of word order and lack of parallel terms that refer to women and men are also forms of linguistic bias.

¹²⁴ Adapted from Love, Reeve Ph.D. and Alicia Salinas Sosa, Ph.D. *Stereotyping and Bias: Their Origin and Effects*. San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association.

The Problem with “Taco Tuesday”—What Multicultural Education Is NOT.

As is clear from these five methods of infusing the principles of multicultural education into your classroom, multicultural education *is*—but is also much *more* than—reference to or celebration of persons of color, or other cultures. As the student of one education professor put it, “a multicultural class is more than ‘Taco Tuesday.’”¹²⁵ While being a multicultural educator *does* mean celebrating heroes and holidays, it also means taking an approach to your classroom that integrates many cultures throughout your curriculum, values diversity, and teaches the values of tolerance and understanding every day.

The practice of incorporating references to minority cultural groups that are superficial and transitory, as opposed to thinking about the opportunities to celebrate diversity throughout your curriculum and long-term plans, is unfortunately common. This practice takes on several, recognizable forms:

Typical inappropriate treatment of African Americans, Native Americans, Asian Americans, and Hispanic Americans includes the “side-bar” approach, the “superhero” syndrome, and the “one size fits all” view. Side-bar treatment occurs frequently in textbooks, where presentation of ethnic experiences is limited to a few isolated events--frequently relegated to a box or side-bar, set apart from the rest of the text. Another common misrepresentation of certain ethnic groups occurs when only exceptional individuals, the “superheroes” of history from among that race or cultural group, are acknowledged.¹²⁶

As another multicultural scholar explains,

In order to establish respect for other cultures in the classroom, teachers must move beyond “multicultural moments” or pseudomulticulturalism (Miller 88). Celebrating Black History Month is a great example of a multicultural moment that many teachers incorporate into their curriculum once a year. Not only do Black History units presented exclusively in February hinder the ability for teachers to cover a wide range of cultures at the same time, creating this type of curriculum sends a message that Black History is separate from and inferior to European History.¹²⁷

For more resources on multicultural education and how to effectively incorporate your students’ culture in your curriculum for the benefit of their academic achievement, please see the

Embracing multicultural education must go beyond celebrating heroes and holidays. In general, it means studying our selves and our society in ways that lay bare how we define differences and assign or strip power according to those differences. In particular (at least in my 8th grade English class), it means reading and writing dialogue poems contrasting the perspectives of people in differing power strata; it means examining an author’s choice in language and explicitly teaching the importance of code switching; it means affording students the choice to write research papers about topics that engage their critical lenses—like driver’s license policies for undocumented immigrants, gender double standards in family practices, or implications of music lyrics. Above all, multicultural education (in fact any good education) is one that takes the student from being a passive consumer of information, to being a thoughtful critic, to being a critical producer of knowledge.

**Frank Lozier, Los Angeles ‘00
Vice Principal, Compton Unified School District**

¹²⁵ Teixeira, Mary Thierry, and Pamela Merchant Christian. “And Still They Rise: Practice Advice for Increasing African American Enrollments in Higher Education.” *Educational HORIZONS*, Spring 2002, p. 119.

¹²⁶ Abdal-Haqq, Ismat. “Culturally Responsive Curriculum.” Washington, DC: ERIC Digest, June 1996. (ED 370 936)

¹²⁷ Fish, Larri. “Building Blocks: The First Steps of Creating a Multicultural Classroom.” EdChange Research Room, Multicultural Pavilion. Available at www.edchange.org/multicultural/papers/buildingblocks.html, accessed 7/1/2010.

Multicultural Education

Diversity, Community, & Achievement Toolkit (p. 8: “Multicultural Education Tools on the Internet”); this Toolkit can be found online at the Resource Exchange on TFANet. ✖

IV. Conclusion

We began this chapter with the obvious point that “multicultural education” means different things to different people. As we have explored those different meanings, however, we hope you have come to recognize some common themes in multicultural education that you can use in your classroom. Through these methods, you will be able to develop ethnic and cultural literacy in your students, nurture the personal esteem and development of your students (who may not often see themselves in the materials they are studying), teach important values of inclusiveness and tolerance, and prepare students for interacting and working with people who are different than themselves. Of course, above all, taking a multicultural education approach to your classroom means more effectively teaching your students.

At this time, please stop in your reading and turn to the final additional article that goes with this text, “Profoundly Multicultural Questions” by Sonia Nieto. This selection can be accessed by visiting the Pre-Institute Work page on the Institute Info Center within TFANet. 📖

Part III: Effecting Change with Respect and Humility

As you know, this *Diversity, Community, and Achievement* text is built on the idea that valuing diversity in your classroom can and should be a means of increasing learning and growth for your students.

Three key principles provide guidance in your quest to harness the positive power of diversity matters in your classroom. First, set and maintain high expectations, despite all the forces that may be working against them (see Part I: Chapters 1-3). Second, build a strong diversity-related knowledge base that includes not only information about racial identity development, cultural learning styles, and multicultural education methods, but also includes knowledge about yourself (see Part II: Chapters 4-8). Part III of this text—which consists of only Chapter Nine—describes best practices for successfully achieving change as a new member of your community.

Effecting Change with Respect and Humility: It Starts with Success in Your Classroom

Chapter Nine

- I. Effecting Change as a New Member of a Community
- II. Getting Started: Tangible Steps Toward Effecting Positive Change
- III. Conclusion: Do Choose Your Battles—Wisely

As mentioned at the start of this text, your commitment to propel your students to achieve ambitious academic goals is an effort to make change. As new members of our school and community, we must approach any attempts to make change with great respect and humility.

This is even more critical if you seek to change policies or practices at your school that you believe to be inhibiting your students' academic achievement. Your quest to close the achievement gap for your students in your classroom may lead you to encounter other, related problems that you are eager to take on and overcome. Perhaps there are special education placement policies that you believe could be adjusted to better serve the needs of your students. Perhaps a mandatory dress-code check is leading to excessive tardiness to first period. Perhaps you have opinions about how money should be spent. As a member of your school community, you may be able to influence some of those policies and decisions. If and when such issues truly hinder your students' learning, you may feel the need to engage in those issues to maximize the likelihood that your students can meet their academic goals. Of course, *how* you choose to approach the issues can be just as important as which issues you choose to address.

Your greatest influence will come if you approach both your efforts to achieve significant gains with your students and your efforts to change policy or practice with sensitivity to dynamics of diversity that we have discussed thus far in this text.

I. Effecting Change as a New Member of a Community

Among the dynamics of difference that virtually every corps member encounters during his or her initial two-year commitment to the classroom are the challenges inherent in being "new" to a community, or campus, or faculty, or classroom. No matter what our race, ethnicity, religion, culture, background, sexual orientation, or gender may be, as new corps members we are entering a role with which we are unfamiliar, and in which most of those around are unfamiliar with us. When one considers the additional layers of dynamics of difference and sameness that come from our and new colleagues', neighbors', and students' wide range of identities, one is faced with a complex tapestry of expectations, assumptions, and relationships that must be acknowledged and navigated in order for you to become a successful agent of change.

These dynamics pose an interesting challenge for you as a new teacher. On one hand, you have been recruited, selected, and trained because of your potential to effect significant gains and your demonstrated leadership ability. Our collective mission as an organization, in fact, calls on corps members and alumni to bring their leadership skills to bear on difficult problems and to change an inequitable system. On the other hand, you are new to your classroom, school, and community, and you may have little or no education experience. You have not yet proven yourself in this context and may be lacking credibility as a leader when you begin. Who are *you* to enter this unfamiliar system with the intention of changing it?

Effecting Change with Respect and Humility

This tension—between your great potential to effect change and your status as a newcomer with little initial influence in your community—has a profound impact on many corps members' experiences. All of us, as new teachers, struggle with gaining the necessary influence to be in a position to effect change and with choosing which challenges to take on and which ones to let pass.

I knew early on that the only way to be "heard" at my school was to gain respect as an educator. My first year, I worked extremely hard to get my children to master the standards and to do well on state standardized tests. During my 2nd and 3rd year, my hard work paid off as my colleagues and administrators listened and treated me as an equal contributor to help solve the pressing issues occurring at our school.

**Jenny Tan, Los Angeles '00
Elementary School Principal,
Clark County**

On occasion, some corps members have failed to make those choices wisely. They have instead charged into their new arenas with well-intended, but overly aggressive plans to change long-standing policies or practices. They have attempted to solve a problem or make a change without the necessary sensitivity to the dynamics of diversity that are at play in a particular context, and have therefore failed. Imagine a corps member who, in his or her first week, marches into the principal's office and demands that the policy barring field trips be changed. Or imagine a new teacher who promptly tells his department chairperson how to restructure the literacy program. Or imagine a corps member writing a letter to the editor of the newspaper to report on what she sees as

misappropriation of funds in the school district. Whether or not those corps members are right on the merits of their concerns, they probably doomed their cause with their somewhat arrogant assumption that they, as newly arrived members of the school community, could immediately effect policy changes in their districts.

Of course, many, many more corps members have been successful agents of positive change in their schools—effecting significant gains among their students and on a whole range school policies and practices. These positive changes are a fundamental part of your teaching experience. In seeking to effect change, however, heed the lessons learned by those who have done so before you.

The sum of our "lessons learned" about successfully making changes and solving problems as a new member to your community can be boiled down to two critically important principles. First, the path to meaningful leadership in your school and your community can only begin with success in your classroom. Second, you must work toward your primary goal of success in your classroom and any derivative goals that impact school policy or practice with the utmost respect and humility for those around you and the task before you.

Rule for Change #1: It Starts With Success in Your Classroom

As we have talked to hundreds of corps members who have in one way or another positively impacted their schools and communities, we have seen an unfaltering pattern. In virtually every case, the teacher who is successful in making changes outside of his or her classroom first built credibility through success inside his or her classroom. Until you have your own successful program in place in your classroom, your suggestions for how to fix other systems have little credibility and therefore are unlikely to lead to any change in policies or practices that you believe hinder your efforts to achieve those gains.

Rule for Change #2: Respect and Humility Moves Mountains

A proven record of achievement is a necessary prerequisite to having ability to lead people to make positive changes for the sake of your students. At the same time, as a new member of your community, you are undeniably ignorant of much of what is going on and has gone on around you. Somewhat paradoxically, we have found that a key to successfully effecting change in a new community is focusing on what you do *not* know rather than on your proven record of leadership. Your best bet for succeeding in making meaningful change is to approach each issue with an unmitigated and continued sense of respect and humility.

I approached every interaction with the notion that I was an outsider in my new school community, and I needed to rely on the expertise of parents, fellow teachers, and other community members. I made sure that I was respectful and humble in every interaction in which I engaged. They were the experts about the community, the school, their children, and I wanted to work as a partner with them to make sure their students achieved. I believe that, because of the way that I presented myself, I was well-received in my community as someone who had come from the outside but was interested in achieving the same ultimate goal as my students' families, other teachers, and community members—student achievement.

**Stephanie Crement, Bay Area '99
Special Education English/Language Arts Teacher,
Boston Public Schools**

The fact is that no matter what your background and experience, you have much to learn about how things work in your new community. Where you may simply see a problem that needs to be solved, others around you may see a whole history and context that you do not. Where you may see an opportunity to change some policy or practice for the benefit of students' learning, others around you may see a web of political dynamics that can only be navigated in a particular way. And, where you may see what you believe to be an obvious solution, others around you may, with the benefit of their experience, know that solution to be fatally flawed.

Thus, to be most effective as a leader for change—no matter how big or small the issue may be—you must approach the project with profound respect for the perspectives and opinions of those around you and with the humility to recognize how little you may know about the context of the problem. This approach will lead you to ask the right questions of the right people, and to garner the support of those around you so that the change will be lasting.

Clearly, one of the messages of this chapter is to check any inclination you may have to burst on the scene in your community with plans to “change the world.” Such an approach and attitude is disrespectful of the norms and culture of your new community. It is also usually ultimately ineffective because you have not yet built the credibility you need to have an influential voice on key issues.

We want to make clear, however, that this chapter is not a call for passivity; rather, the point is that to be effective in your leadership for change you must (1) build your credibility with success in the classroom and (2) approach every interaction with the respect and humility appropriate for a newcomer.

Effecting Change with Respect and Humility

II. Getting Started: Tangible Steps Toward Effecting Positive Change

Here, we describe a number of concrete ways to establish yourself in your community as a leader, and discuss methods that are particularly pertinent to proceeding effectively in your efforts to excel as a teacher and, where important, bring about policy change:

Learn From Those around You. Successful teachers have found that they are most effective when they remain open to learning (and are in fact on a constant mission to learn) from the community of teachers, administrators, students, and students' families with whom they work. Most corps members can share inspiring stories of the guidance and support they received from their veteran colleagues. Do not wait to take advantage of opportunities to learn from colleagues who have considerably more experience than you working in your community. A wonderful way to "break the ice" with your co-workers is to ask them for advice and suggestions for your teaching.

If you have grand ideas to engage, motivate, and create with your students and community, first and foremost acquire the capital that is necessary to get these BIG projects done. Humbly asking, "What can I help other people accomplish?" will garner you the relationships and experience necessary to carry out your vision. By volunteering to help fellow staff members and administrators at concession stands, organizing a Veteran's Day program, and leading an activity that no other teacher wanted, my students were the beneficiaries because we were able to get a grant for reading incentives and prizes through the administration.

Krishnan Subrahmanian, South Dakota '04
9th-12th Special Education

At times, corps members may encounter situations where they feel that their "values" differ from those of the communities in which they're placed. When you encounter a situation where community practices or norms seem to conflict with your own values, talk with community members to understand the roots of the practice or norms so as to be able to view the issue through another lens. You may discover that it is possible to accept different practices or norms even if you don't agree with them. Even teachers those whose methods you may be determined not to adopt can often teach you an enormous amount about how to be effective in the classroom.

Develop Positive Relationships With Co-Workers and Community Members. Not only can other teachers, administrators, and community members help make you a better teacher, but they can prove to be invaluable allies in helping you access the resources you need or helping you work around obstacles, whether small or large. Conversely, if your colleagues do not support your efforts, they can make it more difficult for you to accomplish your goals for students.

Professionalism for a new teacher in a new community is listening without judgment, keeping opinions to yourself for a while, making an effort to understand others' perspectives, learning as much as you can about the community, your students, and their families, and engaging in community events on the residents' terms (not your own).

Jane Henzerling, Phoenix '98
Fellow, Building Excellent Schools

To develop positive relationships, it will be important to understand how you are perceived by others, as this self-awareness can help you determine how best to form positive relationships with co-workers and community members. The fact that you will be newcomers to this role in your schools and communities can in and of itself be a reason for skepticism (however, new energy and enthusiasm can also be warmly welcomed as an asset to the school); you may be entering a system where new teacher retention rates are very low, so whether you plan to teach for two years or more,

your colleagues may believe that they will be around long after you leave. If your race, ethnicity, religion,

sexual orientation, educational background, economic background, or any other aspect of your identity is different from that of most of your co-workers, it may take time for some teachers to warm up to you. If the different characteristic or characteristics make you part of a more privileged group, some colleagues may express skepticism toward your presence, particularly if you somehow convey that you “know it all” and are out to “save” the school.

Finally, your participation in Teach For America may work either for or against you as you work to develop these relationships. Teach For America is controversial in some parts of the teacher education community given its abbreviated pre-service training program and two-year commitment that some perceive as short-term, and various individuals may have either misconceptions or philosophical disagreements with our program. While many principals and teachers of the schools in which you will teach are huge fans of Teach For America, in some rare cases, your colleagues will have had negative experiences working with a corps member.

Very often, however, persistent efforts to get to know others and to ask them for help and guidance pay off as others sense your commitment to their students and discover commonalities on which to base their trust and respect. Invest some time and energy “networking” with other teachers, administrators, and community members. Sit with veteran teachers at faculty meetings, attend local events, and work to meet and get to know your administrators. Consider 2000 Delta corps member Laura Bowen’s account of her relationship with a veteran teacher at her school:

“Well, it looks like we’ll be teaching together this year,” Mrs. Nero said as she walked into my classroom in mid-August. It was our first teacher workday at Carver Elementary and I was overcome with emotions after my first glimpse of my school, my colleagues, and my classroom. I had also just found out that I would not be team-teaching with [fellow corps member] Rachel Schankula, as we had previously thought. Instead, I was paired with Mrs. Nero, whose reputation as a larger-than-life fifth grade teacher is legendary at Carver, as is her paddle named “Bessie.” Misbehaving children at Carver apparently are threatened with Mrs. Nero’s discipline in their kindergarten year! Within the timespan of that first day at Carver, I found out (from another teacher) that Mrs. Nero is often assigned her share of the “difficult” students and that she most likely was not going to be ecstatic about being teamed with a young, white, TFA teacher for the school year. Needless to say, I was daunted by the task that lay before me.

Fast forward eight months—it is now a beautiful Sunday morning in early April. I walk into a small country church and immediately notice that I am the only white person present. However, I soon forget the color of my skin as I am welcomed with a warm embrace. The smiling woman who embraces me and introduces me as “her friend” is Mrs. Mae Bell Nero, a woman who has become a trusted colleague and a supportive friend. A few days later Mrs. Nero sent a note to my classroom in which she expressed her happiness that we had worshipped together. I was also invited to return to share the church service at any time. On the return visit, I was again treated as an honored guest. These events have caused me to reflect on the evolution of my relationship with Mrs. Nero, a teacher who once looked at me with doubtful eyes. How did the expression in her eyes begin to change? When exactly was I welcomed?

