Creating Change in the Large Urban Public Schools of the United States

Ernest L. Heyman and Peter Vigil

Ernest L. Heyman, Professor (retired)
Peter Vigil, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Elementary Education, Metropolitan State College of Denver

Abstract

Minority groups make up a large share of the working and the non-working poor. Moreover, throughout the last several decades, many minority students in the large urban schools, particularly Hispanic, Native and African-American, have had a difficult time taking advantage of a public education. The major tension points and associated problems include prejudice, low achievement rates, and high dropout and suspension rates. The premise of this paper is that solutions to these problems reside in the identification of the changes that must be made by each of the major stakeholders. Teachers need to examine attitudes and practices that may foster low expectations and discipline problems. Although the students are the victims, student attitudes need to be similarly examined. One key change calls for the repudiation of a prevalent notion among many minority students that studying is "acting white." Studying is a norm requisite for minority groups to effectively compete in public schools. Minority community leaders and groups need to lead the call for repudiation of the "acting white" phenomenon. They also need to collaboratively engage with the schools in order to improve student success. Finally, urban teacher education programs need to emphasize effective interpersonal skills, knowledge and understanding of the diverse urban culture, and effective instruction in linguistically relevant pedagogy.

Introduction

The United States prides itself on providing an opportunity for the poor to improve their circumstances by taking advantage of a public education. However, over the last several decades minority groups, particularly Hispanic, Native-, and African-American, which make up a disproportionately large part of the poor, have had a difficult time taking advantage of this educational opportunity[1]. In spite of policy efforts as broad ranging as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), more than fifty-years since *Brown v. Board of Education,* and a nationwide reconsideration of educational equity, the major tension points and associated problems have pretty much remained the same: low test scores, high dropout and absentee rates, high suspension rates, and problems related to prejudice[2]. While federal legislation such as NCLB undoubtedly influences the direction and decisions of policy makers at the state level, for many stakeholders the issues often stall at the local level. Administrators and boards of education have the responsibility to see that the appropriate policies are in place and the needed changes are made. Across the U.S. large urban school districts are experimenting with policies and procedures aimed at improving educational opportunity and accountability. Many urban school boards have tried a variety of research-driven approaches in attempting to solve the unique and persistent challenges to urban education, which have variously emphasized improved achievement, grade reconfiguration, charter schools, and most recently in Denver, releasing individual schools from certain contract provisions[3] . Some of these approaches have been tried multiple times, and often with great intensity. These solutions have, by and large, just not worked. The various boards may be faulted for trying to solve the problems by taking the wrong approach, but they cannot be blamed for lack of effort. Over the last thirty years, the problems of the large urban school districts, such as Denver and Detroit, have essentially remained the

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[1] McSwain and Davis, *College Access for the Working Poor*.
[2] Swanson, *The Real Truth About Low Graduation Rates*; Orfield, *Losing Our Future*; Viadero and Johnson, *Lifting Minority Achievement*.
[3] Meyer, "18 Schools Propose Autonomy."

same. The answers are simply not that easy to come by. There are no simplistic answers, and the frustration level of everyone remains high.

The **premise** of this paper is that solutions to the above problems reside in the identification of the changes that must be made by each of the major stakeholders. Taking responsibility for solving these problems means each stakeholder must say, “What can we do differently to move the district’s students toward success, once and for all?” Below, several key issues are identified for consideration. First, we begin by identifying four principal assumptions.

1. Minority students in large urban school districts are just as capable and have the same potential as students from any other school district.
2. Teachers in the urban schools are as well trained and as competent as the teachers from other school districts.
3. Minority parents and the various community groups care deeply about the education of their children.
4. Racism and prejudice continue to exist and take a painful toll in the large urban public schools.

Numbers two and four present a question of possible incongruity. Could school personnel be both competent and racist? This question will be discussed below. Number two contends that school personnel are competent, but that does not mean that they cannot improve, and that is precisely what will be addressed in the conclusion.

A review of the literature concerning urban school problems revealed issues involving each of the major stakeholders. The following sections identify specific concerns requiring examination and change. The first stakeholder to be reviewed will be the teachers.

