

**“College Is a Good Place  
to Go to Become  
What You Want to Become”:  
A Collaboration  
between Liberal Arts Undergraduates  
and Urban Middle School Students**

**By Carol R. Rinke, Melissa E. Arsenie, & Suzanne Bell**

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*Carol R. Rinke is a professor in the Education Department at Gettysburg College, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania; Melissa E. Arsenie is with The Posse Foundation, Boston, Massachusetts; and Suzanne Bell is with the Baltimore City Public School System, Baltimore, Maryland.*

**Introduction**

In the United States, there is a pressing need to bridge the divide between the higher education institutions where teachers are prepared and the school sites where they work with students (e.g., McDiarmid & Clevenger-Bright, 2008; Zeichner, 2003). Linking the theoretical foundations of teacher education programs with practical experience in K-12 classrooms offers future teachers the fundamental opportunity to learn both in and from practice, developing a stance of inquiry about their teaching (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). These collaborations are particularly critical for urban classrooms where the cultural backgrounds and communication patterns of students so often differ from the predominantly mono-cultural body of future educators (Banks, et

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al., 2005; Haberman, 1996) and where schools struggle to retain a stable corps of highly-qualified teachers (Ingersoll, 2001; Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2002). Moreover, with growing national interest in alternative certification routes (Zeichner & Conklin, 2005), it is increasingly important that higher education and K-12 collaborations reach all prospective teachers, those currently enrolled in teacher education programs as well as liberal arts undergraduates contemplating teaching at some point in their professional future. While there are a plethora of opportunities for post-graduate students to engage in teacher preparation within urban contexts (e.g., Berry, Montgomery, & Snyder, 2008; Veltri, 2008; Villegas & Clewell, 1998), few opportunities exist for undergraduates interested in urban education to explore the field, particularly those students enrolled at residential, liberal arts institutions located far from urban areas.

This article reports on the development, implementation, and outcomes of a partnership between Garrett College, a highly-selective private liberal arts college, and Worthington Charter School, a public K-8 charter school in Baltimore, Maryland.<sup>1</sup> This partnership, which was initiated in 2007, launched the first of an annual series of College and Career Institutes for middle school students in the spring of 2009.<sup>2</sup> Building upon the strong foundation of prior school-university partnerships in the form of Professional Development Schools (PDS), service-learning programs, and teacher education fieldwork, this collaboration was constructed around a notion of shared ownership, in which college students and middle school students were equally engaged in the construction of mutually beneficial learning experiences. Through research into the experiences of both groups of students, we find changed perspectives and strong relationships resulting from participation, each mediated by the individual’s background and prior perspectives. We conclude that there is considerable value in bringing together individuals from disparate backgrounds as co-owners in a meaningful and joint educational endeavor.

### **The Partnership**

This partnership, jointly developed over the course of two years by Garrett College and Worthington Charter School administrators, faculty, and students, aimed to bring together college and middle school students with the goal of better understanding the realities of urban schooling for the former and the college experience for the latter. This program was grounded in prior notions about high-quality urban teacher preparation, including participation in meaningful tasks, dialogue, and mutual engagement (e.g., Oakes, Franke, Quartz, & Rogers, 2002). Moreover, it accepted the notion that legitimate peripheral participation, as both students and teachers, can lead to fuller participation and even identity development (e.g., Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998).

The long-term, shared, and iterative task of determining student needs and researching possible structures ultimately resulted in the creation of the College and

Career Institute, a week-long after-school program in which Garrett undergraduates developed interactive curricula to teach Worthington Charter School 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> graders about the need for higher education, college life, and the practicalities of identifying, applying to, and funding college. The institute culminated in a public celebration where middle school students displayed both artistic and professional artifacts depicting their future career plans and life paths to family and community members. This intense program was followed two weeks later by a campus visit from the Worthington students, in which they had the opportunity to learn about college admissions, academics, and extra-curriculars first hand. Direct experiences were complemented by opportunities for written reflection and dialogue for both groups of students. Throughout the program, a high priority was placed on consistent small groupings of Garrett and Worthington Charter School students as a way to foster the development of strong mentoring relationships.