Looking back on these eight months, I now realize that there was no huge event that changed my status at Carver or with Mrs. Nero. Nothing spectacular happened to integrate me into the group of fifth grade teachers. There are simply a series of things that inevitably happen if you approach a new environment with respect, humility, and love. These things that happen are small building blocks that chip away at old prejudices, past threats, and deep doubts; and since all eyes are on us during our first

Effecting Change with Respect and Humility

few months, all actions and words are noticed and remembered! Thus, the cheerful hallway conversations, the long afternoons, the dedication shown to kids, the willingness to help out, and the hard work is noticed. No one will give you a medal for all of these things, but believe me, they will notice and they will be appreciative. And so, Mrs. Nero's eyes, the eyes that were watching me the closest, took in all of these things and she slowly began sharing herself with me. She would bring me supplies for my classroom, introduce me to family members, back me with certain difficult parents, and most importantly, she supported me in front of the students of Carver. There has never been a time when she questioned my methods in front of others and I am very sure that this isn't a result of her not questioning my methods! Instead, she chose to see the successes rather than the failures of my first year. Despite our disagreements over discipline (I know she thinks I "baby" my kids!) and over the workload (reading groups aren't yet considered real work!), we have managed to forge a strong relationship, one that benefits the both of us.

From my part, the relationship was necessary—in short, I needed to work with Mrs. Nero in order to be successful at Carver. However, I realize that she did not face that similar need. She very well could have ignored me or put up with me for the duration of my stay. Instead, she welcomed me as a friend and colleague even though she wasn't aware that she wanted to! Her spirit, character, and her strength have made my experience thus far a far more valuable one. I know that next year at Carver will be even better, in part, because I will again be teaching with my friend, Mrs. Nero.

The point of this reflection is that we all encounter colleagues who aren't too sure of us. That is an obstacle that either has faced us all or will face us at some point in the future. However, there is always a way around the obstacle, but only if you choose to overcome it. I did make that choice on the very first day and for that, I will be eternally thankful. I can honestly say that all of the unease was worth it – I know that I have been changed and I think that if you asked Mrs. Nero, she would probably admit that I have affected her in the same way! However, be sure to catch her on a good day!

My first-year of teaching I was fully committed to doing anything I could to impact student achievement, both inside and outside the classroom. Putting in the hours, having administrators visit my classroom, and building strong relationships with my fellow teachers that improved my own teaching led to an incredible opportunity my second year: being a representative on the Superintendent's Advisory Council. Being able to sit on that committee and directly affect the policy decisions that were shaping my students' education was invaluable—it gave me a whole new perspective on school and district leadership, and the tough choices that our administrators face in running effective and high-performing schools.

Crystal Brakke, North Carolina '99
Vice President - Institutes
Teach For America

Team Up With Students' Families. In particular, invest time and energy building relationships with students' families. They can be your greatest ally in leading your students to academic gains, and their support when you are trying to effect broader changes is crucial.

Maintain the Highest Level of Professionalism. Professional conduct is one of the keys to building positive relationships with colleagues, supervisors, students and community members. Following the conventions of your school – although some of them may at first seem restrictive or odd to you – is the most effective way to become a trusted member of the faculty. As a newcomer to your school community, your behavior will likely be under the scrutiny of those who wonder who you are and what you're about. Behaviors that may at first seem peripheral to your core objectives – like dressing appropriately,

submitting accurate attendance records, lesson plans and gradebooks on a timely basis, and arriving punctually – send strong messages to all those who are observing your behavior. These habits demonstrate that you are dependable, and that you respect your job and the people with whom you’re working. They also help you build social capital to obtain the resources and make the changes you need to serve your students best. Here are some concrete tips to help you do so:

- **Dress appropriately.** For a new teacher in a new community, appearance counts. Your colleagues and your students will draw conclusions about you based on how you dress. They will respond to you in particular ways based on those conclusions. In order to avoid conclusions that will make it more difficult for you to be effective, you need to think critically about the messages your appearance sends. Do you come across as casual? Disrespectful? Disorganized? Rebellious? Young? Not serious? If so, how might these impressions sabotage your efforts to assert your authority, to build relationships with older, potentially more conservative colleagues, to win the confidence of families and to communicate to your students the value and seriousness of education?
- **Attend school every day.** While there may be an exceptional reason why it is necessary to miss a day of school, corps members aiming to reach high levels with their students are in school consistently. If you need to stay home because of a serious illness, call the appropriate school official as soon as possible. Develop a substitute teacher’s folder in case of emergency. You should also “sign out” in the main office if you need to leave school during the day for any reason. Doing all these things communicates that you take your teaching responsibilities seriously and that you want to ensure that every moment of classroom time – even those when you are absent – is used as well as possible.
- **Cultivate a relationship with your principal or key administrator.** Your principal is your boss and the school leader, and it is your job to defer to his or her instructions. In addition to realizing that your principal has much more experience than you and often faces difficult judgment calls with many variables at play, you can take proactive steps to build a strong relationship. You might update your principal on what is going on in your classroom, invite him or her to a special class presentation, or slip a copy of your class newsletter in his or her mailbox. You should also consult with your principal or key administrator before planning any type of school trip, or watching a movie in your classroom that could possibly be considered frivolous or objectionable. Not only can your principal be a valuable advisor to you, but he or she is also ultimately responsible for everything that happens on school property and may want to be kept abreast of any plans that could be considered out of the ordinary. For an example of a carefully considered request of your principal, see the **Diversity, Community, & Achievement Toolkit** (p. 9: “Sample Letter to Principal, With Author’s Intentions”); this Toolkit can be found online at the Resource Exchange on TFANet. ✖
- **Comply with regulations.** Different schools have different expectations for their teachers, and you may not immediately understand the importance and rationale behind all of the regulations at your school. You may need to reserve audiovisual equipment a week in advance. Doing so may seem an unnecessary hassle when you come up with a great idea the night before a lesson and need a

Professionalism means saying “Good Morning and Good Evening” to all of the faculty—the secretaries, custodians, cafeteria workers, fellow teachers, etc. It means handing in your lessons on time each week and being early to staff meetings, even if it’s just to chat with your colleagues. It means wearing clothing that doesn’t show a tattoo, your belly, your exotic piercings, or your undergarments. It means smiling, listening, and talking to your hallway neighbors, and it means asking for help from those who have been there longer than you.

**Cheryl Bratt, New Orleans ‘01
Judicial Law Clerk, Eastern District of
Pennsylvania**

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TV/VCR to make it a reality. You could be required to provide students with a blue pass before sending them to the nurse. You may feel that it is more important to focus on teaching your class than it is to interrupt your class to fill out a blue pass. There may be a special procedure for covering textbooks, for notifying the office if someone is planning to observe you teach, or clipping your attendance to the door by 8:15 a.m. Some of these regulations may seem unnecessary or even burdensome to you. It is important that in this area, as in others, you seek to understand the point of view of those who have put the regulations in place, that you trust that they have done so with good intentions, and that you comply with these regulations. If you get the reputation of someone who is insubordinate or who won't follow simple rules, it will be much harder to gain the support of your fellow teachers and your administration when you need it in order to best serve your students. The office secretary or a veteran teacher down the hall can help you get up to speed on these regulations. They can also be very helpful in providing you with background information that will help you to understand the rationale for these regulations—and may be able to help you find a way to get the TV/VCR after all.

- **Be careful with records and documents.** Teachers are expected to juggle a lot of paperwork and documentation: attendance, grades, assignments to grade, schedules, notes home, lunch menus, permission slips, special education documents, and discipline referrals – for starters. In most cases, this documentation is required of your school by the central office or state department of education. If you do not complete them, your school may suffer penalties or be exposed to potential lawsuits. If you need to write a discipline referral, maintaining accurate records allows you to be taken seriously by administrators. It is far less effective to say “Paul’s always late to class” than it is to report that “Paul was late five times in the past two weeks – 12/12, 12/13, 12/15, 12/19 and 12/20.” In addition, be sure to remain official, factual and dispassionate in your communications, particularly if you are responding to a family’s complaint or an administrator’s request. Consider having a friend or your regional program director give such letters a second pair of eyes. Written documents have a way of coming back to haunt their well-intentioned authors, so you will want to be sure you can stand by every word that you’ve chosen.
- **Uphold school rules.** If you are not much older than your students, students may pressure you to bend rules and be “the cool teacher.” But by doing so, you would be undermining the authority of your colleagues who stand firm to uphold school policy. Learn the rationale for school rules, such as no gum chewing, and communicate this honestly with your students. If your school has a dress code, you will need to enforce it. Some schools expect all students to be silent during the morning announcements. If there are students who have not submitted their Internet permission slips, it will be up to you to plan an alternative activity for these children while the rest of the class is doing research on the Web. You are also responsible for monitoring the halls and supervising students on the school grounds, and you may be expected to oversee student arrival, lunch, recess or dismissal.
- **Maintain your boundaries.** You will want to avoid any suggestion of an inappropriate relationship with a student. By touching students, driving students in your car without parent or guardian consent, or scheduling one-on-one tutorials without anyone else’s knowledge, you are opening yourself up to potential allegations of misconduct. If you need to detain a student after class, alert another teacher before doing so and be sure to keep the door open. Also, you should stop students from flattering you about the way you look, or talking about your romantic life. If you are unsure whether your comments or actions are inappropriate or not, err on the side of caution.
- **Professionalism extends outside of school.** When you’re acting out of “teaching mode” (for instance, at a bar or a dance club), avoid venues where you’re likely to bump into students or their families. This does not mean abandoning your social life during your entire teaching career, but it

does mean being aware how you may be viewed in your community and paying attention to where you let your hair down.

- **Be discreet.** Like a doctor or lawyer, you will learn specific and personal details about your students and their families. Keep sensitive information to yourself and avoid gossip. (There may be times where you learn information – for instance, about physical or sexual abuse – that you are required by law to report.) You should also avoid making comments about other teachers in front of your students or colleagues.
- **Express your gratitude.** The librarians, secretaries, janitors, bus drivers, food service workers, security guards and other school personnel work extremely hard so that your school runs smoothly every day. Be friendly, and be sure to acknowledge their contribution to your work.
- **Remain flexible and stay positive.** The copy machine may break. Supplies may run out. Faculty meetings may be scheduled the same afternoon you need to grade midterms, and it would be rude to do paperwork while your principal is addressing the faculty. A fire drill may interrupt your most important lesson. You will need to muster your patience and ingenuity to rise above these inconveniences; dwelling on circumstances outside your control is mental energy you'll want to save for helping your students. You also need to call upon your generosity of spirit to remind yourself that your colleagues are most likely not intentionally creating obstacles to make your job more difficult. Rather, they too are doing the best they can to work with a system that can be challenging, disorganized and unpredictable. As a member of your community, your energy and emotions affect the tenor of the environment. You play a role in creating a positive or negative vibe at your school.

Learn About the History and Culture of Your Region. When you arrive in your region, you will be afforded opportunities to learn about the region, its history, and its culture. Take full advantage of those opportunities, even if you are already familiar with the community you will be working in. While no workshop or tour can give you a full picture of a new community, beginning to explore your region provides foundation on which to build your knowledge of your community throughout the year. Moreover, your interest in learning about your region will be another sign of your respect for your new community.

III. Conclusion: Do Choose Your Battles—Wisely

You have joined Teach For America because you want to change things. As mentioned above, we do not want to suppress that interest and energy because such an attitude is exactly what it is going to take—in both the short- and long-term—to close the achievement gap for students from low-income communities. We do, however, want to encourage you to choose your causes carefully, strategically, and purposefully. Generally, when you decide to take on existing practices, it is wise to recruit allies within your communities who can help you determine how best to approach your goal and perhaps even help you in the pursuit.

Making wise choices about what issues to tackle means choosing just those causes that align with your core mission as a teacher of students who are on the losing end of the achievement gap. Your litmus test for investing energy in any particular quest for change should be whether or not the change will positively affect students' academic development and if you're in a good position to bring about that change.

You may find yourself pulled in many directions by many motivations as opportunities arise for leadership in and around your school. Many of those motivations may be absolutely valid and worthy, but they may not actually be for the benefit of students' academic growth. You might, for example, see the need for a

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recycling program in your school. Or, you might disagree with the application of a certain item in the dress code. Or you might disagree with a principal's insistence that you remove a particular bumper sticker from your car. You must ask yourself: Is this worth the energy it would take to see this issue through? Will my work on this issue actually advance my students' learning? Given the precious value of your time and energy, we believe that you should focus your leadership energies on those "battles" that will truly help to close the achievement gap for your students.

In deciding whether to pursue an agenda that requires change outside of your classroom, newcomers to communities must evaluate the implications, challenges, and potential consequences of questioning family, community, school, and district norms. Herb Kohl, a well-known education reformer and advocate for social change, reflects in his book, *Creative Maladjustment and the Struggle for Public Education*, on his mistakes in questioning the system when he was too early in his career. He writes:

Several times, students from other classes have asked me questions like, "Why do your students ride that bus? My teacher says if I don't do my homework, I'll have to ride the retarded bus." Each time, my stomach turns. I explain that my students don't live near enough school to walk, and I spend some time thinking about how best to approach this teacher. This fall, I decided to address the issue school-wide, by presenting at a staff meeting and simply explaining why my students are in a Special Day Class and how I would like teachers to field questions about my class. The staff was tremendously supportive, and several people approached me later to share things they had said to their class without thinking but would avoid in the future. Just by putting this issue in the open and trusting my colleagues' intentions, I got the support I needed.

**Lisa Barrett, Bay Area '02
Partner, The New Teacher Project**

When it is impossible to remain in harmony with one's environment without giving up deeply held moral values, creative maladjustment becomes a sane alternative to giving up altogether. Creative maladjustment consists of breaking social patterns that are morally reprehensible, taking conscious control of one's place in the environment, and readjusting the world one lives in based on personal integrity and honesty – that is, it consists of learning to survive with minimal moral and personal compromise in a thoroughly compromised world and of not being afraid of planned and willed conflict, if necessary....

Sometimes decisions to maladjust are made without thought and can lead to trouble. Such trouble befell me twice at the beginning of my teaching career. During my six weeks of student teaching I got into trouble for trying things that clashed with the style and practice of my supervising teacher. I was accused of getting too close to the students, of being too informal, and of replacing structured learning activities with open-ended, cross-disciplinary projects. When I was asked to do things that in my judgment were detrimental to student learning and self-respect, I changed them without asking permission. This maladjustment made sense in terms of maintaining my integrity and helping my students, but it was suicide for a student teacher who didn't have his or her own classroom and who had no status within the school. Two weeks before the end of my student-teaching assignment, I was unceremoniously terminated by the supervising teacher and ordered out of the school by the principal....

The same thing happened during my first teaching assignment.... At that time, my maladjustment was neither creative nor effective, and I continue to wonder how much more useful I might have been to the school and the community had my responses been more tempered and my maladjustment better thought-out.

However, as a beginning teacher I found myself with too much to learn, too little support, and an inflated sense of how much reform I could accomplish by myself without having experience or friends or allies within the community or the school district.¹²⁸

As Kohl implies, it is important for you to ask yourself whether pursuing a change will compromise your ability to succeed in your core mission. For example, if it will cost you your job, by definition the change prevents you from expanding the opportunities available to your students. If your actions make your school principal resistant to your efforts, they may compromise your ability to pursue other initiatives that are equally or more important. While it is admirable to act according to your convictions, you must do so strategically and think about whether the end results of your efforts will truly be in the best interests of your students.

I learned early on in my teaching career that creating change in my school was a delicate procedure. You have to choose your battles—follow the lead and advice of experienced teachers in your school. While you might initially be frustrated with some of the administrative goals in your school, as time passes you will find that you have a greater ability to make things happen. But, in the words of Confucius, the journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. The first steps will be moderate and cautious, but as the year passes you will be amazed how far you've progressed.

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¹²⁸ Kohl, Herbert. *"I Won't Learn From You" And Other Thoughts on Creative Maladjustment*. New York: The New York Press, 1994, p. 130-132.

Diversity, Community, & Achievement

Related Readings 

A Note About the Related Readings

The following three chapters appear in this text because they are required reading. All other related readings that are referenced throughout this text should be accessed online by visiting the Pre-Institute Work page on the Institute Info Center within TFANet.

4

Identity Development in Adolescence

“Why are all the Black kids sitting together in the cafeteria?”

Walk into any racially mixed high school cafeteria at lunch time and you will instantly notice that in the sea of adolescent faces, there is an identifiable group of Black students sitting together. Conversely, it could be pointed out that there are many groups of White students sitting together as well, though people rarely comment about that. The question on the tip of everyone’s tongue is “Why are the Black kids sitting together?” Principals want to know, teachers want to know, White students want to know, the Black students who aren’t sitting at the table want to know.

How does it happen that so many Black teenagers end up at the same cafeteria table? They don’t start out there. If you walk into racially mixed elementary schools, you will often see young children of diverse racial backgrounds playing with one another, sitting at the snack table together, crossing racial boundaries with an ease uncommon in adolescence. Moving from elementary school to middle school (often at sixth or seventh grade) means interacting with new children from different neighborhoods than before, and a certain degree of clustering by race might therefore be expected, presuming that children who are familiar with one another would form groups. But even in schools where the same children stay together from kindergarten through eighth grade, racial grouping begins by the sixth or seventh grade. What happens?

One thing that happens is puberty. As children enter adolescence, they begin to explore the question of identity, asking “Who am I? Who can I be?” in ways they have not done before. For Black youth,



asking “Who am I?” includes thinking about “Who am I ethnically and/or racially? What does it mean to be Black?”