The Teachers. Public school instructors are often blamed for the failure of the large urban public schools, and frequently their capabilities are brought into question. In an attempt to improve teacher performance, new tougher teacher licensure requirements have been mandated by statute (Colorado Senate Bill 99-154). In spite of efforts to standardize and improve teacher performance, a review of the literature identified a host of ineffective attitudes and practices utilized by teachers. There are ineffective instructional and disciplinary actions that create distance between teachers and students, such as the use of inappropriate assumptions about student behavior, stemming from negative stereotyping and which lead to unintentional but demeaning practices by instructors[4] . There are also ineffective behaviors, such as the use of negative messages (labels, sarcasm, judgments), as well as an inaction category concerning race and/or student self-concept. In this case, teachers remain silent when good teaching requires action, such as responding to a racist or demeaning comment made by one student to another. Some of these practices have clear racial implications, such as low academic and behavioral expectations for certain minority groups[5].

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[4] Dempsey, *Classroom Discipline Made Easy*, *CREDE.*
[5] Gay, *Culturally Responsive Teaching*, 53-62.

Teacher expectations and attitudes

It has long been shown that high expectations produce high student achievement and low expectations produce low achievement[6]. Unfortunately, only thirty-seven per cent of American teachers believe that high expectations produce high achievement[7]. If, for example, a teacher thinks of minority students as incapable or not possessing the same potential as white students, the minority students become victims of low expectations and discrimination. If a teacher does not assign homework because the thinking is that minority kids will not do it anyway, again, the minority students become the victims. Although some minority students still succeed under these conditions, low overall achievement and test scores are unavoidable. This represents a prejudicial attitude in that it ascribes a particular characteristic or behavior to all members of a minority group. Perhaps the biggest problem with low expectations is the fact that the students are confronted with a teacher who does not believe in them, leading them in many cases to seek revenge via disruptive behavior for this perceived affront to their dignity as human beings and capable students. Their primary means for recourse is non-compliance; they simply refuse to work for that particular teacher[8]. Similarly, if a teacher thinks that minority parents do not care about the education of their children, this same teacher could be severely hampered in his/her efforts to work collaboratively with minority parents on behalf of the child. This attitude can be detected by minority parents and resentment can result. Cooperation between parent and teacher then becomes difficult. It becomes particularly devastating when one considers that the primary responsibility for creating a strong parent/teacher relationship resides with the teacher. Another expression of a prejudicial attitude occurs when minorities are referred to as "them." The minority groups become a "problem people," and are not seen as individuals with problems. The implication is that the minority groups have to do all of the cultural, academic, and moral work to create healthy race relations and success in school[9]. Finally, some interesting teacher attitudes were revealed in a 2003-04 Department of Education survey of American public school teachers. The survey asked teachers to identify the serious problems in their schools. The top five items in the survey focused on student behavior and circumstance. The most frequently mentioned problems were student disrespect for teachers, students coming unprepared to learn, and lack of parent involvement. Poverty and student apathy were ranked as numbers four and five[10]. Although this survey did not focus on urban schools, it seems that teachers in general believe that the serious problems require a great deal of change on the part of the students.

Distancing behavior and the quality student teacher relationship

In high performing Hispanic schools, Scribner[11] identifies an "ethic of caring" as essential to the success of these schools. Foster[12], Cooper,[13] and Siddle-Walker[14] also emphasize the importance of strong caring relationships with African-American students. The following represent a collection of behaviors that create distance between a teacher and students, and that are anything

[6] Proctor, "Teacher Expectations"; Armendariz, "The Impact of Racial Prejudice"; Hispanic Dropout Project.
[7] Metropolitan Life Survey of the American Teacher.
[8] Dempsey, *Classroom Discipline Made Easy*, 37.
[9] West, "Race Matters."
[10] Snyder, Dillow, and Hoffman, *Digest of Education Statistics*, 106.
[11] "High Performing Hispanic Schools."
[12] "African American Teachers."
[13] "Effective White Teachers."
[14] "Interpersonal Caring."

but caring. Through her work as a teacher coach, Dempsey[15] describes a large inventory of "negative messages" which create distance, often resulting in failed student/teacher relationships. She identifies teachers who use negative stereotypes (inner city, gangsters, slow learner) as a problem[16]. When teachers employ contemptuous language, criticism, and sarcasm in an attempt to motivate more cooperative behavior, she argues that it usually triggers a lowering of student self-concepts resulting in less cooperative behavior, and a possible adversarial relationship between teacher and students. Dempsey achieves a certain poignancy through the use of direct quotes from teachers she observed during her career working with them. She identifies, as examples, the following teacher statements,