Sixteen Garrett students from freshmen to seniors and from academic disciplines including sociology, political science, psychology, and Africana studies participated through enrollment in a semester-long course on Urban Education (see Table 1). The course was open to teacher education students as well as other undergraduates interested in issues of urban schooling. Six of the 16 participating students were part of Garrett's teacher education program; the others expressed strong interest in work with urban youth and public policy. Three of the students had themselves attended urban schools. The course covered foundational issues in urban education

**Table 1**  
**Overview of Garrett College Participants**

<i>Student</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Race</i>	<i>Academic Major Year</i>	<i>Teacher Educ.</i>	<i>Educational Background</i>	
Adele	Female	Black	Senior	Africana Studies	No	Suburban Public
Alice	Female	White	Senior	Sociology	Yes	Suburban Public
Anisha	Female	Black	Soph.	Psychology	No	Urban Public
Audrey	Female	White	Junior	Globaliz. Studies	No	Suburban Public
Brady	Male	White	Junior	English	Yes	Suburban Public
Darrell	Male	Black	Soph.	Women, Gender & Sexuality Studies	No	Urban Magnet
Edgar	Male	White	Soph.	Management	No	Rural Public
Elisa	Female	White	Senior	Religion	Yes	Private
Elizabeth	Female	White	Soph.	Psychology	No	Suburban Public
Eva	Female	White	Soph.	English	Yes	Suburban Public
Kaitlyn	Female	White	Soph.	Sociology	No	Suburban Public
Kali	Female	White	Freshm.	History	Yes	Suburban Public
Kevin	Male	White	Junior	Psychology	No	Suburban Public
Martin	Male	White	Senior	Psychology	Yes	Private
Maura	Female	White	Junior	Political Science	No	Private
Warren	Male	Black	Senior	Africana Studies	Some	Urban Public

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such as historical roots, political and economic sources of inequality, race, class, and culture, and structures for school reform. This theoretical background was intended to complement their real-world experience in urban schools and prepare them to design and implement a relevant and meaningful curriculum during the College and Career Institute. During their week in Baltimore, Garrett students also visited several neighborhood schools, conducted a case study of student educational experiences, explored a variety of school reform models, and spoke with teachers, administrators, and community leaders.

Garrett students were joined by 31 Worthington Charter School 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> graders who voluntarily registered for the College and Career Institute following an introduction to the program for both students and families. Worthington Charter School is a small, family-like charter school founded in 1997 on the principles of academic achievement, diversity, and arts integration. The school was designed to bring together students from two racially and socioeconomically divergent neighborhoods in Baltimore, one of the most highly segregated cities in the country (Massey & Denton, 1998). Worthington Charter School uses a lottery system to draw an equal number of students from a predominantly low-income Black neighborhood and an adjacent middle class neighborhood with both Black and White residents. As Baltimore City 8<sup>th</sup> graders are expected to apply to a variety of tracked high schools throughout the city, these middle school students were at the cusp of an important decision regarding their future education and life path. The College and Career Institute aimed to serve the needs of these students by helping them to reflect on their direction and ground vague notions about their future in the realities of higher education.

During program development and implementation, Garrett College and Worthington Charter School students served as both teachers and learners, blurring traditional lines established by age and educational attainment. Garrett students were charged with collaboratively designing and implementing an interactive curriculum on the purposes and processes of higher education, paired with a meaningful campus visit. They also learned from their younger colleagues about the cultures of the city, their educational experiences, and their long-term aspirations. Likewise, Worthington students served as teachers to their older colleagues, sharing with them interests, successes, challenges, and dreams, all the while learning about various ways to achieve their professional and personal goals. Together, Garrett and Worthington students shared ownership over this educational endeavor, each teaching and learning together.

### **Theoretical Foundations and Literature Review**

We came to this partnership from the theoretical perspective that higher education and K-12 partnerships can, at their best, be mutually beneficial, offering the opportunity for simultaneous renewal (Goodlad, 1990). We also recognized that

collaborations between institutions with different purposes and distinct institutional cultures come with a certain inherent set of challenges and natural conflict (Walker, 1999). After examining the characteristics of successful partnerships, including sustainability, joint usefulness and productivity, frequent communication, and flexibility (Russell & Flynn, 2000), we aimed to develop a collaboration in which all participants could have a meaningful education experience, indicated by clear outcomes for both college and middle school students (Chorzempa & Isabelle, 2008). We also built our program on a foundation of mutual respect for all players (Marlow, Kyed, & Connors, 2005), which we saw as a key ingredient for a jointly-owned educational endeavor.