As I write this, I can hear the voice of a White woman who asked me, “Well, all adolescents struggle with questions of identity. They all become more self-conscious about their appearance and more concerned about what their peers think. So what is so different for Black kids?” Of course, she is right that all adolescents look at themselves in new ways, but not all adolescents think about themselves in racial terms.

The search for personal identity that intensifies in adolescence can involve several dimensions of an adolescent’s life: vocational plans, religious beliefs, values and preferences, political affiliations and beliefs, gender roles, and ethnic identities. The process of exploration may vary across these identity domains. James Marcia described four identity “statuses” to characterize the variation in the identity search process: (1) *diffuse*, a state in which there has been little exploration or active consideration of a particular domain, and no psychological commitment; (2) *foreclosed*, a state in which a commitment has been made to particular roles or belief systems, often those selected by parents, without actively considering alternatives; (3) *moratorium*, a state of active exploration of roles and beliefs in which no commitment has yet been made; and (4) *achieved*, a state of strong personal commitment to a particular dimension of identity following a period of high exploration.¹

An individual is not likely to explore all identity domains at once, therefore it is not unusual for an adolescent to be actively exploring one dimension while another remains relatively unexamined. Given the impact of dominant and subordinate status, it is not surprising that researchers have found that adolescents of color are more likely to be actively engaged in an exploration of their racial or ethnic identity than are White adolescents.²

Why do Black youths, in particular, think about themselves in terms of race? Because that is how the rest of the world thinks of them. Our self-perceptions are shaped by the messages that we receive



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from those around us, and when young Black men and women enter adolescence, the racial content of those messages intensifies. A case in point: If you were to ask my ten-year-old son, David, to describe himself, he would tell you many things: that he is smart, that he likes to play computer games, that he has an older brother. Near the top of his list, he would likely mention that he is tall for his age. He would probably not mention that he is Black, though he certainly knows that he is. Why would he mention his height and not his racial group membership? When David meets new adults, one of the first questions they ask is “How old are you?” When David states his age, the inevitable reply is “Gee, you’re tall for your age!” It happens so frequently that I once overheard David say to someone, “Don’t say it, I know. I’m tall for my age.” Height is salient for David because it is salient for others.

When David meets new adults, they don’t say, “Gee, you’re Black for your age!” If you are saying to yourself, of course they don’t, think again. Imagine David at fifteen, six-foot-two, wearing the adolescent attire of the day, passing adults he doesn’t know on the sidewalk. Do the women hold their purses a little tighter, maybe even cross the street to avoid him? Does he hear the sound of the automatic door locks on cars as he passes by? Is he being followed around by the security guards at the local mall? As he stops in town with his new bicycle, does a police officer hassle him, asking where he got it, implying that it might be stolen? Do strangers assume he plays basketball? Each of these experiences conveys a racial message. At ten, race is not yet salient for David, because it is not yet salient for society. But it will be.

Understanding Racial Identity Development

Psychologist William Cross, author of *Shades of Black: Diversity in African American Identity*, has offered a theory of racial identity development that I have found to be a very useful framework for understanding what is happening not only with David, but with those Black students in the cafeteria.³ According to Cross’s model, referred

to as the psychology of nigrescence, or the psychology of becoming Black, the five stages of racial identity development are *pre-encounter*, *encounter*, *immersion/emersion*, *internalization*, and *internalization-commitment*. For the moment, we will consider the first two stages as those are the most relevant for adolescents.

In the first stage, the Black child absorbs many of the beliefs and values of the dominant White culture, including the idea that it is better to be White. The stereotypes, omissions, and distortions that reinforce notions of White superiority are breathed in by Black children as well as White. Simply as a function of being socialized in a Eurocentric culture, some Black children may begin to value the role models, lifestyles, and images of beauty represented by the dominant group more highly than those of their own cultural group. On the other hand, if Black parents are what I call race-conscious—that is, actively seeking to encourage positive racial identity by providing their children with positive cultural images and messages about what it means to be Black—the impact of the dominant society’s messages are reduced.⁴ In either case, in the pre-encounter stage, the personal and social significance of one’s racial group membership has not yet been realized, and racial identity is not yet under examination. At age ten, David and other children like him would seem to be in the pre-encounter stage. When the environmental cues change and the world begins to reflect his Blackness back to him more clearly, he will probably enter the encounter stage.

Transition to the encounter stage is typically precipitated by an event or series of events that force the young person to acknowledge the personal impact of racism. As the result of a new and heightened awareness of the significance of race, the individual begins to grapple with what it means to be a member of a group targeted by racism. Though Cross describes this process as one that unfolds in late adolescence and early adulthood, research suggests that an examination of one’s racial or ethnic identity may begin as early as junior high school.

In a study of Black and White eighth graders from an integrated urban junior high school, Jean Phinney and Steve Tarver found clear



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evidence for the beginning of the search process in this dimension of identity. Among the forty-eight participants, more than a third had thought about the effects of ethnicity on their future, had discussed the issues with family and friends, and were attempting to learn more about their group. While White students in this integrated school were also beginning to think about ethnic identity, there was evidence to suggest a more active search among Black students, especially Black females.⁵ Phinney and Tarver's research is consistent with my own study of Black youth in predominantly White communities, where the environmental cues that trigger an examination of racial identity often become evident in middle school or junior high school.⁶

Some of the environmental cues are institutionalized. Though many elementary schools have self-contained classrooms where children of varying performance levels learn together, many middle and secondary schools use "ability grouping," or tracking. Though school administrators often defend their tracking practices as fair and objective, there usually is a recognizable racial pattern to how children are assigned, which often represents the system of advantage operating in the schools.⁷ In racially mixed schools, Black children are much more likely to be in the lower track than in the honors track. Such apparent sorting along racial lines sends a message about what it means to be Black. One young honors student I interviewed described the irony of this resegregation in what was an otherwise integrated environment, and hinted at the identity issues it raised for him.

It was really a very paradoxical existence, here I am in a school that's 35 percent Black, you know, and I'm the only Black in my classes. . . . That always struck me as odd. I guess I felt that I was different from the other Blacks because of that.

In addition to the changes taking place within school, there are changes in the social dynamics outside school. For many parents, puberty raises anxiety about interracial dating. In racially mixed com-



munities, you begin to see what I call the birthday party effect. Young children's birthday parties in multiracial communities are often a reflection of the community's diversity. The parties of elementary school children may be segregated by gender but not by race. At puberty, when the parties become sleepovers or boy-girl events, they become less and less racially diverse.

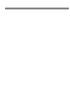
Black girls, especially in predominantly White communities, may gradually become aware that something has changed. When their White friends start to date, they do not. The issues of emerging sexuality and the societal messages about who is sexually desirable leave young Black women in a very devalued position. One young woman from a Philadelphia suburb described herself as "pursuing White guys throughout high school" to no avail. Since there were no Black boys in her class, she had little choice. She would feel "really pissed off" that those same White boys would date her White friends. For her, "that prom thing was like out of the question."⁸

Though Black girls living in the context of a larger Black community may have more social choices, they too have to contend with devaluing messages about who they are and who they will become, especially if they are poor or working-class. As social scientists Bonnie Ross Leadbeater and Niobe Way point out,

The school drop-out, the teenage welfare mother, the drug addict, and the victim of domestic violence or of AIDS are among the most prevalent public images of poor and working-class urban adolescent girls. . . . Yet, despite the risks inherent in economic disadvantage, the majority of poor urban adolescent girls do not fit the stereotypes that are made about them.⁹

Resisting the stereotypes and affirming other definitions of themselves is part of the task facing young Black women in both White and Black communities.

As was illustrated in the example of David, Black boys also face a



devalued status in the wider world. The all too familiar media image of a young Black man with his hands cuffed behind his back, arrested for a violent crime, has primed many to view young Black men with suspicion and fear. In the context of predominantly White schools, however, Black boys may enjoy a degree of social success, particularly if they are athletically talented. The culture has embraced the Black athlete, and the young man who can fulfill that role is often pursued by Black girls and White girls alike. But even these young men will encounter experiences that may trigger an examination of their racial identity.

Sometimes the experience is quite dramatic. *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* is a classic tale of racial identity development, and I assign it to my psychology of racism students for just that reason. As a junior high school student, Malcolm was a star. Despite the fact that he was separated from his family and living in a foster home, he was an A student and was elected president of his class. One day he had a conversation with his English teacher, whom he liked and respected, about his future career goals. Malcolm said he wanted to be a lawyer. His teacher responded, “That’s no realistic goal for a nigger,” and advised him to consider carpentry instead.¹⁰ The message was clear: You are a Black male, your racial group membership matters, plan accordingly. Malcolm’s emotional response was typical—anger, confusion, and alienation. He withdrew from his White classmates, stopped participating in class, and eventually left his predominately white Michigan home to live with his sister in Roxbury, a Black community in Boston.

No teacher would say such a thing now, you may be thinking, but don’t be so sure. It is certainly less likely that a teacher would use the word *nigger*, but consider these contemporary examples shared by high school students. A young ninth-grade student was sitting in his homeroom. A substitute teacher was in charge of the class. Because the majority of students from this school go on to college, she used the free time to ask the students about their college plans. As a substitute she had very limited information about their academic perfor-



mance, but she offered some suggestions. When she turned to this young man, one of few Black males in the class, she suggested that he consider a community college. She had recommended four-year colleges to the other students. Like Malcolm, this student got the message.

In another example, a young Black woman attending a desegregated school to which she was bussed was encouraged by a teacher to attend the upcoming school dance. Most of the Black students did not live in the neighborhood and seldom attended the extracurricular activities. The young woman indicated that she wasn't planning to come. The well-intentioned teacher was persistent. Finally the teacher said, "Oh come on, I know you people love to dance." This young woman got the message, too.

Coping with Encounters: Developing an Oppositional Identity

What do these encounters have to do with the cafeteria? Do experiences with racism inevitably result in so-called self-segregation? While certainly a desire to protect oneself from further offense is understandable, it is not the only factor at work. Imagine the young eighth-grade girl who experienced the teacher's use of "you people" and the dancing stereotype as a racial affront. Upset and struggling with adolescent embarrassment, she bumps into a White friend who can see that something is wrong. She explains. Her White friend responds, in an effort to make her feel better perhaps, and says, "Oh, Mr. Smith is such a nice guy, I'm sure he didn't mean it like that. Don't be so sensitive." Perhaps the White friend is right, and Mr. Smith didn't mean it, but imagine your own response when you are upset, perhaps with a spouse or partner. He or she asks what's wrong and you explain why you are offended. Your partner brushes off your complaint, attributing it to your being oversensitive. What happens to your emotional thermostat? It escalates. When feelings, rational or irrational, are invalidated, most people disengage. They not only choose to discontinue the conversation but are more likely to turn to



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someone who will understand their perspective.

In much the same way, the eighth-grade girl's White friend doesn't get it. She doesn't see the significance of this racial message, but the girls at the "Black table" do. When she tells her story there, one of them is likely to say, "You know what, Mr. Smith said the same thing to me yesterday!" Not only are Black adolescents encountering racism and reflecting on their identity, but their White peers, even when they are not the perpetrators (and sometimes they are), are unprepared to respond in supportive ways. The Black students turn to each other for the much needed support they are not likely to find anywhere else.

In adolescence, as race becomes personally salient for Black youth, finding the answer to questions such as, "What does it mean to be a young Black person? How should I act? What should I do?" is particularly important. And although Black fathers, mothers, aunts, and uncles may hold the answers by offering themselves as role models, they hold little appeal for most adolescents. The last thing many fourteen-year-olds want to do is to grow up to be like their parents. It is the peer group, the kids in the cafeteria, who hold the answers to these questions. They know how to be Black. They have absorbed the stereotypical images of Black youth in the popular culture and are reflecting those images in their self-presentation.

Based on their fieldwork in U.S. high schools, Signithia Fordham and John Ogbu identified a common psychological pattern found among African American high school students at this stage of identity development.¹¹ They observed that the anger and resentment that adolescents feel in response to their growing awareness of the systematic exclusion of Black people from full participation in U.S. society leads to the development of an oppositional social identity. This oppositional stance both protects one's identity from the psychological assault of racism and keeps the dominant group at a distance. Fordham and Ogbu write:

Subordinate minorities regard certain forms of behavior and certain activities or events, symbols, and mean-

ings as *not appropriate* for them because those behaviors, events, symbols, and meanings are characteristic of white Americans. At the same time they emphasize other forms of behavior as more appropriate for them because these are *not* a part of white Americans' way of life. To behave in the manner defined as falling within a white cultural frame of reference is to "act white" and is negatively sanctioned.¹²

Certain styles of speech, dress, and music, for example, may be embraced as "authentically Black" and become highly valued, while attitudes and behaviors associated with Whites are viewed with disdain. The peer groups' evaluation of what is Black and what is not can have a powerful impact on adolescent behavior.

Reflecting on her high school years, one Black woman from a White neighborhood described both the pain of being rejected by her Black classmates and her attempts to conform to her peer's definition of Blackness:

"Oh you sound White, you think you're White," they said. And the idea of sounding White was just so absurd to me. . . . So ninth grade was sort of traumatic in that I started listening to rap music, which I really just don't like. [I said] I'm gonna be Black, and it was just that stupid. But it's more than just how one acts, you know. [The other Black women there] were not into me for the longest time. My first year there was hell.

Sometimes the emergence of an oppositional identity can be quite dramatic, as the young person tries on a new persona almost overnight. At the end of one school year, race may not have appeared to be significant, but often some encounter takes place over the summer and the young person returns to school much more aware of his or her Blackness and ready to make sure that the rest of the

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world is aware of it, too. There is a certain “in your face” quality that these adolescents can take on, which their teachers often experience as threatening. When a group of Black teens are sitting together in the cafeteria, collectively embodying an oppositional stance, school administrators want to know not only why they are sitting together, but what can be done to prevent it.

We need to understand that in racially mixed settings, racial grouping is a developmental process in response to an environmental stressor, racism. Joining with one’s peers for support in the face of stress is a positive coping strategy. What is problematic is that the young people are operating with a very limited definition of what it means to be Black, based largely on cultural stereotypes.

Oppositional Identity Development and Academic Achievement

Unfortunately for Black teenagers, those cultural stereotypes do not usually include academic achievement. Academic success is more often associated with being White. During the encounter phase of racial identity development, when the search for identity leads toward cultural stereotypes and away from anything that might be associated with Whiteness, academic performance often declines. Doing well in school becomes identified as trying to be White. Being smart becomes the opposite of being cool.

While this frame of reference is not universally found among adolescents of African descent, it is commonly observed in Black peer groups. Among the Black college students I have interviewed, many described some conflict or alienation from other African American teens because of their academic success in high school. For example, a twenty-year-old female from a Washington, D.C., suburb explained:

It was weird, even in high school a lot of the Black students were, like, “Well, you’re not really Black.” Whether it was because I became president of the sixth-grade class or whatever it was, it started pretty much back



then. Junior high, it got worse. I was then labeled certain things, whether it was “the oreo” or I wasn’t really Black.

Others described avoiding situations that would set them apart from their Black peers. For example, one young woman declined to participate in a gifted program in her school because she knew it would separate her from the other Black students in the school.

In a study of thirty-three eleventh-graders in a Washington, D.C., school, Fordham and Ogbu found that although some of the students had once been academically successful, few of them remained so. These students also knew that to be identified as a “brainiac” would result in peer rejection. The few students who had maintained strong academic records found ways to play down their academic success enough to maintain some level of acceptance among their Black peers.¹³

Academically successful Black students also need a strategy to find acceptance among their White classmates. Fordham describes one such strategy as *racelessness*, wherein individuals assimilate into the dominant group by de-emphasizing characteristics that might identify them as members of the subordinate group.¹⁴ Jon, a young man I interviewed, offered a classic example of this strategy as he described his approach to dealing with his discomfort at being the only Black person in his advanced classes. He said, “At no point did I ever think I was White or did I ever want to be White. . . . I guess it was one of those things where I tried to de-emphasize the fact that I was Black.” This strategy led him to avoid activities that were associated with Blackness. He recalled, “I didn’t want to do anything that was traditionally Black, like I never played basketball. I ran cross-country. . . . I went for distance running instead of sprints.” He felt he had to show his White classmates that there were “exceptions to all these stereotypes.” However, this strategy was of limited usefulness. When he traveled outside his home community with his White teammates, he sometimes encountered overt racism. “I quickly realized that I’m

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Black, and that's the thing that they're going to see first, no matter how much I try to de-emphasize my Blackness."

A Black student can play down Black identity in order to succeed in school and mainstream institutions without rejecting his Black identity and culture.¹⁵ Instead of becoming raceless, an achieving Black student can become an *emissary*, someone who sees his or her own achievements as advancing the cause of the racial group. For example, social scientists Richard Zweigenhaft and G. William Domhoff describe how a successful Black student, in response to the accusation of acting White, connected his achievement to that of other Black men by saying, "Martin Luther King must not have been Black, then, since he had a doctoral degree, and Malcolm X must not have been Black since he educated himself while in prison." In addition, he demonstrated his loyalty to the Black community by taking an openly political stance against the racial discrimination he observed in his school.¹⁶

It is clear that an oppositional identity can interfere with academic achievement, and it may be tempting for educators to blame the adolescents themselves for their academic decline. However, the questions that educators and other concerned adults must ask are, How did academic achievement become defined as exclusively White behavior? What is it about the curriculum and the wider culture that reinforces the notion that academic excellence is an exclusively White domain? What curricular interventions might we use to encourage the development of an empowered emissary identity?