> *"Did you know you had class today? I'm tired of you coming to class without your book. Maybe you should just sit there and get an F."*
> *"If you act like third graders, I'll treat you like third graders."*
> *"I'll teach those who are attentive."*

The above comments lower self-esteem and increase the likelihood for non-participation and a determination to disrupt. These results can generalize to an entire class by what Dempsey calls the "society of kids." In this phenomenon, when there is *perceived* mistreatment of a student by a teacher, the other students identify with the mistreated and band together against the teacher[17]. When teachers experience what seem to be excessive discipline problems with minority students, they need help. The problem may be technique or the problem may be rooted in teacher attitude, which can sometimes be discriminatory. Dempsey identifies unintentional but common mistakes made by well-meaning teachers. For instance, teachers who utilize harsh, humiliating reprimands, or ones who mete out unfair punishment, overreacting to normal adolescent or teen behavior, as well as utilizing unannounced consequences, most likely will net no overall positive change in student behavior. Dempsey cites not establishing discipline from day one as a misstep, resulting in the teacher not being fully in charge and students then pushing the limits, having their way via socializing and playing. In this case, the students are not responsible for the failed relationship.

The use of a double standard can breed resentment and thereby create distance in the student/teacher relationship as well. Students are sensitive to different punishments given for committing the same offense. If a minority student receives a harsher or quicker punishment than a white student, this will not go unnoticed by adolescents who have a keen sense of justice. Finally, teacher inaction can also increase the distance between teacher and students. For instance, if there is a racist remark in a classroom and the teacher does nothing and just marches on with the lesson, minority students can and will take offense at this inaction, particularly if the teacher is white. In this case, inaction does not necessarily mean that the teacher is a racist; it may mean that the teacher simply does not know how to handle the situation. They may not have had the appropriate behavior modeled or taught to them. Teachers may also exhibit inappropriate inaction by not identifying minority contributions to a particular discipline, or they might ignore minority issues in the community that are appropriate to the classroom[18].

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[15] *Classroom Discipline Made Easy*, 3-5.
[16] Ibid, 110.
[17] Ibid, 29-30.
[18] Derman-Sparks, "Empowering Children," *NAME.*

It is the job of the teacher to establish effective discipline and strong student-teacher relationships. The instructor must recognize inappropriate behavior and convert to the use of fair, effective strategies which pull students into a realignment of an overall classroom disciplinary structure, such as reflective listening, I-messages, and the use of warm-up activities. Dempsey advocates interesting, well organized lessons with clear expectations, and as she calls it "authority mingled with kindness"[19]. In similar fashion, Irvine[20], Brown[21], and many others have advocated the use of positive reinforcement and an organized, pleasant, and respectful class that does not ignore inappropriate behaviors.

The Students. It has long been documented that the basic skill test scores of minority groups have been too low[22]. As well, the effort and the attentiveness of many minority students have been called into question. Research has indicated that many minority students have become the victims of being stereotyped as poor students[23]. In addition, it then becomes easy for some students to act on the belief that they *are* victims, so why even try. Any learner who is not attentive will learn poorly, and test scores will suffer as a result. Many of these students are acting on the belief that studying is "acting white," and this has now become a term that is in the teacher education literature. As described by Fordham and Ogbu, "acting white" refers to minority students neither studying hard nor trying to do well in school, and is used by some minority students to castigate other minority students trying to do well in school[24]. Although their research focused only on black students, Fordham and Ogbu also cite studies identifying Native- and Mexican-American students having to cope with the same burden[25]. Fordham and Ogbu claim that "acting white" is part of a peer oppositional culture that has arisen as an adaptive response to fear of failure. Further, they claim that successful black minority students are "subordinating their black identity to their identity as Americans." Fordham also accuses some high-achievers who have learned the value of being raceless (acting white) as "clear examples of internalizing oppression." Since the publication of this popular and controversial study in 1986, a great deal of research has been conducted examining their claims. Tyson, Darity, and Castellino recently reviewed the studies. They note the research has been divided with some studies finding little evidence to support either the acting white phenomenon or the influence of an oppositional peer culture[26]. They also cite studies that provide substantial support for Fordham and Ogbu, such as Ford & Harris[27] and Bergin & Cooks[28]. The authors tend to side with Fordham and Ogbu on most points as a result of their experience in Denver over the last thirty years.