We situate our program within three larger bodies of literature: research on PDS partnerships, studies of service learning within liberal arts education, and work on urban field experiences for teacher education candidates. We see our partnership as grounded in and building upon each of these fields. The principles of PDS partnerships, laid out in the Holmes Group report *Tomorrow's Schools* (1990), focus on using school-university partnerships as sites for professional preparation, school research, and improvement of teaching. The literature praises PDS partnerships as vehicles for enhanced pre-service teacher field experiences, ongoing teacher development and empowerment, and even increased student achievement (Byrd & McIntyre, 1999; Clift & Brady, 2005; Darling-Hammond, 2006; Knight, Wiseman, & Cooner, 2000). Specific examples of PDS partnerships abound, with descriptions predominantly focusing on their creation and implementation, teacher reflection and growth, and the learning communities that emerged from the partnerships (Boyle-Baise & McIntyre, 2008; Pajak, 1999). Despite the overwhelming strengths of PDSs, some note that they have the potential to do more to improve learning experiences in schools with low-income, culturally and linguistically diverse students and advance the goals of educational equity (Valli, Cooper, & Franke, 1997; Wong & Glass, 2005). In this collaboration, we build upon the basic principles of PDS partnerships as mutually beneficial sites for both teacher education and professional development, applying these foundations to the relationship between a private liberal arts college and a racially and socioeconomically diverse urban school.

We pair this foundation in PDS partnerships with work on academic service-learning for undergraduate students. The service-learning approach to liberal arts education blends course-based academic learning with projects serving the needs of the community in such a way that the two are closely integrated, one building off of the other (Rhoads & Howard, 1998). Service learning has been noted as a particularly effective pedagogy for helping undergraduate students develop complex perceptions of truth and accept ambiguity over and above simplistic solutions to real-world problems (Butin, 2005). Butin calls service learning a transformative and dangerous pedagogy because it, “challenges our static notions of teaching and learning, decenters our claim to the labels of ‘students’ and ‘teachers’, and exposes and explores the linkages between power, knowledge, and identity” (Butin, 2005, pp. vii-viii).

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Although service learning is predominantly located within the broader liberal arts educational context, it has also been applied to teacher education. Service learning is seen as powerful for teacher preparation because of its ability to foster social understanding, provide civic and moral benefits for participants, and prepare pre-service teachers for the workplace (Verducci & Pope, 2001). Recommendations for integrating service learning into teacher education include meeting the needs of all stakeholders, structuring service, reflection, and assessment, and organizing around program goals and standards (Anderson & Hill, 2001). Specific examples of service learning within teacher education promote enhanced understanding of subject matter and students as well as critical thinking and collaborative skills (e.g., Handa, et al., 2008; Kirtman, 2008). Our program applies the most salient aspects of service learning to meet the needs of pre-service teachers, prospective teachers, and middle school students. Most significantly, we draw from notions about complicating static truths through field experience and serving the identified needs of our community partner.

Finally, our program also pulls from research on urban field placements within teacher education. In particular, we ground our program in research demonstrating how first-hand experiences can affect pre-service teacher notions about urban students and schools. The current demographic divide in our country between increasingly diverse students and largely mono-cultural pre-service teachers has led to a consensus around the importance of engaging with issues of race, class, and social inequality within teacher education and helping pre-service teachers develop concrete skills for working with students different than themselves (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Gay & Howard, 2000). Studies indicate that pre-service teachers hold largely deficit views of urban contexts, perceiving them as violence-ridden and valuing urban teachers while disparaging urban students (Gilbert, 1997; Watson, Charner-Laird, Kirkpatrick, Szczesiul, & Gordon, 2006).

Previous work on urban field placements has demonstrated that pre-service teachers can gain knowledge about cultural values and patterns of communication, overcome a sense of “culture shock,” and develop positive dispositions about working with urban schools and students (e.g., Marxen & Rudney, 1999; Olmedo, 1985; Swartz, 2003; Zeichner & Melnick, 1996). In our collaboration, we build upon this foundation of research on urban field placements and explore both college students’ and middle school students’ changed perspectives as a result of their mutual engagement. Because this course engages such a diversity of college students in terms of academic focus and career plans, we also explore the outcomes of this program with respect to professional direction.