An oppositional identity that disdains academic achievement has not always been a characteristic of Black adolescent peer groups. It seems to be a post-desegregation phenomenon. Historically, the oppositional identity found among African Americans in the segregated South included a positive attitude toward education. While Black people may have publicly deferred to Whites, they actively encouraged their children to pursue education as a ticket to greater freedom.¹⁷ While Black parents still see education as the key to upward mobility, in today's desegregated schools the models of suc-



cess—the teachers, administrators, and curricular heroes—are almost always White.

Black Southern schools, though stigmatized by legally sanctioned segregation, were often staffed by African American educators, themselves visible models of academic achievement. These Black educators may have presented a curriculum that included references to the intellectual legacy of other African Americans. As well, in the context of a segregated school, it was a given that the high achieving students would all be Black. Academic achievement did not have to mean separation from one's Black peers.

The Search for Alternative Images

This historical example reminds us that an oppositional identity discouraging academic achievement is not inevitable even in a racist society. If young people are exposed to images of African American academic achievement in their early years, they won't have to define school achievement as something for Whites only. They will know that there is a long history of Black intellectual achievement.

This point was made quite eloquently by Jon, the young man I quoted earlier. Though he made the choice to excel in school, he labored under the false assumption that he was “inventing the wheel.” It wasn't until he reached college and had the opportunity to take African American studies courses that he learned about other African Americans besides Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, and Frederick Douglass—the same three men he had heard about year after year, from kindergarten to high school graduation. As he reflected on his identity struggle in high school, he said:

It's like I went through three phases. . . . My first phase was being cool, doing whatever was particularly cool for Black people at the time, and that was like in junior high. Then in high school, you know, I thought being Black was basically all stereotypes, so I tried to avoid all

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of those things. Now in college, you know, I realize that being Black means a variety of things.

Learning his history in college was of great psychological importance to Jon, providing him with role models he had been missing in high school. He was particularly inspired by learning of the intellectual legacy of Black men at his own college:

When you look at those guys who were here in the Twenties, they couldn't live on campus. They couldn't eat on campus. They couldn't get their hair cut in town. And yet they were all Phi Beta Kappa. . . . That's what being Black really is, you know, knowing who you are, your history, your accomplishments. . . . When I was in junior high, I had White role models. And then when I got into high school, you know, I wasn't sure but I just didn't think having White role models was a good thing. So I got rid of those. And I basically just, you know, only had my parents for role models. I kind of grew up thinking that we were on the cutting edge. We were doing something radically different than everybody else. And not realizing that there are all kinds of Black people doing the very things that I thought we were the only ones doing. . . . You've got to do the very best you can so that you can continue the great traditions that have already been established.

This young man was not alone in his frustration over having learned little about his own cultural history in grade school. Time and again in the research interviews I conducted, Black students lamented the absence of courses in African American history or literature at the high school level and indicated how significant this new learning was to them in college, how excited and affirmed they felt by this newfound knowledge. Sadly, many Black students never get to



college, alienated from the process of education long before high school graduation. They may never get access to the information that might have helped them expand their definition of what it means to be Black and, in the process, might have helped them stay in school. Young people are developmentally ready for this information in adolescence. We ought to provide it.

----- Not at the Table

As we have seen, Jon felt he had to distance himself from his Black peers in order to be successful in high school. He was one of the kids *not* sitting at the Black table. Continued encounters with racism and access to new culturally relevant information empowered him to give up his racelessness and become an emissary. In college, not only did he sit at the Black table, but he emerged as a campus leader, confident in the support of his Black peers. His example illustrates that one's presence at the Black table is often an expression of one's identity development, which evolves over time.

Some Black students may not be developmentally ready for the Black table in junior or senior high school. They may not yet have had their own encounters with racism, and race may not be very salient for them. Just as we don't all reach puberty and begin developing sexual interest at the same time, racial identity development unfolds in idiosyncratic ways. Though my research suggests that adolescence is a common time, one's own life experiences are also important determinants of the timing. The young person whose racial identity development is out of synch with his or her peers often feels in an awkward position. Adolescents are notoriously egocentric and assume that their experience is the same as everyone else's. Just as girls who have become interested in boys become disdainful of their friends still interested in dolls, the Black teens who are at the table can be quite judgmental toward those who are not. "If I think it is a sign of authentic Blackness to sit at this table, then you should too."

The young Black men and women who still hang around with



the White classmates they may have known since early childhood will often be snubbed by their Black peers. This dynamic is particularly apparent in regional schools where children from a variety of neighborhoods are brought together. When Black children from predominantly White neighborhoods go to school with Black children from predominantly Black neighborhoods, the former group is often viewed as trying to be White by the latter group. We all speak the language of the streets we live on. Black children living in White neighborhoods often sound White to their Black peers from across town, and may be teased because of it. This can be a very painful experience, particularly when the young person is not fully accepted as part of the White peer group either.

One young Black woman from a predominantly White community described exactly this situation in an interview. In a school with a lot of racial tension, Terri felt that “the worst thing that happened” was the rejection she experienced from the other Black children who were being bussed to her school. Though she wanted to be friends with them, they teased her, calling her an “oreo cookie” and sometimes beating her up. The only close Black friend Terri had was a biracial girl from her neighborhood.

Racial tensions also affected her relationships with White students. One White friend’s parents commented, “I can’t believe you’re Black. You don’t seem like all the Black children. You’re nice.” Though other parents made similar comments, Terri reported that her White friends didn’t start making them until junior high school, when Terri’s Blackness became something to be explained. One friend introduced Terri to another White girl by saying, “She’s not really Black, she just went to Florida and got a really dark tan.” A White sixth-grade “boyfriend” became embarrassed when his friends discovered he had a crush on a Black girl. He stopped telling Terri how pretty she was, and instead called her “nigger” and said, “Your lips are too big. I don’t want to see you. I won’t be your friend anymore.”

Despite supportive parents who expressed concern about her situation, Terri said she was a “very depressed child.” Her father would



have conversations with her “about being Black and beautiful” and about “the union of people of color that had always existed that I needed to find. And the pride.” However, her parents did not have a network of Black friends to help support her.

It was the intervention of a Black junior high school teacher that Terri feels helped her the most. Mrs. Campbell “really exposed me to the good Black community because I was so down on it” by getting Terri involved in singing gospel music and introducing her to other Black students who would accept her. “That’s when I started having other Black friends. And I thank her a lot for that.”

The significant role that Mrs. Campbell played in helping Terri open up illustrates the constructive potential that informed adults can have in the identity development process. She recognized Terri’s need for a same-race peer group and helped her find one. Talking to groups of Black students about the variety of living situations Black people come from and the unique situation facing Black adolescents in White communities helps to expand the definition of what it means to be Black and increases intragroup acceptance at a time when that is quite important.

For children in Terri’s situation, it is also helpful for Black parents to provide ongoing opportunities for their children to connect with other Black peers even if that means traveling outside the community they live in. Race-conscious parents often do this by attending a Black church or maintaining ties to Black social organizations such as Jack and Jill. Parents who make this effort often find that their children become bicultural, able to move comfortably between Black and White communities, and able to sit at the Black table when they are ready.

Implied in this discussion is the assumption that connecting with one’s Black peers in the process of identity development is important and should be encouraged. For young Black people living in predominantly Black communities, such connections occur spontaneously with neighbors and classmates and usually do not require special encouragement. However, for young people in predominantly



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White communities they may only occur with active parental intervention. One might wonder if this social connection is really necessary. If a young person has found a niche among a circle of White friends, is it really necessary to establish a Black peer group as a reference point? Eventually it is.

As one's awareness of the daily challenges of living in a racist society increase, it is immensely helpful to be able to share one's experiences with others who have lived it. Even when White friends are willing and able to listen and bear witness to one's struggles, they cannot really share the experience. One young woman came to this realization in her senior year of high school:

[The isolation] never really bothered me until about senior year when I was the only one in the class. . . . That little burden, that constant burden of you always having to strive to do your best and show that you can do just as much as everybody else. Your White friends can't understand that, and it's really hard to communicate to them. Only someone else of the same racial, same ethnic background would understand something like that.

When one is faced with what Chester Pierce calls the "mundane extreme environmental stress" of racism, in adolescence or in adulthood, the ability to see oneself as part of a larger group from which one can draw support is an important coping strategy.¹⁸ Individuals who do not have such a strategy available to them because they do not experience a shared identity with at least some subset of their racial group are at risk for considerable social isolation.

Of course, who we perceive as sharing our identity may be influenced by other dimensions of identity such as gender, social class, geographical location, skin color, or ethnicity. For example, research indicates that first-generation Black immigrants from the Caribbean tend to emphasize their national origins and ethnic identities, dis-

tancing themselves from U.S. Blacks, due in part to their belief that West Indians are viewed more positively by Whites than those American Blacks whose family roots include the experience of U.S. slavery. To relinquish one's ethnic identity as West Indian and take on an African American identity may be understood as downward social mobility. However, second-generation West Indians without an identifiable accent may lose the relative ethnic privilege their parents experienced and seek racial solidarity with Black American peers in the face of encounters with racism.¹⁹ Whether it is the experience of being followed in stores because they are suspected of shoplifting, seeing people respond to them with fear on the street, or feeling overlooked in school, Black youth can benefit from seeking support from those who have had similar experiences.

An Alternative to the Cafeteria Table

The developmental need to explore the meaning of one's identity with others who are engaged in a similar process manifests itself informally in school corridors and cafeterias across the country. Some educational institutions have sought to meet this need programmatically. Several colleagues and I recently evaluated one such effort, initiated at a Massachusetts middle school participating in a voluntary desegregation program known as the Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity (METCO) program.²⁰ Historically, the small number of African American students who are bussed from Boston to this suburban school have achieved disappointing levels of academic success. In an effort to improve academic achievement, the school introduced a program, known as Student Efficacy Training (SET) that allowed Boston students to meet each day as a group with two staff members. Instead of being in physical education or home economics or study hall, they were meeting, talking about homework difficulties, social issues, and encounters with racism. The meeting was mandatory and at first the students were resentful of missing some of their classes. But the impact was dramatic. Said one young woman,

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In the beginning of the year, I didn't want to do SET at all. It took away my study and it was only METCO students doing it. In the beginning all we did was argue over certain problems or it was more like a rap session and I didn't think it was helping anyone. But then when we looked at records . . . I know that last year out of all the students, sixth through eighth grade, there was, like, six who were actually good students. Everyone else, it was just pathetic, I mean, like, they were getting like Ds and Fs. . . . The eighth grade is doing much better this year. I mean, they went from Ds and Fs to Bs and Cs and occasional As. . . . And those seventh-graders are doing really good, they have a lot of honor roll students in seventh grade, both guys and girls. Yeah, it's been good. It's really good.

Her report is borne out by an examination of school records. The opportunity to come together in the company of supportive adults allowed these young Black students to talk about the issues that hindered their performance—racial encounters, feelings of isolation, test anxiety, homework dilemmas—in the psychological safety of their own group. In the process, the peer culture changed to one that supported academic performance rather than undermined it, as revealed in these two students' comments:

Well, a lot of the Boston students, the boys and the girls, used to fight all the time. And now, they stopped yelling at each other so much and calling each other stupid.

It's like we've all become like one big family, we share things more with each other. We tease each other like brother and sister. We look out for each other with homework and stuff. We always stay on top of each other 'cause we know it's hard with African American



students to go to a predominantly White school and try to succeed with everybody else.

The faculty, too, were very enthusiastic about the outcomes of the intervention, as seen in the comments of these two classroom teachers:

This program has probably produced the most dramatic result of any single change that I've seen at this school. It has produced immediate results that affected behavior and academics and participation in school life.

My students are more engaged. They aren't battling out a lot of the issues of their anger about being in a White community, coming in from Boston, where do I fit, I don't belong here. I feel that those issues that often came out in class aren't coming out in class anymore. I think they are being discussed in the SET room, the kids feel more confidence. The kids' grades are higher, the homework response is greater, they're not afraid to participate in class, and I don't see them isolating themselves within class. They are willing to sit with other students happily. . . . I think it's made a very positive impact on their place in the school and on their individual self-esteem. I see them enjoying themselves and able to enjoy all of us as individuals. I can't say enough, it's been the best thing that's happened to the METCO program as far as I'm concerned.²¹

Although this intervention is not a miracle cure for every school, it does highlight what can happen when we think about the developmental needs of Black adolescents coming to terms with their own sense of identity. It might seem counterintuitive that a school involved in a voluntary desegregation program could improve both academic performance and social relationships among students by *separating* the



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Black students for one period every day. But if we understand the unique challenges facing adolescents of color and the legitimate need they have to feel supported in their identity development, it makes perfect sense.

Though they may not use the language of racial identity development theory to describe it, most Black parents want their children to achieve an internalized sense of personal security, to be able to acknowledge the reality of racism and to respond effectively to it. Our educational institutions should do what they can to encourage this development rather than impede it. When I talk to educators about the need to provide adolescents with identity-affirming experiences and information about their own cultural groups, they sometimes flounder because this information has not been part of their own education. Their understanding of adolescent development has been limited to the White middle-class norms included in most textbooks, their knowledge of Black history limited to Martin Luther King, Jr., and Rosa Parks. They sometimes say with frustration that parents should provide this kind of education for their children. Unfortunately Black parents often attended the same schools the teachers did and have the same informational gaps. We need to acknowledge that an important part of interrupting the cycle of oppression is constant re-education, and sharing what we learn with the next generation.



3

The Early Years

“Is my skin brown because I drink chocolate milk?”

Think of your earliest race-related memory. How old were you? When I ask adults in my workshops this question, they call out a range of ages: “Three,” “Five,” “Eight,” “Thirteen,” “Twenty.” Sometimes they talk in small groups about what they remember. At first they hesitate to speak, but then the stories come flooding forward, each person’s memory triggering another’s.

Some are stories of curiosity, as when a light-skinned child wonders why a dark-skinned person’s palms are so much lighter than the backs of his hands. Some are stories of fear and avoidance, communicated verbally or nonverbally by parents, as when one White woman describes her mother nervously telling her to roll up the windows and lock the doors as they drove through a Black community. Some are stories of active bigotry, transmitted casually from one generation to the next through the use of racial slurs and ethnic jokes. Some are stories of confusing mixed messages, as when a White man remembers the Black maid who was “just like family” but was not allowed to eat from the family dishes or use the upstairs bathroom. Some are stories of terror, as when a Black woman remembers being chased home from school by a German shepherd, deliberately set loose by its White owner as she passed by. I will often ask audience members, “What do you remember? Something someone said or did? A name-calling incident? An act of discrimination? The casual observation of skin color differences? Were you the observer or the object of observation?”

In large groups, I hesitate to ask the participants to reveal their memories to a crowd of strangers, but I ask instead what emotions are



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attached to the memories. The participants use such words as *anger*, *confusion*, *surprise*, *sadness*, *embarrassment*. Notice that this list does not include such words as *joy*, *excitement*, *delight*. Too often the stories are painful ones. Then I ask, “Did you talk to anyone about what happened? Did you tell anyone how you felt?” It is always surprising to me to see how many people will say that they never discussed these clearly emotional experiences with anyone. Why not? Had they already learned that race was not a topic to be discussed?

If they didn’t talk to anyone else about it, how did these three- or five- or eight- or thirteen-year-old children make sense of their experience? Has the confusion continued into adulthood? Are we as adults prepared to help the children we care about make sense of their own race-related observations?

Preschool Conversations

Like many African Americans, I have many race-related memories, beginning when I was quite small. I remember being about three years old when I had an argument with an African American playmate. He said I was “black.” “No I’m not,” I said, “I’m tan.” I now see that we were both right. I am Black, a person of African descent, but tan is surely a more accurate description of my light brown skin than black is. As a three-year-old child who knew her colors, I was prepared to stand my ground. As an adult looking back on this incident, I wonder if I had also begun to recognize, even at three, that in some circles it was better to be tan than to be black. Had I already started internalizing racist messages?

Questions and confusion about racial issues begin early. Though adults often talk about the “colorblindness” of children, the fact is that children as young as three do notice physical differences such as skin color, hair texture, and the shape of one’s facial features.¹ Certainly preschoolers talk about what they see, and often they do it in ways that make parents uncomfortable. How should we respond when they do?



My own children have given me many opportunities to think about this question. For example, one winter day, my youngest son, David, observed a White mother helping her brown-skinned biracial daughter put on her boots in the hallway of his preschool. “Why don’t they match, Mommy?” he asked loudly. Absentmindedly collecting his things, I didn’t quite understand what he was talking about—mismatched socks, perhaps? When I asked, he explained indignantly, “You and I match. They don’t match. Mommies and kids are supposed to match.”

David, like many three-year-olds (and perhaps some adults), had overgeneralized from his routine observations of White parents with White children, and Black parents, like his own, with Black children. As a psychologist, I recognized this preschool tendency to overgeneralize as a part of his cognitive development, but as a mother standing with her child in the hallway, I was embarrassed, afraid that his comment might have somehow injured the mother-daughter pair standing in the hallway with us. I responded matter-of-factly, “David, they don’t have to match. Sometimes parents and kids match, and sometimes they don’t.”

More often, my children and I have been on the receiving end of a preschooler’s questions. The first conversation of this type I remember occurred when my oldest son, Jonathan, was enrolled in a day care center where he was one of few children of color, and the only Black child in his class. One day, as we drove home from the day care center, Jonathan said, “Eddie says my skin is brown because I drink too much chocolate milk. Is that true?” Eddie was a White three-year-old in Jonathan’s class who, like David, had observed a physical difference and was now searching for an explanation.