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[19] *Classroom Discipline Made Easy*, 4-49.
[20] *Black Students and School Failure*, 95-96.
[21] *Teaching Minorities More Effectively*.
[22] Neill, "The Dangers of Testing"; Fletcher "Exit Exams Hurt At-Risk Students"; Snyder et al, *Digest of Educational Statistics*, 186-89.
[23] "The Threat of Stereotype."
[24] Fordham, "Racelessness as a Factor"; Fordham and Ogbu, "Black Student Success."
[25] Virgil, *From Indians to Chicanos*; Ogbu and Manute-Bianchi, "Understanding Sociocultural Factors"; Erickson and Mohatt, "Cultural Organization"; Phillips, *The Invisible Culture*.
[26] Ainsworth-Darnell and Downey, "Assessing the Oppositional Culture"; Cook and Ludwig, "The Burden of Acting White"; Ferguson, "A Diagnostic Analysis."
[27] "Perceptions and Attitudes of Black Students."
[28] "High School Students of Color Talk."

Fordham[29] identified the difficulties black adolescents have resolving a black and an American identity. Many of the difficulties are ones similar to those faced by other ethnicities who have faced discrimination and violence as they struggled to assimilate and yet maintain an ethnic identity. Fordham contends that in order for black adolescents to succeed academically they must become raceless, identify with the dominant culture, and often forfeit their allegiance to the black community. This creates an illusion that studying requires forfeiture of a black identity, as if it were an either-or situation. Although there does not seem to be a strong case for either-or, there is a strong case for black adolescents to maintain and to cherish their black identity as they strive for academic excellence. Fordham and Ogbu[30] acknowledge that many black high-achievers have succeeded in coping with the burden of "acting white." Finally, they call for educational policies and remediation efforts that address the learning and achievement problems created by this phenomenon. They also call for the black community to develop programs to teach black children that academic pursuit and "acting white" are not synonymous terms, and further, they should provide concrete, visible evidence that the community appreciates and encourages academic effort and success.

Indeed, many people of all backgrounds have had to overcome the fear of failing, or of criticism, and have benefited from kind support and encouragement. Minorities, like all students, are entitled to this kind of treatment. Studying cannot be equated with internalizing oppression if we are to solve the achievement dilemma. Achievement and learning are the result of studying, and students need to be told and reminded that studying hard in school is not "acting white," it is acting smart. Studying is a mainstream cultural norm requisite for minority students to compete effectively in an academic setting[31]. A public education provides an opportunity for the poor, and poor minorities in particular, to overcome poverty, but they must take advantage of the opportunity. A democracy requires that an educated populace and society must be held accountable for providing an equal opportunity for an education. However, equal opportunity is not equivalent to equal results[32]. It is the responsibility of each student to study. All minority students need to study hard, and this must come within the larger context of studying a curriculum that makes them feel proud of who they are and one that helps them understand the racism in society[33]. Racism remains a destructive element both in the larger society and the public schools. Students need to hear these messages from minority parents and community members in an all-out effort to change this crippling belief. Without question, minority students are the victims of the failure of the large urban public schools and they cannot be blamed for this problem; by the same token, they cannot be excused from responsible, accountable behavior.

Parents and the Community. Parents, regardless of background, care about the education of their children, and it would be unfair to blame parents for the academic achievement problems of their children. However, most parents could improve their childrearing practices, particularly with regard to school success. Over the last couple of decades, a great deal of research has been conducted concerning school related parenting practices. This focus emerged in part because the teacher- and school-centered approaches of the recent decades have not worked particularly well.

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[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid.
[31] D'Souza, *The End of Racism Principles*, 556.
[32] Ibid, 539.
[33] Gay, "Preparing for Culturally Responsive Teaching"; Haberman, "The Pedagogy of Poverty."

Research[34] found that family plays a major role in the academic success of children. Simply, some parents prepare their children for school success and some do not. A substantial portion of the more recent research focused on poor black and poor Hispanic parents[35]. The research found that many minority parents, some with incredible barriers to overcome, have been able to maintain home environments and parental practices conducive to school achievement. Sampson[36] found that the parents of poor black achievers and non-achievers provided good support and generally had high expectations of their children. Further, he described how parenting practices differed between achieving and non-achieving poor black students. The high-achievers came from homes that were structured and provided supportive talk of school activities. Good work was expected and complimented. There was homework and chores after school, and these homes were headed by mostly single parents. In a follow-up study, Sampson created elaborate intervention plans that attempted to improve the parenting skills and the home environment of non-achieving poor blacks and Hispanics. Even though he was generally unsuccessful, he did find that positive attention to young people made a difference in their school performance. Some children "starved for attention" performed better when they received it, despite the fact that needed changes in the home environment were not made[37]. Such is the power of caring.