Building upon the foundations of previous PDS partnerships, service-learning coursework, and urban field experiences, we developed a unique collaboration between liberal arts undergraduates and middle school students. This collaboration drew particular elements from each of its predecessors, including school-university collaborations as mutually beneficial sites for teacher preparation and development,

schools as contexts for complicating academic learning while serving the needs of the community, and urban experiences as a means to develop productive perspectives on schools, students and careers. Together, this led to a partnership focused on helping liberal arts undergraduates grapple with the challenges and successes of urban schooling while simultaneously supporting middle school students in developing their own ideas about higher education. In this way, the College and Career Institute prepared pre-service and prospective teachers, met the needs of the partner middle school students, and resulted in both strong mentoring relationships and altered perspectives on schools, students, and careers.

### **Research Methods**

In an effort to understand the outcomes and continually improve our partnership, we initiated a primarily qualitative case study exploring the perspectives of the college and middle school students participating in the program (Yin, 2003). Growing out of our theoretical framework, this research focused on understanding college students' ideas about schools, students, and careers within urban contexts and monitoring those perspectives over time. We also aimed to understand how the middle school students interpreted their week-long experience in the College and Career Institute as well as the Garrett campus visit. Overall, we addressed two overarching research questions:

- (1) What are the outcomes for all participating parties of a collaboration between liberal arts undergraduates and urban middle school students?
- (2) How did those involved, from different backgrounds and educational motivations, make sense of their experience in the program?

Each of the three authors played a role in the implementation of this partnership, one as a teacher educator, one as an undergraduate student, and one as a school administrator. Given our dual roles as participants and researchers, we scrutinized assumptions, shared understandings, and triangulated data in an effort to generate an interpretation of data independent from our own relationships to the partnership (Merriam, 1998).

Data for this study were drawn from a variety of sources collected over the course of the first implementation semester, including surveys, written reflections, naturalistic observations, and ongoing communications. For the college students, a pre- and post-course survey was implemented which specifically investigated students' interest in urban education, ideas about urban cultures, career paths, and previous educational experiences. We also examined written reflections from an ongoing journal assignment in which students related their past, present, and future to ideas and experiences in the course. Additional academic work was also integrated, with specific attention paid to students' analyses of school reform initiatives based on their first-hand experiences in urban schools. Finally, we conducted naturalistic



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observations during class sessions and program implementation and incorporated verbal and email communication to provide a more complete picture of student perspectives. Middle school student perspectives were captured through participant observation during the College and Career Institute, artifacts generated during the Institute, and a culminating survey looking at student perspectives, relationships, and learning.

Data analysis took place iteratively during and following completion of the program and used a variety of methods in an effort to understand how both college students and middle school students made sense of the program in relation to their particular background and experiences (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Survey data were analyzed for trends within groups of students, including year, academic interest, and educational background, as well as change over time. Written data were coded using a framework of initial ideas and developing perspectives in relation to course concepts and analyzed in an effort to identify patterns among and between groups of students (Stake, 1995). Individual student analysis preceded cross-student analysis as we identified both patterns and dissimilarities within the larger case study (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Our analysis concluded with detailed member checks to verify and, at times, even extend conclusions (Merriam, 1998), and these member checks resulted in an undergraduate student suggesting the notion of shared ownership.

### **Outcomes**

The Garrett-Worthington collaboration, in combination with other experiences in the course and the urban context, resulted in positive outcomes for both college and middle school students. Garrett students reported more optimistic views about urban schools and students and increased interest in pursuing post-college work in urban areas. In addition to these changed perspectives, college students with different academic, personal, and educational backgrounds made sense of their experiences in distinct ways, each filtering their experiences through the lens of previous interests and orientations. Like their older colleagues, the middle school students reported increased understanding of and focus on higher education as well as strong relationships with their college mentors. Worthington Charter School students also made sense of their experiences in the College and Career Institute based on initial ideas about personal and professional direction. Finally, this partnership yielded some surprising results, particularly with respect to the relationships between the college students themselves. This section will present the outcomes and experiences of college students and middle school students, followed by a discussion of some of the more surprising outcomes of the program.