“No,” I replied, “your skin is brown because you have something in your skin called melanin. Melanin is very important because it helps protect your skin from the sun. Eddie has melanin in his skin,

* With the exception of my own children’s names, all names used in these examples are pseudonyms.



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too. Remember when Eddie went to Florida on vacation and came back showing everybody his tan? It was the melanin in his skin that made it get darker. Everybody has melanin, you know. But some people have more than others. At your school, you are the kid with the most!”

Jonathan seemed to understand the idea and smiled at the thought that he was the child with the most of something. I talked more about how much I liked the color of his pecan-colored skin, how it was a perfect blend of my light-brown skin and his father’s dark-brown complexion. I wanted to affirm who Jonathan was, a handsome brown-skinned child. I wanted to counter the implication of Eddie’s question—that there was perhaps something wrong with brown skin, the result of “too much” chocolate milk.

This process of affirmation was not new. Since infancy I had talked about how much I liked his smooth brown skin and those little curls whenever I bathed him or brushed his hair. I searched for children’s books depicting brown-skinned children. When Jonathan was one year old, we gave him a large brown rag doll, complete with curly black hair made of yarn, a Marcus Garvey T-shirt, and an African name. Olayinka, or Olay for short, was his constant companion at home and at the day care center during nap time. Especially because we have lived in predominantly White communities since his birth, I felt it was important to make sure he saw himself reflected positively in as many ways as possible. As many Black families do, I think we provided an important buffer against the negative messages about Blackness offered by the larger society.²

But Jonathan continued to think about the color of his skin, and sometimes he would bring it up. One Saturday morning I was cooking pancakes for breakfast, and Jonathan was at my side, eagerly watching the pancakes cook on the griddle. When I flipped the pancakes over, he was excited to see that the cream-colored batter had been transformed into a golden brown. Jonathan remarked, “I love pancakes. They are brown, just like me.” On another occasion when we were cooking together, he noticed that I had set some eggs out on



the kitchen counter. Some of the eggs were brown, and some of them were white. He commented on the fact that the eggs were not all the same color. “Yes,” I said, “they do have different shells. But look at this!” I cracked open a brown egg and emptied its contents into a bowl. Then I cracked open a white egg. “See, they are different on the outside, but the same on the inside. People are the same way. They look different on the outside, but they are the same on the inside.”

Jonathan’s questions and comments, like David’s and Eddie’s, were not unusual for a child of his age. Preschool children are very focused on outward appearances, and skin color is the racial feature they are most likely to comment on.³ I felt good about my ability as a parent to respond to Jonathan’s questions. (I was, after all, teaching courses on the psychology of racism and child development. I was not caught completely off guard!) But I wondered about Jonathan’s classmates. What about Eddie, the boy with the chocolate milk theory? Had anyone set him straight?

In fact, Eddie’s question, “Is your skin brown because you drink too much chocolate milk?” represented a good attempt to make sense of a curious phenomenon that he was observing. All the kids in the class had light skin except for Jonathan. Why was Jonathan’s skin different? It didn’t seem to be dirt—Jonathan washed his hands before lunch like all the other children did, and there was no change. He did often have chocolate milk in his lunch box—maybe that was it. Eddie’s reasoning was first-rate for a three-year-old. The fact that he was asking about Jonathan’s skin, rather than speculating about his own, reflected that he had already internalized “Whiteness” as the norm, which it was in that school. His question did not reflect prejudice in an adult sense, but it did reveal confusion. His theory was flawed, and he needed some help.

I decided to ask a staff member how she and the other preschool teachers were handling children’s questions about racial differences. She smiled and said, “It really hasn’t come up.” I was amazed. I knew it had come up; after all, Jonathan had reported the conversations to me. How was it that she had not noticed?



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Maybe it was easy not to notice. Maybe these conversations among three-year-olds had taken place at the lunch table or in the sand box, away from the hearing of adults. I suspect, too, that there may have been some selective inattention on the part of the staff. When children make comments to which we don't know how to respond, it may be easier simply not to hear what has just been said or to let it slip from our consciousness and memory. Then we don't have to respond, because it "hasn't come up."

Many adults do not know how to respond when children make race-related observations. Imagine this scenario. A White mother and preschool child are shopping in the grocery store. They pass a Black woman and child, and the White child says loudly, "Mommy, look at that girl! Why is she so dirty?" (Confusing dark skin with dirt is a common misconception among White preschool children.) The White mother, embarrassed by her child's comment, responds quickly with a "Ssh!"

An appropriate response might have been: "Honey, that little girl is not dirty. Her skin is as clean as yours. It's just a different color. Just like we have different hair color, people have different skin colors." If the child still seemed interested, the explanation of melanin could be added.⁴ Perhaps afraid of saying the wrong thing, however, many parents don't offer an explanation. They stop at "Ssh," silencing the child but not responding to the question or the reasoning underlying it. Children who have been silenced often enough learn not to talk about race publicly. Their questions don't go away, they just go unasked.

I see the legacy of this silencing in my psychology of racism classes. My students have learned that there is a taboo against talking about race, especially in racially mixed settings, and creating enough safety in the class to overcome that taboo is the first challenge for me as an instructor. But the evidence of the internalized taboo is apparent long before children reach college.

When addressing parent groups, I often hear from White parents who tell me with pride that their children are "colorblind." Usually



the parent offers as evidence a story of a friendship with a child of color whose race or ethnicity has never been mentioned to the parent. For example, a father reported that his eight-year-old daughter had been talking very enthusiastically about a friend she had made at school. One day when he picked his daughter up from school, he asked her to point out her new friend. Trying to point her out of a large group of children on the playground, his daughter elaborately described what the child was wearing. She never said she was the only Black girl in the group. Her father was pleased that she had not, a sign of her colorblindness. I wondered if, rather than a sign of colorblindness, it was a sign that she had learned not to be so impolite as to mention someone's race.

My White college students sometimes refer to someone as Black in hushed tones, sometimes whispering the word as though it were a secret or a potentially scandalous identification. When I detect this behavior, I like to point it out, saying it is not an insult to identify a Black person as Black. Of course, sometimes one's racial group membership is irrelevant to the conversation, and then there is no need to mention it. But when it is relevant, as when pointing out the only Black girl in a crowd, we should not be afraid to say so.

----- Blackness, Whiteness, and Painful History

Of course, when we talk to children about racial issues, or anything else, we have to keep in mind each child's developmental stage and cognitive ability to make sense of what we are saying. Preschool children are quite literal in their use of language and concrete in their thinking. They talk about physical differences and other commonly observed cultural differences such as language and style of dress because they are tangible and easy to recognize. They may be confused by the symbolic constructs that adults use.⁵

This point was brought home to me in another conversation with my son Jonathan. As a working mother, I often found trips to the grocery store to be a good opportunity for "quality" time with my then



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four-year-old. We would stroll the grocery aisles chatting, as he sat in the top part of the grocery cart and I filled the bottom. On such an outing, Jonathan told me that someone at school had said he was Black. “Am I Black?” he asked me. “Yes, you are,” I replied. “But my skin is brown,” he said. I was instantly reminded of my own preschool “I’m not black, I’m tan” argument on this point. “Yes,” I said, “your skin is brown, but *Black* is a term that people use to describe African Americans, just like *White* is used to describe people who came from Europe. It is a little confusing,” I conceded, “because Black people aren’t really the color black, but different shades of brown.” I mentioned different members of our family and the different shades we represented, but I said that we were all African Americans and in that sense could all be called Black.

Then I said, “It’s the same with White people. They come in lots of different shades—pink, beige, even light brown. None of them are white like this piece of paper.” I held up the white note paper on which my grocery list was written as proof. Jonathan nodded his agreement with my description of Black people as really being varying shades of brown, but hesitated when I said that White people were not really white in color. “Yes they are,” he said. I held up the paper again and said, “White people don’t really look like this.” “Yes, they do,” he insisted. “Okay,” I said, remembering that children learn from actual experiences. “Let’s go find one and see.” We were alone in the grocery aisle, but sure enough, when we turned the corner, there was a White woman pushing her cart down the aisle. I leaned over and whispered in Jonathan’s ear, “Now, see, she doesn’t look like this paper.” Satisfied with this evidence, he conceded the point, and we moved on in our conversation. As I discovered, we were just getting started.

Jonathan’s confusion about society’s “color” language was not surprising or unusual. At the same time that preschoolers are identifying the colors in the crayon box, they are also beginning to figure out racial categorizations. The color-coded language of social categories obviously does not match the colors we use to label objects. People



of Asian descent are not really “yellow” like lemons, Native Americans don’t really look “red” like apples. I understood the problem and was prepared for this kind of confusion.

What was of most concern to me at that moment was the tone of my son’s question. In his tone of voice was the hint that maybe he was not comfortable being identified as Black, and I wondered what messages he was taking in about being African American. I said that if he wanted to, he could tell his classmate that he was African American. I said that he should feel very proud to have ancestors who were from Africa. I was just beginning to talk about ancient African civilizations when he interrupted me. “If Africa is so great, what are we doing here?” he asked.

I had not planned to have a conversation about slavery with my four-year-old in the grocery store that day. But I didn’t see how I could answer his question otherwise. Slavery is a topic that makes many of us uncomfortable. Yet the nature of Black-White race relations in the United States have been forever shaped by slavery and its social, psychological, and economic legacies. It requires discussion. But how does one talk to a four-year-old about this legacy of cruelty and injustice?

I began at the beginning. I knew his preschool had discussed the colonial days when Europeans first came to these shores. I reminded him of this and said:

A long, long time ago, before there were grocery stores and roads and houses here, the Europeans came. And they wanted to build roads and houses and grocery stores here, but it was going to be a lot of work. They needed a lot of really good, strong, smart workers to cut down trees, and build roads, and work on farms, and they didn’t have enough. So they went to Africa to get the strongest, smartest workers they could find. Unfortunately they didn’t want to pay them. So they kidnapped them and brought them here as slaves. They



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made them work and didn't pay them. And that was really unfair.

Even as I told this story I was aware of three things. (1) I didn't want to frighten this four-year-old who might worry that these things would happen to him (another characteristic of four-year old thinking). (2) I wanted him to know that his African ancestors were not just passive victims, but had found ways to resist their victimization. (3) I did not want him to think that all White people were bad. It *is* possible to have White allies.

So I continued:

Now, this was a long, long time ago. You were never a slave. I was never a slave. Grandmommy and Granddaddy were never slaves. This was a really long time ago, and the Africans who were kidnapped did whatever they could to escape. But sometimes the Europeans had guns and the Africans didn't, so it was hard to get away. But some even jumped off the boats into the ocean to try to escape. There were slave rebellions, and many of the Africans were able to escape to freedom after they got here, and worked to help other slaves get free. Now, even though some White people were kidnapping Africans and making them work without pay, other White people thought that this was very unfair, which it was. And those White people worked along with the Black people to bring an end to slavery. So now it is against the law to have slaves.

Jonathan was paying very close attention to my story, and when I declared that slavery had ended a long time ago, he asked, "Well, when they weren't slaves anymore, why didn't they go back to Africa?" Thanks to the African American history classes I took in college, I knew enough to say, "Well, some did. But others might not have been



able to because they didn't have enough money, and besides that, by then they had families and friends who were living here and they might have wanted to stay."

"And this is a nice place, too," he declared.

"Yes it is."

Over the next few weeks, an occasional question would come up about my story, and I knew that Jonathan was still digesting what I had said. Though I did not anticipate talking about slavery with my four-year-old, I was glad in retrospect that it was I who had introduced him to the subject, because I was able to put my own spin on this historical legacy, emphasizing both Black resistance to victimization and White resistance to the role of victimizer.

Too often I hear from young African American students the embarrassment they have felt in school when the topic of slavery is discussed, ironically one of the few ways that the Black experience is included in their school curriculum. Uncomfortable with the portrayal of their group as helpless victims—the rebellions and resistance offered by the enslaved Africans are rarely discussed—they squirm uncomfortably as they feel the eyes of White children looking to see their reaction to this subject.

In my professional development work with White teachers they sometimes remark how uncomfortable they, too, are with this and other examples of the painful history of race relations in the United States. As one elementary school teacher said,

It is hard to tell small children about slavery, hard to explain that Black young men were lynched, and that police turned firehoses on children while other men bombed churches, killing Black children at their prayers. This history is a terrible legacy for all of us. The other day a teacher told me that she could not look into the faces of her students when she taught about these things. It was too painful, and too embarrassing. . . . If we are all uncomfortable, something is wrong in our approach.⁶



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Something *is* wrong. While I think it is necessary to be honest about the racism of our past and present, it is also necessary to empower children (and adults) with the vision that change is possible. Concrete examples are critical. For young children these examples can sometimes be found in children's picture books. One of my favorites is Faith Ringgold's *Aunt Harriet's Underground Railroad in the Sky*.⁷ Drawing on historical accounts of the Underground Railroad and the facts of Harriet Tubman's life, this story is told from the point of view of a young Black girl who travels back in time and experiences both the chilling realities of slavery and the power of her own resistance and eventual escape.

White people are present in the story both as enemies (slave-owners) and as allies (abolitionists). This dual representation is important for children of color, as well as for White children. I remember a conversation I had a few years ago with a White friend who often talked to her then preschool son about issues of social justice. He had been told over and over the story of Rosa Parks and the Montgomery bus boycott, and it was one of his favorites as a four-year-old. But as he got a little older she began to notice a certain discomfort in him when she talked about these issues. "Are all White people bad?" he asked her. At the age of five, he seemed to be feeling badly about being White. She asked me for some advice. I recommended she begin talking more about what White people had done to oppose injustice. Finding examples of this in children's literature can be a challenge, but one example is Jeanette Winter's book, *Follow the Drinking Gourd*.⁸ This too is a story about the Underground Railroad, but it highlights the role of a White man named Peg Leg Joe and other White allies who offer assistance along the escape route, again providing a tangible example of White resistance to injustice.

A Question of Color

All of these preschool questions reflect the beginnings of a developing racial identity. The particular questions my child asked me reflect-



ed his early experience as one of few Black children in a predominantly White community. Even in the context of all-Black communities, the color variations in the community, even within families, can lead to a series of skin-color related conversations. For example, it is common to hear a preschool child describe a light-skinned Black person as White, often to the chagrin of the individual so identified. The child's misclassification does not represent a denial of Blackness, only the child's incomplete understanding of the adult world's racial classifications. As preschoolers, my own children have asked me if I was White. When I am misidentified by children as White, I usually reply matter-of-factly, "I am an African American person. We come in all shades of brown, dark brown, medium brown, and sometimes light brown—like me."

The concept of *race constancy*, that one's racial group membership is fixed and will not change, is not achieved until children are six or seven years old. (The same is true of gender constancy.)⁹ Just as preschool boys sometimes express a desire to have a baby like Mom when they grow up (and are dismayed when they learn they cannot), young Black children may express a desire to be White. Though such statements are certainly distressing to parents, they do not necessarily mean that the child has internalized a negative self-image. It may, however, reflect a child's growing awareness of White privilege, conveyed through the media. For example, in a study of children's race-related conversations, one five-year-old Black boy reportedly asked, "Do I have to be Black?" To the question of why he asked, he responded, "I want to be chief of paramedics." His favorite TV show at the time featured paramedics and firefighters, all of whom were White.¹⁰

Though such comments by young children are not necessarily rooted in self-rejection, it is important to consider what messages children are receiving about the relative worth of light or dark skin. The societal preference for light skin and the relative advantage historically bestowed on light-skinned Blacks, often referred to as colorism, manifests itself not only in the marketplace but even within Black families.¹¹



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A particular form of internalized oppression, the skin-color prejudice found within Black communities is toxic to children and adults. A by-product of the plantation hierarchy, which privileged the light-skinned children of enslaved African women and White slaveowners, a post-slavery class system was created based on color. Historically the Black middle class has been a light-skinned group. But the racially mixed ancestry of many Black people can lead to a great deal of color variation among siblings and extended family members. The internalization of White-supremacist standards of beauty and the desire to maintain what little advantage can be gained in a racist system leads some families to reject darker-skinned members. Conversely, in some families, anger at White oppression and the pain of colorism can lead to resentment toward and rejection of lighter-skinned members. According to family therapist Nancy Boyd-Franklin, family attitudes about skin color are rarely discussed openly, but the messages are often clearly conveyed when some children are favored over others, or when a relative teasingly says, “Whose child are you?” to the child whose skin color varies from other family members. Boyd-Franklin writes,

All Black people, irrespective of their color, shade, darkness, or lightness, are aware from a very early age that their blackness makes them different from mainstream White America. It sets them apart from White immigrant groups who were not brought here as slaves and who have thus had a different experience in becoming assimilated into mainstream American culture. The struggle for a strong positive racial identity for young Black Afro-American children is clearly made more difficult by the realities of color prejudice.¹²

We need to examine not only our behavior toward our children, but also the language we use around them. Is *black* ever used as a derogatory term to describe others, as in “that black so-and-so?” Is



darkness seen as an obstacle to be overcome, as in “She’s dark, but she’s still pretty,” or avoided, as in “Stay out of the sun, you’re dark enough already?” Is lightness described as defective, as in “You need some sun, girl?” Do we sing hymns in church on Sunday proclaiming our wish to be washed “white as snow”? Even when our clear desire is to reflect positive images of Blackness to young Black children, our habits of speech may undermine our efforts unless we are intentional about examining the color-coded nature of our language.