The focus on parenting skills is vulnerable not only to the charge of blaming the victim, but also the effort calls for poor minority parents to adopt middle-class values. After all, studying, doing homework, promoting self esteem, the ability to delay gratification, to name just a few, are middle-class values. Comer[38] points out that public schools are middle-class institutions and "instruments of the mainstream culture." Nevertheless, middle-class values are not found exclusively in middle-class homes, nor are they exhibited by all middle-class parents[39], but they are the values exhibited by the parents of high achieving poor black and Hispanic students. Without putting a focus on minority parents, the schools need to provide opportunities for parents to improve their school related parenting skills.

Parents, regardless of their background, need to stay informed about their child's whereabouts and activities. If the parent is not helping the child with homework, or seeking homework assistance when needed, the parent is not only missing out on a great experience in raising a child, but these parents are not doing their job. Parents need to investigate if their child does not have homework. As long as they are not in the first few years of schooling, parents need to demand that their children receive regular homework, and make sure that they bring it home. The list of good parenting skills is not limited to school related issues. It involves a positive home environment and human interaction conducive to the development of self esteem, responsibility, and a host of other values. As Sampson found, in spite of the infusion of a great deal of resources, it is very difficult to change what is going on in homes. Still, the public schools could assist parents in the strengthening of parenting skills. Over the last four decades,

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[34] Murphy, "Case Studies in African-American School Success"; Tapia, "Schooling and Learning in U.S.-Mexican American Families"; Trueba, "Culturally Based Explanations."
[35] Clark, *Family Life and School Achievement*; Comer, "Inner-City Education"; Sampson, *Black Student Achievement, Black and Brown,* and *Race, Class, and Family Intervention*.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Sampson, *Race, Class, and Family Intervention*, 124-27.
[38] "Inner-City Education," 305.
[39] Ogbu and Manute-Bianchi, "Understanding Sociocultural Factors."

there has been a large increase in both the number of single parents and working parents [40]. It is difficult for a single, working parent to respond adequately to the psychological and physical needs of a child as well as tending to the school related needs. The public schools could provide a venue for parenting workshops, support groups or formal parenting classes. The public schools could also offer an elective high school course in parenting skills.

In further research, Henderson[41] found that when parents collaboratively engage with the schools, the result is improved student success and higher teacher expectations for student success. Nieto[42] advocated parent involvement as a way to close the gap between school/home cultures and that the goal was parent empowerment, particularly with low income parents. School personnel and parents need to work closely together on all of these issues which require self-examination and skill development in order to create highly effective partnerships[43]. Epstein is renowned in the field of school, parent, and community partnerships. She has developed a framework that identifies six types of caring involvement. First, she identifies ways for the school to help with the home environment and parenting, and also to allow families to share information about their child with the school. The second component of her framework is an outline for more effective school- to-home and home-to-school communication with an overall goal to better inform parents of school programs, policies, and their children's progress. Third, is a description of ways to involve parents as volunteers in the school and classrooms, programs such as the nationally acclaimed Watch D.O.G.S.[44]. Fourth, she specifies approaches to provide families with ideas and information to help students at home with school activities, not specifically to teach subject matter but to give encouragement and praise, as well as to listen and to react to interactive homework. Fifth, she identifies practices aimed to develop parent leaders and to include parents and students in school decisions. Sixth, she describes ways to identify and integrate community resources that will strengthen the school, students and the family. In Denver, Colorado Escuela Tlatelolco has become an excellent example of this kind of school/ community group collaboration[45]. Epstein identifies caring as a key concern for successful school/community partnerships. Kemp[46], like Epstein, underscores the importance of collaboration not just between the schools and the parents, but collaboration with human and social service agencies and local higher education as a means to promote improvement for students.