Related to questions of color are issues of hair texture, an especially sensitive issue for Black women, young and old. I grew up with the expression “good hair.” Though no one in my household used that phrase often, I knew what it meant when I heard it. “Good hair” was straight hair, the straighter the better. I still remember the oohs and ahs of my White elementary school classmates when I arrived at school for “picture day” with my long mane of dark hair resting on my shoulders. With the miracle of a hot comb, my mother had transformed my ordinary braids into what I thought was a glamorous cascade of curls. I received many compliments that day. “How pretty you look,” the White teacher said. The truth is I looked pretty every day, but a clear message was being sent both at home and at school about what real beauty was.

I now wear my hair in its natural state of tiny curls. It has been that way for more than twenty-five years. My sons are unfamiliar with Saturday afternoon trips to the beauty parlor, the smell of hot combs and chemical straighteners. Instead they go with me or their father to the Black-owned barber shop where Black men and some women wait their turn for a seat in the barber’s chair. I admire their neatly trimmed heads, and they admire mine. I genuinely like the way my short hair looks and feels, and that sends an important message to my sons about how I feel about myself as a Black woman and, by extension, how I feel about them.

Though a woman’s choice to straighten her hair is not necessarily a sign of internalized oppression, it does reinforce the notion to an observant child that straight is better. In her book *Sisters of the Yam:*



Black Women and Self Recovery, bell hooks relates a conversation she had with a Black woman frustrated by her daughter's desire for long blond hair, despite the family's effort to affirm their Blackness. Observing the woman's dark skin and straightened hair, she encouraged the mother to examine her own attitudes about skin color and hair texture to see what messages she might be communicating to her child by the way she constructed her own body image.¹³

Countering the images of the dominant culture is a challenge, but it can be done. Finding images that reflect the range of skin tones and hair textures in Black families is an important way to affirm a positive sense of Black identity. A wonderfully illustrated book for children that opposes the prevailing Eurocentric images of beauty is John Steptoe's *Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters: An African Tale*.¹⁴ As the story states on the opening page, "everyone agreed that Manyara and Nyasha are beautiful." These lovely brown-skinned sisters have broad noses and full lips, with hair braided in short cornrows.

Though it is easier than it used to be to find children's picture books depicting Black children authentically rather than as White children painted a darker shade, it may still be hard to find children's books depicting Black children with very dark or very light skin. A medium brown seems to be the color of choice. Decorating one's home with photographs of family and friends who represent a range of skin tones and hair textures is one way to begin to fill this representational gap.

"It's That Stuff Again": Developing a Critical Consciousness

From the time my children were infants, reading has been a shared activity in our family. I have always loved to read, and that love of books has been imparted to my children, who rarely leave home without a book to read on the way. I have worked hard to find good children's literature featuring African Americans and other children of color, but I have also introduced my children to some of the books I liked when I was a child, most of which only included White children.

When Jonathan was just learning to read on his own and had advanced to “chapter books,” I introduced him to *The Boxcar Children* series of easy-reading mysteries that I loved as a child.¹⁵ Originally written in the 1940s, these books feature four White children, two boys and two girls, orphaned and homeless, who lived in an abandoned railway car until they were found by their wealthy grandfather. From then on, they traveled with Grandfather and solved mysteries wherever they went.

Reading these volumes again with Jonathan, I had a new perception of them: how sexist they seemed to be. The two girls seemed to spend most of their time on these adventures cooking and cleaning and setting up house while the boys fished, paddled the canoe, and made the important discoveries. After reading several pages of this together, I decided to say something about it to my then seven-year-old son. I asked if he knew what sexism was. He did not, so I explained that it was when girls were treated differently than boys just because they were girls. I said that the girls in this story were being treated differently than the boys, and I pointed out some examples and discussed the unfairness of it. Jonathan wanted to continue the story, and I agreed that we could finish it, despite my new perception. What pleased and surprised me as we continued to read was that Jonathan began to spot the gender bias himself. “Hey Mom,” he interrupted me as I read on, “there’s that stuff again!”

Learning to spot “that stuff”—whether it is racist, or sexist, or classist—is an important skill for children to develop. It is as important for my Black male children to recognize sexism and other forms of oppression as it is for them to spot racism. We are better able to resist the negative impact of oppressive messages when we see them coming than when they are invisible to us. While some may think it is a burden to children to encourage this critical consciousness, I consider it a gift. Educator Janie Ward calls this child-rearing process “raising resisters.”¹⁶ And there are infinite opportunities to do so.

One such opportunity came in the form of a children’s book of Bible stories, a gift from a friend. My son and I sat down to read the



story of Moses together. We hadn't gotten very far when I said, "You know, something is bothering me about this book." "What is it?" he replied. "You know, this story took place in Egypt, and the people in these pictures do not look much like Egyptians." "Well, what do Egyptians look like?" he asked. We turned to a children's world atlas and found that the photographs of the Egyptians in the atlas had noticeably darker skin and hair than the drawings in the book. Though we did not discard the book, we did discuss the discrepancy.

I do not point out every omission or distortion I notice (and I am sure that a lot go by me unnoticed), and sometimes my children don't agree with my observations. For example, when discussing with them my plans to talk about media stereotyping in this book, I offered the example of the Disney film *The Lion King*. A very popular family film, I was dismayed at the use of ethnically identifiable voices to characterize the hyenas, clearly the undesirables in the film. The Spanish-accented voice of Cheech Marin and the Black slang of Whoopi Goldberg clearly marked the hyenas racially. The little *Lion King* is warned never to go to the place where the hyenas live. When the evil lion (darker in shade than the good lions) takes over, and the hyenas have access to power, it is not long before they have ruined the kingdom. "There goes the neighborhood!"

My sons, now ten and fourteen, countered that the distinguished Black actor James Earl Jones as the voice of the good lion offset the racial characterizations of the hyenas. I argued that to the target audience of young children, the voice of James Earl Jones would not be identified as a voice of color, while the voices of the hyenas surely would. The racial subtext of the film would be absorbed uncritically by many young children, and perhaps their parents. Whether we agree or not, the process of engaging my children in a critical examination of the books they read, the television they watch, the films they see, and the video games they play is essential.

And despite my best efforts, the stereotypes still creep in. One Saturday afternoon a few years ago, after attending choir rehearsal at a church located in a Black section of a nearby city, my oldest son and



I drove past a Black teenager running down the street. “Why is that boy running?” my son asked. “I don’t know,” I said absentmindedly. “Maybe he stole something.” I nearly slammed on the brakes. “Why would you say something like that?” I said. “Well, you know, in the city, there’s a lot of crime, and people steal things,” he said. He did not say “Black people,” but I knew the cultural images to which he was responding. Now, this neighborhood was very familiar to us. We had spent many Saturdays at choir rehearsal and sat in church next to Black kids who looked a lot like that boy on the street. We had never personally experienced any crime in that location. In fact the one time my car stereo was stolen was when it was parked in a “good neighborhood” in our own small town. I pointed out this contradiction and asked my son to imagine why he, also a Black boy, might be running down the street—in a hurry to get home, late for a bus, on his way to a job at the McDonald’s up the street? Then we talked about stereotyping and the images of urban Black boys we see on television and elsewhere. Too often they are portrayed as muggers, drug dealers, or other criminals. My sons know that such images are not an accurate representation of themselves, and I have to help them see that they are also a distorted image of their urban peers.

Children can learn to question whether demeaning or derogatory depictions of other people are stereotypes. When reading books or watching television, they can learn to ask who is doing what in the story line and why, who is in the role of leader and who is taking the orders, who or what is the problem and who is solving it, and who has been left out of the story altogether.¹⁷

But not only do children need to be able to recognize distorted representations, they also need to know what can be done about them. Learning to recognize cultural and institutional racism and other forms of inequity without also learning strategies to respond to them is a prescription for despair. Yet even preschool children are not too young to begin to think about what can be done about unfairness. The resource book *Anti-Bias Curriculum: Tools for Empowering Young Children*, includes many examples of young children learning



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to recognize and speak up against unfairness.¹⁸ The book suggests increasing levels of activism for developing children. Two- and three-year-olds are encouraged to use words to express their feelings and to empathize with one another. With adult guidance, four- and five-year-olds are capable of group activism.

Several years ago a group of seven-year-olds in a second-grade class in Amherst, Massachusetts, wrote letters to the state Department of Transportation protesting the signs on the Massachusetts Turnpike depicting a Pilgrim hat with an arrow through it. This sign was certainly a misrepresentation of history, and offensive to American Indians. The children received national recognition for their efforts, and more important, the signs were changed. I am sure the lesson that collective effort can make a difference will be remembered by those children for a long time.

As early childhood educator Louise Derman-Sparks and her colleagues write in *Anti-Bias Curriculum*,

For children to feel good and confident about themselves, they need to be able to say, “That’s not fair,” or “I don’t like that,” if they are the target of prejudice or discrimination. For children to develop empathy and respect for diversity, they need to be able to say, “I don’t like what you are doing” to a child who is abusing another child. If we teach children to recognize injustice, then we must also teach them that people can create positive change by working together. . . . Through activism activities children build the confidence and skills for becoming adults who assert, in the face of injustice, “I have the responsibility to deal with it, I know how to deal with it, I will deal with it.”¹⁹

When we adults reflect on our own race-related memories, we may recall times when we did not get the help we needed to sift through the confusing messages we received. The task of talking to



our children about racism and other isms may seem formidable. Our children's questions may make us uncomfortable, and we may not have a ready response. But even a missed opportunity can be revisited at another time. It is never too late to say, "I've been thinking about that question you asked me the other day . . ." We have the responsibility, and the resources available, to educate ourselves if necessary so that we will not repeat the cycle of oppression with our children.



8

Critical Issues in Latino, American Indian, and Asian Pacific American Identity Development

“There’s more than just Black and White, you know.”

“I took a Chicano Studies class my freshman year and that made me very militant.”

JUDITH, A CHICANA COLLEGE STUDENT

“There’s a certain amount of anger that comes from the past, realizing that my family because they had to assimilate through the generations, don’t really know who they are.”

DON, AN AMERICAN INDIAN COLLEGE STUDENT

“Being an Asian person, a person of color growing up in this society, I was taught to hate myself. I did hate myself, and I’m trying to deal with it.”

KHANH, AN ASIAN AMERICAN COLLEGE STUDENT¹

Like the African American and European American students I have described, each of the young people quoted above is also engaged in a process of racial or ethnic identity development. Although conversations about race, racism, and racial identity tend to focus on Black-White relations, to do so ignores the experiences of other targeted racial or ethnic groups. When we look at the experiences of Latinos, American Indians, and Asian Pacific Americans in the United States, we can easily see that racial and cultural oppression has been a part of their past and present and that it plays a role in the identity development process for individuals in these groups as well.²



Though racial identity models such as that of William Cross were developed with African Americans in mind, the basic tenets of such models can be applied to all people of color who have shared similar patterns of racial, ethnic, or cultural oppression. Psychologist Stanley Sue, an expert in crosscultural counseling, writes, “[I]n the past several decades, Asian Americans, Hispanics, and American Indians have experienced sociopolitical identity transformations so that a ‘Third World consciousness’ has emerged with cultural oppression as the common unifying force.”³

In this multiracial context, Jean Phinney’s model of adolescent ethnic identity development stands out. Grounded in both an Eriksonian understanding of adolescence and research studies with adolescents from various racial or ethnic groups, Phinney’s model is made up of three stages: (1) unexamined ethnic identity, when race or ethnicity is not particularly salient for the individual; (2) ethnic identity search, when individuals are actively engaged in defining for themselves what it means to be a member of their own racial or ethnic group; and (3) achieved ethnic identity, when individuals are able to assert a clear, positive sense of their racial or ethnic identity.⁴ Phinney’s model shares with both Cross’s and Helms’s models the ideas that an achieved identity develops over time in a predictable fashion and that encounter experiences often lead to the exploration, examination, and eventual internalization of a positive, self-defined sense of one’s own racial or ethnic identity.

While Phinney’s work describes the identity process for adolescents of color in general, it is important to continually keep in mind the cultural diversity and wide range of experience represented by the groups known as Latinos, Asian Pacific Americans, and American Indians. Because of this tremendous diversity, it is impossible in the space of one chapter to detail the complexities of the identity process for each group.⁵ Therein lies my dilemma. How can I make the experiences of my Latino, Asian, and Native students visible without tokenizing them? I am not sure that I can, but I have learned in teaching about racism that a sincere, though imperfect, attempt to interrupt



the oppression of others is usually better than no attempt at all. In that spirit, this chapter is an attempt to interrupt the frequent silence about the impact of racism on these communities of color. It is not an attempt to provide an in-depth discussion of each group's identity development process, an attempt which would inevitably be incomplete. Rather this chapter highlights a few critical issues pertinent to the identity development of each group, particularly in schools, and points the reader to more information.

----- What Do We Mean When We Say "Latino"?

Latinos, also known as Hispanics, are the second largest and fastest-growing community of color in the United States. There are more than 25 million Latinos residing permanently in the United States. As a result of high birthrates and continuing immigration, the Latino population is expected to surpass the African American population in number early in the twenty-first century, thereby becoming the largest "minority" group in the United States. Over 60 percent of Latinos are of Mexican ancestry, a population that includes U.S.-born Mexican Americans (also known as Chicanos) whose families may have been in the Southwest for many generations as well as recent Mexican immigrants. Approximately 13 percent of Latinos are Puerto Rican, 5 percent are Cuban, and about 20 percent are considered "other Hispanics" by the U.S. Bureau of the Census. The last category includes Dominicans, newly arrived Central Americans (e.g., Nicaraguans, Guatematecos, and Salvadoreños), and South Americans (e.g., Chileans, Colombians, and Argentinians).⁶ Each of these groups is a distinct population with a particular historical relationship to the United States.

In the case of Chicanos, the U.S. conquest and annexation of Mexican territory in 1848 created a situation in which people of Mexican ancestry became subject to White domination. Like African Americans and Native Americans, Mexican Americans were initially incorporated into U.S. society against their will. It was the general

feeling among White settlers that Whites and Mexicans were never meant to live together. Segregated schools, segregated housing, and employment discrimination were the result. State legislation in Texas and California outlawing the use of Spanish in the schools was enacted. Though the Mexican population declined immediately after the conquest (due to forced relocations), it increased again during the early twentieth century when U.S. farmers actively encouraged the immigration of Mexicans as an inexpensive source of agricultural labor. Subsequently, political and economic conditions in Mexico have fueled a steady stream of immigrants to the United States.⁷

While most Mexican-origin Latinos are legal residents, people of Mexican descent are often stereotyped as illegal aliens. Most Mexican Americans continue to live in the Southwest in urban areas. According to the most recent census data, Mexican-origin Latinos are the youngest of all Latino subgroups—median age in 1990 was 24.1 as compared to 33.5 for non-Hispanics. Education and family income remain below the U.S. average—only 45 percent of Mexican Americans age 25 and older have completed high school, and approximately 26 percent of all Mexican-origin families live in poverty.⁸

Like the conquered Mexicans, Puerto Ricans did not choose to become U.S. citizens. Puerto Rico became an unincorporated territory of the United States in 1898, ceded by Spain at the conclusion of the Spanish-American War. Puerto Rico, which had struggled to become independent of Spain, did not welcome subjugation by the United States. An active policy of Americanization of the island population was implemented, including attempts to replace Spanish with English as the language of instruction on the island. The attempts to displace Spanish were vigorously resisted by Puerto Rican teachers and students alike. In 1915, resistance to the imposition of English resulted in a student strike at Central High School in San Juan, part of a rising wave of nationalism and calls for independence. Rather than let the Puerto Rican people vote on whether they wanted citizenship, the U.S. Congress passed the Jones Act of 1917, imposing citizenship and the obligation to serve in the U.S. military but denying



the right to vote in national elections. In 1951, Puerto Ricans were allowed to vote on whether to remain a territory or to become a commonwealth. Though there were those who urged another option, Puerto Rican independence, commonwealth status was the choice. Commonwealth status allowed Puerto Ricans greater control of their school systems, and Spanish was restored in the schools.⁹

Economic conditions on the island have driven many Puerto Ricans to New York and other Northeastern U.S. cities. Many came in the 1940s and 1950s to work in the factories of the Northeast, but as industry left the region many Puerto Rican workers were displaced. Fluctuating employment conditions have contributed to a pattern of circular migration to and from Puerto Rico which is made easier by U.S. citizenship.

In general, Puerto Ricans have the poorest economic conditions of all Latino groups—the poverty rate is close to 60 percent. Approximately 53 percent of Puerto Rican adults over age 25 have completed high school.¹⁰ A multiracial population descended from European colonizers, enslaved Africans, and the indigenous Taino Indians, a significant number of Puerto Ricans are dark-skinned and may experience more racism and discrimination than lighter-skinned Latino populations.¹¹

As a group, Cuban Americans are older and more affluent than other Latinos, reflecting a different immigration history. Although Cuban communities have existed in Florida and New York since the 1870s, Cuban immigration to the United States increased dramatically following the 1959 revolution led by Fidel Castro. The first wave of immigrants were upper-class, light-skinned Cubans who left in the very first days of the revolution. They were able to bring their personal fortunes with them and established businesses in the United States. The second major group left after Castro had been in power for a few months, and were largely middle-class professionals and skilled workers. Though many were unable to bring possessions with them, they received support from the the U.S. government and charitable organizations. The last major group of Cuban immigrants,

known as Marielitos, arrived in 1980, having lived most of their lives under a socialist government. Marielitos are typically much poorer, less educated, and darker-skinned than earlier refugees.