Community groups consist of bright, concerned citizens. They have been involved in countless initiatives aimed at helping kids and improving the schools. They have given the boards of education numerous scoldings, all well-reasoned and usually research-based. They have made many contributions to solving these problems and many groups have worked well in concert with the board. Unfortunately, as mentioned earlier, over the years the challenge before the schools has remained the same; only a small dent has been made in the problems. Rightly, many of these groups have pointed out that public school students are the victims. However, assuming the victim role has not been productive. All students, regardless of background, need their potential

[40] Irvine, *Black Students and School Failure*, 111-12, "America's Children."
[41] *A New Wave of Evidence*.
[42] "Creating Multicultural Learning Communities."
[43] Epstein, "School/Family/Community Partnerships."
[44] "All about WATCH D.O.G.S."
[45] *Escuela Tlatelolco*
[46] "Preparing Education Practitioners."

proclaimed and nurtured. They need to be encouraged to believe that they can compete. They need to be told that their teachers are capable and that they must study hard and long to succeed. Minority community leaders need to lead the call for the repudiation of the "acting white" phenomenon. The responsibility for many of these needed changes resides equally with the schools and the minority communities in that government alone is not equipped to make these cultural changes[47]. Finally, community groups must be highly involved in the creation of caring partnerships with the schools[48]. Epstein calls for an exceptionally high degree of parental and total community involvement. Caring is a two-way street that requires appropriate response from all parties. The policy makers are required to see that the opportunity is presented to the community, but the community members are accountable for taking advantage of the opportunity. Without adequate minority participation, caring partnerships are not likely to happen.

Lastly, **teacher education programs** need to change and to concentrate on developing highly effective educators. A great deal of the research concerning new conceptual frameworks for educating teachers in cultural diversity include substantive components involving: *cultural competency*, the idea that teachers acquire the knowledge and skills to function productively in cross-cultural classrooms and to interact efficiently with students from cultures that differ from their own[49]; *culturally responsive* teaching, an instructional strategy based on the theory that when curriculum and skills are situated within the lived experiences and frames of references of students, they are more personally meaningful and are learned more easily and thoroughly[50], and *reflective practice*, the concept that teachers develop not only the observational, empirical and analytical skills necessary to monitor, evaluate and revise their own teaching practices[51], but also be taught the skills of critical analysis and self-reflection, allowing them to examine their *own* cultural perspectives and personal assumptions underlying their expectations, beliefs and behaviors when interacting with CLD students[52].

The notions of *critical analysis* and *reflective practice* form a conceptual strand that ties many of the frameworks for a more multicultural approach to teacher education and professional development together[53]. Gay[54] talks about reflective practice and professional development for educators working with diverse populations in terms of all teachers being taught the skills of *critical analysis* and *self-reflection*. This notion of teaching educators to become *critical thinkers* and *reflective practitioners* builds upon many of the aspects of critical pedagogy and socio-cultural learning theory[55]. Additionally, it remains an important part of any discussion on how to better prepare instructional professionals for working with the growing numbers of culturally and linguistically diverse students in today's public schools.

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[47] D'Souza, *The End of Racism Principles*, 555.
[48] Epstein, "School/Family/Community Partnerships."
[49] Marquez-Chisolm, "Preparing Teacher for Multicultural Classrooms"; Pang, "Educating the Whole Child."
[50] Gay, *Culturally Responsive Teaching*; Ladson-Billings, "Multicultural Teacher Education."
[51] Irvine, "Transforming Teaching for the Twenty-First Century."
[52] Marquez-Chisolm, ibid; Nieto, ibid.
[53] e.g., Banks, "Multicultural Literacy"; Marquez-Chisolm, ibid; Nieto, ibid.
[54] "Building Cultural Bridges."
[55] e.g., Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*; Giroux, *Theory and Resistance in Education*; McLaren, *Life in Schools*; Vygotsky, *Mind in Society*.

Ladson-Billings[56] is a strong supporter of multicultural education in teacher preparation. She notes that the needs of African-American students have not been met and calls for a greater utilization of black culture in urban schooling. She criticizes American education for a refusal to recognize blacks as having a distinct culture. Whereas much of multicultural education aims at using cultural referents as a bridge to explain the mainstream culture, she emphasizes they are a part of the curriculum in their own right. She cites an example of a culturally relevant lesson involving the U.S. Constitution. The lesson could begin with a discussion of the bylaws and articles of incorporation that were involved in the organization of a local church or community civic association. The students will now learn not only the significance of the documents in forming institutions but they will see that there are institution builders within their own community. This kind of a lesson establishes the dignity of the local culture and community, and helps students with their ability to understand and to move between two cultures.