On average, Cubans have higher education levels than Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans. Approximately 17 percent of Cubans over age 25 are college graduates, as compared to less than 10 percent for Chicanos or Puerto Ricans.¹² Because the early Cuban immigrants view themselves as people in exile who might return to Cuba when Castro is no longer in power, they have worked to keep Spanish an integral part of their lives in the United States.¹³

“Other Hispanics,” as the U.S. government classifies those Latinos who do not trace their family background to Mexico, Puerto Rico, or Cuba, are an extremely heterogeneous group. They include South Americans as well as Central Americans, well-educated professionals as well as rural farmers, those who immigrated for increased economic opportunities as well as those escaping civil war. Among this category of “other Hispanics,” the largest groups are from the Dominican Republic, Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Peru, and Nicaragua.¹⁴

Although non-Latinos often use *Latino* to refer to a racial group, it is an error to do so. The term *Hispanic* was used by the Bureau of the Census as an ethnic label and not to denote a race, because Hispanics are a racially mixed group, including combinations of European White, African Black, and indigenous American Indian. It is possible for an individual to identify himself or herself as ethnically Hispanic and racially Black or White at the same time.¹⁵ As in African American families, there can be wide color variations in the same family. *Racismo* within Latino communities is akin to colorism in Black American communities, advantaging lighter-skinned individuals.¹⁶ Although a majority of Latinos share the Roman Catholic faith and speak Spanish, not all do. Researchers Gerardo Marín and Barbara VanOss Marín argue that cultural values—not demographic characteristics—help Hispanics self-identify as members of one ethnic group.



All in the Family: Familism in Latino Communities

In particular, the cultural value of *familism*, the importance of the extended family as a reference group and as providers of social support, has been identified as a characteristic shared by most Hispanics independent of their national background, birthplace, dominant language, or any other sociodemographic characteristic.¹⁷

In a carefully designed comparative study of four groups of adolescents—Mexicans living in Mexico, immigrant Mexicans in the United States, U.S.-born Mexican Americans, and White American adolescents—researchers Carola and Marcelo Suárez-Orozco investigated the nature of familism among the four groups. In particular, they examined perceptions of the degree of emotional and material support provided by the family, the sense of obligation to provide support to one's family, and the degree to which families served as one's reference group (as opposed to peers, for example). They predicted that the three Latino groups would demonstrate more familism than white American adolescents, and that Mexican immigrants would demonstrate the highest level of familism because immigrants frequently turn to the family for support and comfort. They found that the Latino groups were indeed more family-oriented than the White American group, but that there was no significant difference between the three Latino groups. All the adolescents of Mexican ancestry had a strong family orientation that expressed itself in a variety of ways.

For example, achieving in school and at work were considered important by Latino teens because success would allow them to take care of family members. Conversely, White American teens considered education and work as a means of gaining independence from their families. The researchers concluded that “in Mexico the family seems to be a centripetal force; in the United States it is a centrifugal force.”¹⁸ Because both immigrant and non-immigrant Latino adolescents expressed this value, the researchers also concluded that familism is related to enduring psychocultural features of the Latino

population, not only the stresses of immigration. Similarly, Fabio Sabogal and his colleagues found that Mexican Americans, Central Americans, and Cuban Americans all reported similar attitudes toward the family, this familism standing in contrast to the rugged individualism so often identified with White Anglo-American culture.¹⁹

In her book *Affirming Diversity*, Sonia Nieto describes a very successful program for Latino youth in a large, urban high school that has recognized the importance of this cultural value and has incorporated it into the classroom structure.²⁰ The program was infused with a sense of caring and support, and family-like relationships were fostered between the teacher and students, and between the students themselves. Through activities such as peer tutoring and mentoring, a sense of collective responsibility was reinforced. In contrast to the high dropout rates common in many Latino communities, up to 65 percent of the high school graduates of this program have gone on to college. Said one student, “The best thing I like about this class is that we all work together and we all participate and try to help each other. We’re family!”²¹

Though familism is not caused by immigration, it is reinforced by it. The ongoing influx of new Latino immigrants and the circular migration of some populations (Puerto Ricans, for example) help to keep cultural values alive in the U.S. communities. The Suárez-Orozcos write,

For many second- and third-generation Latinos the immigrant past may also *be* the present. . . . Among Latinos the past is not only kept alive through family narratives but unfolds in front of our very eyes as recent arrivals endure anew the cycle of deprivation, hardship, and discrimination that is characteristic of first-generation immigrant life.²²

In this context, perhaps the most critical task facing the children of immigrants is reconciling the culture of home with the dominant



American culture. Drawing on the work of social identity theorist Tajfel and others, Phinney describes four possible outcomes for coping with this cultural conflict: *assimilation*, *withdrawal*, *biculturalism*, and *marginalization*. Assimilation is the attempt to blend into the dominant culture as much as possible, distancing oneself from one's ethnic group. Individuals using this strategy may actively reject the use of Spanish. Withdrawal results in an emphasis on one's ethnic culture and an avoidance of contact with the dominant group. This strategy is seen in highly segregated communities where English is rarely spoken. A bicultural identity incorporates selected aspects of both the home culture and the dominant culture, often achieving bilingual fluency in the process. The bicultural strategy can be a very positive one, but it is not easily achieved. For some the attempt to bridge two worlds may result in alienation from both. Having rejected the "old country" ways of the family, yet unable to find full acceptance in the dominant culture, these adolescents often experience marginalization. These alienated young people, relying on their peers for a sense of community, may be at particular risk for gang membership. School programs, such as the one Nieto describes, that help bridge the gap between the culture of home and the culture of the dominant society can reduce the risks of alienation.²³

"Who Are You if You Don't Speak Spanish?" Language and Identity Among Latinos

As is suggested above, language is inextricably bound to identity. Language is not only an instrumental tool for communication, but also the carrier of cultural values and attitudes. It is through language that the affect of *mi familia*, the emotions of family life, are expressed. Richard Rodriguez, author of *Hunger for Memory* and critic of bilingual education, describes what happened in his family when the nuns at his parochial school told his Mexican parents to stop using Spanish at home, so their children might learn English more quickly. Gradually, he and his parents stopped speaking to each other. His

family was “no longer so close; no longer bound tight by the pleasing and troubling knowledge of our public separateness. . . . The family’s quiet was partly due to the fact that as we children learned more and more English, we shared fewer and fewer words.”²⁴ What did it mean to his understanding of familism, and other aspects of ethnic identity when he relinquished his Spanish?

For Jose, a young Puerto Rican man, the answer to this question is clear.

I think that the only thing that Puerto Ricans preserve in this country that is Puerto Rican is the language. If we lose that, *we* are lost. I think that we need to preserve it because it is the primordial basis of our culture. It is the only thing we have to identify ourselves as Puerto Rican. If you don’t know your language, who are you? . . . I believe that being Puerto Rican and speaking Spanish go hand in hand.²⁵

This sentiment was echoed repeatedly by other young Puerto Rican adults who were interviewed by Maria Zavala as part of a study of language and ethnic identity among Puerto Ricans.²⁶

However, these young people had also learned that their language was devalued by the dominant culture. Those who had spent their childhoods in the United States in particular recalled feeling ashamed to be bilingual. Said Margarita,

In school there were stereotypes about the bilingual students, big time. [Since] they don’t speak “the” language, they don’t belong here. That’s number one. Number two, they were dumb, no matter what. . . . Everyone said “that bilingual person,” but they didn’t realize that bilingual means they speak *two* languages. To them bilingual was not a good thing. There was a horrible stigma attached to them and I think I fell in the



trap sometimes of saying “those bilingual people” just because that was what I was hearing all around me.²⁷

A common coping strategy in childhood was to avoid the use of Spanish in public, a strategy akin to the “racelessness” adopted by some African American students. Said Cristina, a young woman raised in the United States, “I remember pretending I didn’t know how to speak Spanish. You know, if you pretended that you were that American then maybe you would get accepted by the White kids. I remember trying not to speak Spanish or speaking it with an [English] accent.”²⁸

However, avoiding the use of Spanish does not guarantee acceptance by the dominant society. A growing awareness of this reality and the unfolding process of adolescent identity development led these students to reclaim their Spanish, a process integral to their exploration of Puerto Rican identity. Cristina, now a college student, explains:

I’m a lot more fluent with English. I struggle with Spanish and it’s something that I’ve been trying to reclaim. I’ve been reading a lot of literature written by Latinos lately, . . . some Puerto Rican history. Before [college] I didn’t even know it existed. Now I’m reading and writing more and more in Spanish and I’m using it more in conversations with other Puerto Ricans. Now I have confidence. I don’t feel inferior any more. I used to in high school, I did. People don’t want you to speak Spanish and before I was one of those that’s very guilty of not speaking it because I didn’t want to draw attention to me, but now you can’t tell me not to speak Spanish because for me that’s the biggest form of oppression. My kids are going to speak Spanish and they’re going to speak it loud. They’re not going to go with the whispering stuff. As a matter of fact, if a

White person comes by, we're going to speak it even louder. I am going to ingrain that in them, that you need to be proud of that.²⁹

Zavala effectively demonstrates that while these young people are still in the process of exploring identity, the resolution of their feelings about the Spanish language is a central dimension of the identity development process. The linguicism—discrimination based on language use—to which they all had been subjected had been internalized by some, and had to be rejected in order for them to assert a positive sense of identity.

While Zavala's study focused only on Puerto Ricans, sociologist Samuel Betances argues that for Latinos the Spanish language is a unifying theme. He writes, "in essence, the core which links Hispanics/Latinos is language, i.e., the theme of Spanish and English as vital to a healthy membership in both the larger society and in the ever growing emerging ethnic interest group."³⁰

Given the strong connection between language and identity it seems very important for educators to think carefully about how they respond to Latino children's use of Spanish at school. As Nieto points out, schools often work hard to strip away the child's native language, asking parents to speak English to their children at home, punishing children with detention for using their native language at school, or even withholding education until children have mastered English.³¹ While of course fluency in English is a necessary educational goal, the child's fluency in Spanish need not be undermined in order to achieve it.

There is increasing evidence that the level of proficiency in one's native language has a direct influence on the development of proficiency in the second language. Contrary to common belief, it makes sense to use students' native language to reinforce their acquisition of English. While it is not possible here to review the varieties of bilingual education and the political controversies surrounding them, the positive effects of bilingual education, from lower dropout rates to



increased literacy development, have been demonstrated again and again.³² Bilingual education, in which children are receiving education in content areas in their native language, as well as receiving structured instruction in English, is more effective than English as a second language (ESL) instruction alone, because the children can build on their previous literacy. Research suggests that it takes five to seven years on average to develop the level of English proficiency needed to succeed academically in school. For this reason, late-exit bilingual education programs—in which students remain until they have developed adequate English proficiency for high-level academic work—are particularly effective. Such programs have not only cognitive benefits, but social and emotional ones as well. Students who are encouraged to maintain their Spanish are able to maintain close family ties through their shared use of the language and their parents feel more comfortable with the school environment, increasing the likelihood of parental involvement at school.³³ Nieto and others are quick to point out that bilingual education alone cannot completely reverse the history of school failure that Latino students have experienced. But it does challenge the alienating and emotionally disruptive idea that native language and culture need to be forgotten in order to be successful.

The attempted destruction of an oppressed people's native language has been an issue not only for Latinos, but also for American Indians. In fact, Indian education as carried out by the U.S. government in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries served as the model for the early Americanization efforts in Puerto Rico.³⁴ The physical and cultural dislocations visited upon Native Americans still have major implications for the identity development of Indian youth today.

----- **What Do We Mean When We Say "Indian"?**

It is conservatively estimated that prior to 1492 there were 3 to 5 million indigenous people in America. Following the disastrous contact

with Europeans, the populations were greatly reduced, and by 1850 there were only about 250,000 Indians in North America. Now there are almost 2 million American Indians and Alaska Natives living in the United States.³⁵ They represent more than 500 different cultural communities federally defined as sovereign entities with which the United States has a government-to-government relationship.³⁶ In addition there are an estimated 250 Native groups that are not recognized by the U.S. government.

Each of these cultural communities has its own language, customs, religion, economy, historical circumstances, and environment. They range from the very traditional, whose members speak their indigenous language at home, to the mostly acculturated, whose members speak English as their first language. Most Native people identify with their particular ancestral community first, and as American Indians second.³⁷

The Native population grew slowly in the first half of the twentieth century, but has grown rapidly in the second half, due to a high birth rate and reduced infant mortality. Another source of the population increase, however, has been the fact that since 1970 a significant number of people have changed their Census identification to American Indian from some other racial category on the Census forms. This shift in self-identification raises the questions, who is an American Indian and how is that category defined?

The answers depend on whom you ask. Each Indian nation sets its own criteria for membership. Some specify a particular percentage of Indian ancestry (varying from one-half to one-sixty-fourth), others do not. Some nations specify native language fluency as a prerequisite for service in their government, others do not. The U.S. government requires one-quarter blood quantum (as indicated on a federal "certificate of Indian blood") in order to qualify for Bureau of Indian Affairs college scholarships. Other federal agencies, such as the Bureau of the Census, rely on self-identification. Declining social discrimination, growing ethnic pride, a resurgence in Indian activism, and the pursuit of sovereign rights may account for the growing



numbers of racially mixed U.S. citizens who are now choosing to identify themselves as American Indian.³⁸

Despite the stereotypes to the contrary, there is great diversity among this population. K. Tsianina Lomawaima, a professor of American Indian Studies, makes this point very clearly when she writes:

A fluent member of a Cherokee Baptist congregation living in Tahlequah, Oklahoma, is different from an English-speaking, pow-wow-dancing Lakota born and raised in Oakland, California, who is different from a Hopi fluent in Hopi, English, Navajo, and Spanish who lives on the reservation and supports her family by selling “traditional” pottery in New York, Santa Fe, and Scottsdale galleries. The idea of being generically “Indian” really was a figment of Columbus’s imagination.³⁹

However, there are general demographic statements that can be made about the American Indian population. Approximately 50 percent live west of the Mississippi River. In fact according to recent Census reports, more than half of the American Indian population lives in just six states: Oklahoma, California, Arizona, New Mexico, Alaska, and Washington. Approximately 50 percent live in urban areas. Only 22 percent of all American Indians (including Alaska Natives) live on reservations and trust lands, with most of the rest living in rural communities nearby.⁴⁰

There are also some shared cultural values that are considered characteristic of American Indian families. For example, as with Latinos (who often share Indian ancestry), extended family and kinship obligations are considered very important. Consequently, group needs are more important than individual needs. Communal sharing with those less fortunate is expected. Traditional Indian culture sees an interdependent relationship between all living things. Just as one

seeks harmony with one's human family, so should a person try to be in harmony with nature, rather than dominant over it.⁴¹

----- Surviving the Losses

From the beginning of their encounters with Europeans, these and other Indian values were at odds with the individualistic and capitalistic orientation of the White settlers. U.S. government leaders were convinced that changing Indian cultural values were the key to "civilizing" Indians and acquiring Indian-controlled lands.⁴²

Following the establishment of reservations, one of the major strategies used to facilitate this cultural conversion was the establishment of off-reservation boarding schools for Indian children. The first such school was the Carlisle Indian School in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, established in 1879. Over the fifty years that followed, thousands of Indian children as young as five were forcibly removed from their families and placed in boarding schools, too far away for their poverty-stricken families to visit. Parental nurturing was replaced with forced assimilation, hard physical labor, harsh discipline, and emotional, physical, and often sexual abuse. Though the U.S. government's practice of removing children from their home environments was reversed in the 1930s, by then several generations of Indian children had lost their traditional cultural values and ways, and yet remained alienated from the dominant American culture.⁴³

Further cultural disruptions occurred in the 1940s and 1950s when federal Indian policy shifted again, this time with the goal of terminating the official relationship between the Indian nations and the U.S. government. Many Indians were taken from their homes and relocated in urban areas, in a manner reminiscent of the earlier forced removal to reservations.⁴⁴ Unprepared for urban life, the upheaval brought on by the relocation process was devastating to many. Alcoholism, suicide, and homicide increased to epidemic proportions,⁴⁵ and continue to be the leading causes of death among American Indians.⁴⁶



The intergenerational impact of these disruptions can be seen in this Native woman's narrative:

For 500 years, my people have been told in so many ways, "You're no good. You are a savage. Change your ways. You are not civilized. Your ways are heathen and witchery. Your ways are not Christian!" My grandfather gave up his tribal religion and customs. He adopted Christianity. He, my grandmother, and the other people on the reservation did their best to give up the old ways, become farmers, quit hunting, go to church and be "good Indians, civilized Indians." They wept when the federal agents rounded up their children to take them away to boarding school. Some of the children never came home. Some came home to be buried. My grandparents and the people wept again because their children grew up learning alien ways, forgetting their language and customs in schools too far away to visit.

My parents married soon after they came home from the boarding school. They came from different tribes. They left my father's reservation encouraged by the U.S. government and the boarding school system to find jobs in the "real world." . . . The promised jobs never materialized and, stuck between two worlds, the big city and the reservation, the Indian world and the White, my father drank and beat my mother. My mother worked at menial jobs to support us. My life was built on this foundation. I was never parented because my parents, raised in government boarding schools, had nothing to give me. They had lost their languages and retained only traces of their cultures. They had never been parented themselves. Boarding school nurturing was having their mouths washed out with soap for talking Indian and receiving beatings for failing to follow directions.



So this is my legacy and the legacy of many Indians, both reservation and urban. . . . We are survivors of multigenerational loss and only through acknowledging our losses will we ever be able to heal.⁴⁷

The legacy of loss is accompanied by a legacy of resistance. As they had in the past, Native peoples resisted the termination policy, and the policy ended in the 1960s following the election of John F. Kennedy. The Civil Rights era included Native American demands for greater self-determination and the development of a pan-Indian movement based on the assumption that Native American peoples shared a common set of values and interests. In response to Indian activism, the federal government condemned its own destructive policies of the past and increased support for Indian self-determination, passing legislation in the 1980s and 1990s designed to promote Indian-controlled schools, protect American Indian religious freedom, and preserve traditional Indian languages.