Over the last several years there has been a substantial mandate from researchers and professional teaching organizations (i.e. the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education) regarding the development of critical thinking skills for educators working in a multicultural setting. In 1982 The National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), established multicultural educational standards which stated in part:

> Multicultural teacher education could include but not be limited to experiences which (i) promote analytical and evaluative abilities to confront issues such as participatory democracy, racism, sexism and the parity of power; (ii) develop skills for values clarification including the study of the manifest and latent transmission of values[57].

This notion of developing critical thinking skills in teacher education and professional development programs for educators has recently become an essential part of the call for reform in the way teachers are prepared to work with culturally and linguistically diverse students. In her *Bold Proposal for Teacher Education*, Gay describes specific aspects of teacher education programs for developing the skills necessary to incorporate cultural and linguistic diversity into the normative operations of schools and classrooms. According to Gay, these skills and the rationales behind them include:

> First, teacher education students should be taught skills of critical analysis and self-reflection. These skills will help to analyze systematically the structures and procedures in schools and classrooms and their own habitual ways of behaving in instructional settings from various cultural vantage points; to identify points of conflict between the school and different ethnic groups; and to determine which of these offer the best and worst opportunities for negation and change to serve the academic needs of culturally diverse students;
> Second, education students should be taught how to deconstruct mainstream hegemonic assumptions, values and beliefs embedded in the normative structures and procedures in conventional classroom teaching[58].

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[56] Ibid, 7-18.
[57] NCATE, 14.

Discussion of prejudice
It is quite clear that discrimination and prejudice have played a role in the failure of the large urban public schools. Low expectations have resulted in lower self esteem and lower achievement. There is no justification to apply such expectations to a whole group of people. Further, Tatum identifies racism as either active or passive. Examples of active racism are verbal harassment, physical violence, and intentional acts of discrimination. Armendriaz contends the blatant discrimination of earlier decades in large part has been replaced by a more subtle kind of prejudice. Tatum identifies more subtle racism as passive and gives as examples: silence in response to another's racist remark, failure to acknowledge the contributions of minorities and practices that disproportionately affect minorities. Interviews[59] provide additional examples of this more subtle racism. First is a refusal on the part of a teacher to acknowledge the ethnic name of a student or the proper pronunciation of a student's name. For instance, Juan is not pronounced like "John," nor is Vigil pronounced with a hard "g" sound. This practice denies a person the control and power over his/her own name, and the teacher is claiming that power. The student reports this to be a demeaning experience and the consequences to be increased distance from, and diminished trust in, the teacher. A truly caring relationship becomes that much more difficult to establish. In a second example, a student cited simply being ignored, passed over, or not called on in response to a question. The third example is the use of public humiliation in disciplinary actions. If this practice is used disproportionately with minorities, it is clearly racism. The result is increased distance between the teacher and student. A caring relationship is likely to be lost and the student is that much more likely to disengage from the academic work required by the teacher. Similarly, when a student does not perceive that an instructor genuinely likes him or her, or does not perceive a sense of caring respect, refusal to work is one way that he or she may respond to that perception[60]. In some cases, it can lead to what Armendriaz[61] calls outcast behavior, which is behavior that reflects an alienation from school and can lead to suspension or expulsion[62].

The above describes numerous pitfalls with serious consequences for any teaching situation. In addition, another potential problem arises when teachers and students are of differing backgrounds or ethnicities and the teacher lacks appropriate cultural knowledge and cross cultural teaching skills. In the large city public schools in the United States teachers and students are, in general, from different backgrounds, 77% of the students have been identified as minority and 84% of the public high school teachers as white[63]. The potential for serious problems is clear. When caring, effective student teacher relationships are not established, the results are often withdrawn effort, low achievement, high suspension, expulsion, and dropout rates. Finally, minorities also seem to be the victims of discrimination when schools employ tracking schemes. Oakes presents a case for race rather than ability being the determining factor for tracking students. Minorities are overrepresented in lower tracks and underrepresented in higher tracks[64].

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[58] Ibid, 295.
[59] Heyman.
[60] Dempsey, *Classroom Discipline Made Easy*, 4.
[61] Armendriaz, "The Impact of Racial Prejudice."

[63] Snyder, Dillow, and Hoffman, ibid.
[64] Oakes, *Keeping Track*.

Teachers and the development of an ethic of caring

Gay[65] calls caring a moral imperative, a social responsibility and for teachers, a pedagogical imperative. The development of an attitude of caring and the skills of caring require diligent, time consuming work. It means a teacher must know how to act in the best interests of others and that caring is what binds us all together[66]. A great deal of honest self examination is required. Teachers need to develop the emotional empathy to know that bias hurts[67]. In many ways, effective teachers in the urban schools are no different from any others. They are respectful, kind, gracious, fair, positive, patient, and non-judgmental in their interactions with students. They stay away from being critical, sarcastic, and insulting, all of which are counterproductive and lead to discipline problems. Dempsey suggests that teachers may wish to utilize tape or video recordings of their own teaching. They can examine their own interactions with students, in a private setting, and can comfortably look for negative behavior or attitudes in teaching and/or disciplining style. Teachers are professionals who will change ineffective behavior, especially when constructive alternatives are provided in a non-threatening manner.

For Gay, caring and high expectations are intimately interrelated. She contends that teachers have to care so much about their minority students that they will accept nothing less than high-level success and they will work diligently to accomplish it. High expectations are achieved, in part, through the use of positive statements that preserve the dignity of a student. Teachers need to employ positive statements with regard to not only the person of the student but also the work of the student. Students need to like who they are[68] and to see themselves as competent. Teachers need to be encouraging and positive about the good behavior of students, speak to students in a respectful manner, and identify for students better ways to handle situations. As an example, Dempsey suggests the following comment in the case of a forgotten book, *"I see you forgot your book. Please get one from the shelf to use for today, so that you can participate in the lesson with us."* If this is done with a tone of kindness and graciousness, it conveys that the student cares about learning and wishes to participate[69].

Ladson-Billings[70] also makes numerous references to the importance of caring. For her, caring begins with simple acts of human kindness: listening, acknowledging birthdays, encouraging opinions, and believing in students' capabilities. It also extends into affirmation and celebration of the students' own cultures. Caring might take the form of bringing in local coaches and Scout leaders to talk about an individual student's excellence. A caring teacher creates an environment where students feel comfortable and supported. It is an environment where students care about each other, help one another, and acknowledge the success of others.

Conclusions

All groups need to change to solve the problems of the urban schools. The solutions reside in the identification of the changes that must be made by each of the major stakeholders. Most of the

[65] "Preparing for Culturally Responsive Teaching."
[66] Webb, Wilson, Corbett, and Mordecai, "Understanding Caring in Context"; Gay, ibid, 33-34.
[67] Derman-Sparks, "Empowering Children."
[68] Derman-Sparks, ibid.
[69] Dempsey, ibid, 4.
[70] *The Dreamkeepers*, 35-116.

changes identified in the review of the literature were permeated with the theme of caring. The review of the literature suggested the following conclusions:

1. Public school administrators must develop and manage policy that:

- **a. provides teachers appropriate assistance in developing strong, caring relationships with students, and**
- **b. creates support for the development of caring school/community partnerships.**

2. Public school teachers need to examine behavior and attitudes and develop a stronger ethic of caring. Minority failure in terms of overall success in the large urban public schools seems to result from a combination of inappropriate teaching behaviors and attitudes, including both prejudice based behavior and distancing behavior.

3. Repudiation of the "acting white" phenomenon. The effort must be community-wide and led my minority community members.

4. Schools, parents and community groups need to commit to a more caring, collaborative participation with the public schools. This must be a community wide effort and all stakeholders need to be held accountable for collaborative, caring participation.

5. Public schools need to create an elective parenting class at the high school level and provide a venue for assisting parents in the strengthening of parenting skills. This recommendation is applicable to all high schools.

6. Teacher education programs should include coursework examining the following areas:

- **a. the history and culture of the larger local community,**
- **b. culturally relevant pedagogy, c. critical thinking, racism, and personal reflection.** This recommendation applies to the preparation of all teachers.

Final note: Perhaps Nel Noddings said it best in her book, *The Challenge to Care in Schools*. She notes not only do students need caring, but that it is essential at every stage of life "we need to be cared for in the sense that we need to be understood, received, respected, recognized." At the time, the press for higher test scores was already in full swing and few heard the call for more caring in our schools. She cited a Girl Scouts of America survey that found only one-third of the students said their teachers cared for them. She observed that it was obvious that our main purpose in public education was not the moral one of developing caring people, but instead a relentless and rather hapless pursuit of academic improvement[71]. It was 1992 when she made these observations and now sixteen years later, we could say the very same thing.

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[71] Noddings, xi-1.

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