But the struggle is not over. On the occasion of the 1992 celebration of the five-hundredth anniversary of Columbus's arrival to the Western Hemisphere, Pulitzer Prize-winning author N. Scott Momaday reflected on the future of Indians in the United States:

The major issues we face now are survival—how to live in the modern world. Part of this is how to remain Indian, how to assimilate without ceasing to be Indian. I think some important strides have been made. Indians remain Indian, and against pretty good odds. They remain Indian and in some situations, by a thread. Their languages are being lost at a tremendous rate, poverty is rampant, as is alcoholism. But still there are Indians, and the traditional world is intact.

It's a matter of identity. It's thinking about who I am. I grew up on Indian reservations, and then I went away from the Indian world and entered a different



context. But I continue to think of myself as Indian, I write out of that conviction. I think this is what most Indian people are doing today. They go off the reservations, but they keep an idea of themselves as Indians. That's the trick.⁴⁸

That *is* the trick. Remaining anchored in a positive sense of one's cultural identity in the face of racism is an antidote to alienation and despair. What constructive role can educators play in this process? Next to Latinos, American Indians are least likely to graduate from high school or college.⁴⁹ The use of schools as instruments of forced assimilation was education at its worst. What would it look like at its best? How could the identities of Native students be affirmed in school? That is the question to be considered next.

"I" Is for Invisible: Contemporary Images of American Indians in the Curriculum

In her article "Is There an 'Indian' in Your Classroom?" Lee Little Soldier makes the point that teachers might find it hard to determine whether there even are Native American students in their classrooms.⁵⁰ Indians often have European names, and because of the high proportion of mixed-heritage individuals, there are wide variations in physical appearance. While some are easily recognized as people of color, others have light skin, light eyes, and brown or blond hair and may be identified by others as White. Those who are products of Black-Indian unions may simply be assumed to be African American. Particularly in those parts of the United States with small Indian populations, many people may be surprised to discover that American Indians still exist at all. For example, American Indian studies professor Donald Andrew Grinde, Jr., describes his history professor's response when he expressed an interest in studying American Indian history: "My advisor told me I needed to focus on an area such as American economic history to secure employment. When I told him

I was an American Indian and thus still wanted to do research in this area, he smiled and murmured, ‘I thought that we had killed all of them.’”⁵¹ This perception is not surprising given the absence of contemporary images of American Indians in the popular culture. Native American communities are typically portrayed as people of the past, not of the present or the future. This depiction prevails even in places where there is a large and visible Indian population.

Consider this case example provided by Alaska Native educator Paul Ongtooguk.⁵² Describing the high school curriculum he experienced in Nome, Alaska, a community where Alaska Natives outnumbered Whites, but where the school board, faculty, and administration of the school were all White, he writes: “During my four years at Nome-Beltz High School, teachers and students maintained a veil of silence about Alaska Native history and culture except for the disparaging remarks about Alaska Natives as barbaric and ignorant that were part of the hidden curriculum.” Teacher expectations of Alaska Natives were low, and in fact, almost half of them dropped out of high school before graduation. Many committed suicide. Those who did graduate were discouraged from attending college and encouraged instead to pursue vocational training. In this context, Ongtooguk struggled to define a positive sense of identity as an Alaska Native adolescent:

Despite the denigration of Alaska Native societies in schools, in other places in my life there were images that were actually complimentary and admirable. Slowly these conflicting images began to tear at the veil of silence. I rejected the argument of the inferiority of Alaska Natives that was part of the structure of the schools, sensing if not actually realizing that who I was was not shameful but was an inescapable fact and that what was shameful was what members of the white community were saying about Alaska Natives.



He learned about his heritage through the oral histories of the older Alaska Natives he knew, elders who talked about the tremendous difficulties they had endured when Whites took control of Northwest Alaska.

It seemed remarkable to me, as an adolescent boy, that anybody had survived in that community let alone found a way to sustain a distinctive way of life and maintain a rich and complex culture. I realized then that there were members of the Alaska Native community who were working to create the conditions in which all could have lives with dignity and be well-regarded as human beings. This realization was the result of becoming acquainted with Alaska Native leaders working in the community with Native elders trying to preserve the legacy of our society and introduce the young people to that legacy.

Ongtooguk was one of the few Alaska Natives at his school to graduate and go on to college. His ambition was to become a social studies and history teacher. While in college, he immersed himself in Alaska Native history. To his amazement, he found thousands of volumes in the University of Washington library written by European and American scholars about Alaska Natives. He writes, "Until that time, I had not realized how much of our own history had been written down, how much of our lives had been described, and how important we were as people." When he returned to Northwest Alaska as a certified secondary teacher, he brought with him thirty-six boxes of books and documents about Alaska Natives to share with his new students.

One of the first tasks in his new job was to review a recently implemented "Inupiaq Heritage Curriculum," constructed by White educators and consisting primarily of Native arts and crafts projects.

While the traditional arts and crafts were worthy of study, the curriculum embodied a “museum” perspective whereby the traditional life of Alaska Natives was studied as “an interesting curiosity commemorating the past.” Ongtooguk writes,

The most disturbing picture of Inupiaq culture, then, was of its static nature—something that had happened “back then” rather than something that was happening now. Did this mean that the people living in the region now were like a cast of actors who had run out of lines?

He set out to reconstruct the curriculum to reflect not only traditional life, but transitional life and the modern period.

He explains:

If, as their teachers commonly implied, being Inupiaq only meant being traditional (or Ipani), then both assimilation and all of modern schooling were essentially cultural genocide in that they moved the students away from things traditional. . . . The course was not intended to turn back the clock, but to allow students to realize that they were the latest inheritors of a society in the midst of dramatic transformation. They needed to know both what was and what is crucial for survival and for leading productive lives within the Inupiaq community.

The inclusion of contemporary life as part of this new Inupiaq studies curriculum was essential if Inupiaq students were to see themselves reflected in the schools and see the Inupiaq identity as having a future, not only a past. They needed a coherent picture of the continuity, conflict, and cultural transformation that had shaped and continued to shape the Inupiaq community. Ongtooguk’s reconstructed curriculum was eventually adopted by the Northwest Arctic School



District and has become a model for Yupik studies in several school districts in southwest Alaska.

Such curricular interventions stand in stark contrast to the deculturalization that has been the legacy of American Indian education, reminding us that education does not have to mean alienation. More such interventions are needed if faculty and students, both Indian and White, are to realize that the Native community is not a relic of the past, but a growing community with a future.

Another growing population, which unlike American Indians is usually assumed to have a very bright future, is that of the Asian Pacific American community. The collective image of Asians as the “model minority” in the United States is a pervasive one. Yet like the Latino and American Indian communities, the Asian Pacific American community is not a monolith.

What Do We Mean When We Say “Asian”?

The terms, *Asian*, *Asian American*, and more inclusively *Asian Pacific American* are often used as a collective reference to the Asian and Pacific Islander populations living in the United States. The U.S. government includes in its definition of Asian, peoples from East Asia (e.g., Chinese, Japanese, Korean), from Southeast Asia (e.g., Vietnamese, Laotian, Burmese), from the Pacific Islands (e.g., Samoan, Guamanian, Fijian), from South Asia (e.g., Indian, Pakistani, Nepali), from West Asia (Iranian, Afghan, Turkish), and from the Middle East (e.g., Iraqi, Jordanian, Palestinian).⁵³ The Asian Pacific population in the United States has increased from less than 1 million in 1960 to more than 7 million by 1990, now representing about 3 percent of the U.S. population. It includes 43 ethnic groups, including 28 from the Asian continent and 15 from the Pacific Islands. Religious beliefs vary greatly among these groups, and include Buddhism, Islam, Christianity (both Protestant and Catholic), Hinduism, Shintoism, ancestor worship, and animism.⁵⁴ Those from communist countries where religion was essentially outlawed may be without any religious tradition.

The most populous Asian Pacific American groups are Chinese (23% of the Asian population in the United States), Filipino (19%), Japanese (12%), Asian Indian (11%), Korean (11%). However, the Vietnamese (presently 9% of the Asian American population) represent the fastest-growing Asian community in the United States. Except for isolated Southeast Asian refugees scattered throughout the country, most Asian Pacific American communities are on the coasts, with about 70 percent of the total population residing in only five states: California, Hawaii, New York, Illinois, and Texas.⁵⁵

In 1960, most Asian Americans were descendants of early Chinese and Japanese immigrants. Changes in immigration policy in 1965 dramatically increased Asian immigration, significantly altering the demographic makeup of the Asian Pacific American community. By 1990, over half of the Asians and Pacific Islanders in the United States were foreign born. As is the case among Latinos, each national group has its own unique immigration history that has shaped its experience in the United States. While it is not possible to review the immigration history of all these groups, the immigration experience of the most populous groups will be briefly summarized here.

The Chinese were the first Asians to immigrate to the United States in large numbers, arriving in California in 1850 as part of the rush for gold. These first arrivals were single men who paid their own way to the California gold fields, hoping to get rich and then return to China. As the gold rush waned, many Chinese did not have enough money to go home. Hired at wages one-third below what whites would have been paid, Chinese men found employment as laborers working on the transcontinental railroad and on California farms. In 1882 immigration was severely restricted by the Chinese Exclusion Act and completely forbidden by the 1924 Immigration Act.⁵⁶ Like Blacks and Indians, the Chinese were viewed as a threat to White racial purity. Laws prohibiting marriage between a White person and a “negro, mulatto, or Mongolian” were passed.⁵⁷ These laws, combined with immigration restrictions, special taxes directed against the Chinese, and discrimination in housing and employment, limited the



growth of the Chinese population. Most of the men did not start families in the United States.

A second wave of Chinese immigration occurred after World War II. In an effort to promote an alliance with China against Japan, the U.S. government repealed the Exclusion Act to allow a few thousand Chinese to enter the country. Chinese scientists and professionals and their families escaping communism were part of this second wave.

A third wave of Chinese immigration occurred after the 1965 Immigration Act (and its 1990 extension). Because racial quotas on immigration were eliminated by this legislation, Chinese immigration dramatically increased, with entire families immigrating at once. Tens of thousands of Chinese have come to the United States every year since passage of the 1965 Immigration act. In addition, the re-establishment of diplomatic relations between the People's Republic of China and the United States provided new immigration opportunities for Chinese students.

In the last thirty years, Chinese immigrants have come not only from China, but also from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia as well as other parts of Asia. Because of the magnitude of this wave of immigration, over half of the Chinese in the United States in 1990 were foreign born. As a consequence of these three phases of immigration, there is great socioeconomic, political, and linguistic diversity within the Chinese American community.⁵⁸

By contrast, more than three-quarters of the people with Japanese ancestry in the United States are American born, descendants of those who came to the U.S. mainland or Hawaii before 1924. These early immigrants were attracted by higher U.S. wages, and because the Japanese government encouraged women to immigrate as well, often as "picture brides" in arranged marriages, Japanese families quickly established themselves. While Japanese workers were welcomed on the plantations of Hawaii, there was considerable anti-Japanese feeling on the West Coast. In 1906 the San Francisco board of education established a separate school for Chinese, Japanese, and Korean children, and the California Alien Land Law prohibited Japanese immi-

grants and other foreign-born residents from purchasing agricultural land because they were ineligible for citizenship. (The Naturalization Act, passed in 1790, only allowed Whites to become naturalized citizens, so while children born in the United States automatically became citizens, until this law was repealed, their immigrant parents could never be eligible.) As with the Chinese, immigration of Japanese came to a halt with the Immigration Act of 1924.

The Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941 certainly intensified anti-Japanese sentiment. In March 1942, Executive Order 9102 established the War Relocation Authority, making it possible to remove 120,000 Japanese Americans from their West Coast homes without a trial or hearing and confine them in internment camps in places as far away as Idaho, Colorado, and Utah.⁵⁹ One response to this internment experience was for Japanese American families to encourage their children to become as “American” as possible in an effort to prevent further discrimination. For this reason, as well as their longevity in the United States, Japanese Americans as a group are the most acculturated of the Asian Pacific American communities.

Korean immigration to the United States occurred in three distinct waves, beginning with fewer than 10,000 laborers who arrived between 1903 and 1905. While there were some Korean “picture brides,” most male immigrants were unable to start families because of the same antimiscegenation laws that affected the Chinese. Another small group of immigrants came to the United States after World War II and the Korean War. This group included Korean adoptees and war brides. As with the Chinese, the 1965 Immigration Act dramatically increased Korean immigration of entire families, with 30,000 Koreans arriving annually between 1970 and 1990. These Koreans came from a wide range of socioeconomic and educational levels. Most Korean Americans currently living in the United States were part of this post-1965 immigration, thus most are living in families consisting of immigrant parents and American-born or -raised children, families in which differing rates of acculturation may contribute to generational conflicts.⁶⁰



Filipino Americans also experienced a pattern of male immigration to Hawaii, and then the mainland United States, in the early 1900s. Because these men could not establish families, there are few descendants from this wave of immigration. This pattern ended in 1930 when Congress set a Filipino immigration quota of fifty per year. As with Chinese and Koreans, tens of thousands of Filipinos have immigrated annually since 1965. Some Filipino immigrants were quite affluent in the Philippines, while others were extremely poor. In general, because of the U.S. military presence in the Philippines during most of the twentieth century, Filipino immigrants are much more familiar with U.S. culture than most Asian immigrants are.⁶¹

Southeast Asian refugees are quite different from other Asian immigrant groups in their reasons for coming to the United States and their experiences in their homelands. After the end of the Vietnam War in 1975, a large number of mostly educated Vietnamese arrived. Since 1978, a second group of immigrants, many of them uneducated rural farmers traumatized by the war and its aftermath, came to the United States to escape persecution. This group includes Vietnamese, Chinese Vietnamese, Cambodians, Lao, Hmong, and Mien.⁶²

Asian Indians have also experienced a dramatic population growth in the United States. The number of Asian Indians in the United States increased from 800,000 in 1990 to 1 million in 1993. The first immigrants from India were farmers who settled on the West Coast in the 1850s, but like other Asians they encountered a lot of discrimination and did not gain a strong foothold at that time. The contemporary wave of Asian Indian immigration includes many highly educated English-speaking adults and their children. However, newer rural immigrant families are less fluent in English and are having more difficulty adjusting to the American culture.

Arab Americans are a very heterogeneous group that is multicultural, multiracial, and multiethnic. Although “Arab” and “Muslim” are often linked together in the popular culture, many Arabs are Christian, and many Muslims are not Arabs. Some who identify as

Arab may not identify as Asian at all, despite the government's classification system. In fact the first wave of Arab immigrants came to the United States between 1890 and 1940 from regions now known as Syria and Lebanon. Ninety percent were Christian and they seem to have assimilated in their new country with relative ease.

The second wave of Arab immigrants began after World War II. Most of this group are college graduates or came in pursuit of higher education. This wave was dominated by Palestinians, Egyptians, Syrians, and Iraqis, and came to the United States with an Arab identity shaped by Cold War politics and the Arab-Israeli conflict.⁶³ Many of this group are Muslims and have been increasingly impacted by anti-Arab sentiments and "terrorist" stereotyping in the U.S.

The linguistic, religious, and other cultural diversity of these disparate groups, some of whom have long histories of conflict with one another in Asia—for example, Japan and Korea, Japan and China, China and Vietnam—gives validity to the question posed by Valerie Lee, director of the 1992 Asian American Renaissance Conference: "What do we have in common except for racism and rice?"⁶⁴ Social scientists Kenyon Chan and Shirley Hune argue that racism is quite enough. Because the treatment of early Asian immigrant communities was so similar and distinctions between them ignored by the dominant culture, the foundation of a group identity was laid.

Racial ideologies defined Pacific immigrants as aliens ineligible for citizenship, unfair economic competitors, and socially unassimilable groups. For the first 100 years of "Asian America"—the 1840s to the 1940s—the images of each community were racialized and predominantly negative. The Chinese were called "Mongolians" and depicted in the popular press as heathens, gamblers, and opium addicts. The Japanese and Koreans were viewed as the "yellow peril." Filipinos were derogatorily referred to as "little brown monkeys," and Asian Indians, most of them Sikhs, were called "ragheads."⁶⁵



In the late 1960s, as part of the social transformation of the Civil Rights era, the concept of a panethnic Asian American identity emerged among second- and third-generation Japanese, Chinese, and Filipino American college students. Chan and Hune write:

Racial identity and ethnic consciousness were fundamentally transformed along with the racial order. The polarization of civil rights protests required Asians in America to consider their identity, their self-definition, and their place in racialized America. They discovered that racial quotas and legal inequalities applied to them just as they did to other minorities. “Colored” was clearly defined as anyone nonwhite.⁶⁶

Consequently, the terms *Asian American* and *Asian Pacific American* emerged as a unifying political construct encompassing all U.S. residents of Asian and Pacific Island ancestry, encouraging individuals to work across ethnic lines for increased economic, political, and social rights. Asian American groups have lobbied for bilingual education, curricular reform, Asian American studies, improved working conditions for garment and restaurant workers, and support for community-based development. They have also opposed media misrepresentations and sought more opportunities for Asian Pacific Americans in theater, film, and television. Racial politics have continued to foster this unifying panethnic identity, though the large influx of new immigrants has changed the character of the Asian American community from the stable third- and fourth-generation community of the 1960s to one now composed largely of newcomers.⁶⁷