#### **College Student Outcomes**

From the beginning of the course to the end, Garrett students reported more positive attitudes about urban students, families, and schools (see Table 2). In par-



ticular, Garrett students came away impressed with the young people they met. On the pre- and post-course survey, Garrett students responded more positively to the statement “Urban students are academically motivated.” Using a Likert scale from one to five, with one representing “Strongly Agree” and five “Strongly Disagree,” students’ responses changed from a class average of 3.06 at the beginning of the semester to an average of 2.69 at the conclusion of the semester. Garrett students also expressed time and again how surprised they were by Worthington students’ knowledge of and preparation for college. And Garrett students explained that “interaction with the students at Worthington” was the most meaningful aspect of

**Table 2**  
**College Student Attitudes about Urban Schools and Students,**  
**Pre- and Post-Course Survey Responses**

<i>Survey Question</i>	<i>Pre- Course Class Average*</i>	<i>Post- Course Class Average</i>	<i>Change in Response</i>
Urban schools are organized	3.31	3.31	0
Urban schools have discipline problems	2.12	2.19	-0.07
Urban schools have a largely minority student body	1.81	1.63	0.18
Urban schools have large numbers of special education students	3.19	3.44	-0.25
Urban schools are safe	3.38	3.00	0.38
Urban students are academically motivated	3.06	2.69	0.37
Urban schools don’t have the resources for students to be academically successful	2.19	2.88	-0.69
Urban teachers are positive role models	2.50	2.72	-0.22
Urban teachers are unmotivated	3.75	3.44	0.31
Urban teachers are dedicated to their students	2.69	2.53	0.16
Urban teachers are unable to relate to their students	3.25	3.38	-0.13
Urban principals are incompetent	3.63	3.63	0
Urban parents are active in their child’s education	3.68	3.22	0.46
Urban parents are suspicious of the educational system	2.65	2.75	-0.10
Teachers generally work in the setting they grew up in (urban, rural, etc)	2.81	3.31	-0.50
Urban teachers are very qualified	3.25	3.50	-0.25
Urban schools are nice places to learn and teach	3.88	3.63	0.25
Urban schools offer the same opportunities to students as suburban and rural schools	3.94	4.50	-0.56
Student achievement is primarily determined by family background	3.09	3.03	0.06
Urban schools prepare students for college	3.41	3.78	-0.37

\* Average responses based on a five-point Likert scale: 1=Strongly Agree, 2=Agree, 3=Neutral, 4=Disagree, 5=Strongly Disagree.

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their experience. This element of mutual understanding was echoed by one of the Worthington students who wrote, “I feel like I made a connection with the [Garrett] students, like showing them there is more to kids than what they think.”

Likewise, Garrett students reported more optimistic views of urban families and schools. They reported more positive responses to the survey prompt “Urban parents are active in their child’s education,” changing from a class average of 3.69 to 3.22. They also reported more positive perspectives on school safety, availability of resources, and general school climate. This experience also appeared to open their eyes to the challenges some urban students must overcome in order to reach college. At the conclusion of the semester, their average response to the statement, “Urban schools offer the same opportunities to students as suburban and rural schools” changed from a 3.94 to 4.50. The one area where there were mixed results was with respect to urban teachers. At the conclusion of the semester, college students reported that urban teachers were less motivated, but more dedicated, than they had previously believed. Overall, Garrett students also indicated that urban education was much more complex than they had previously realized. One student wrote, “I learned that there are many different problem plaguing urban schools, and while they are possible to fix, they will not and cannot be fixed with one solution.”

Participation in the College and Career Institute also influenced some college students’ career plans (see Table 3). At the conclusion of the semester, the college students indicated that they were more likely to pursue work in urban

**Table 3**  
**College Student Career Plans, Pre- and Post-Course Survey Responses**

<i>Survey Question</i>	<i>Pre- Course Class Average</i>	<i>Post- Course Class Average</i>	<i>Change in Response</i>
I plan to earn my teaching certification at Garrett	3.25	3.38	-0.13
I am considering earning a teaching certificate after graduation	2.82	2.58	0.24
I plan to work with schools or education indirectly (e.g., after-school programs, social work, counseling)	2.40	2.63	-0.18
I plan to work in education policy	3.19	3.25	-0.06
I plan to work with urban youth outside of the school setting	2.75	2.56	0.19
I do not plan to work with schools or education	4.38	4.40	-0.02
I am considering Teach for America or another alternative certification route	3.13	2.31	0.82
I plan to work in an urban area temporarily	3.13	2.81	0.32
I plan to work in an urban area long-term	2.63	2.63	0
I do not plan to work with urban schools or students	3.88	4.13	-0.25

areas than they had previously planned. They also indicated greater interest in direct classroom work with urban students, through graduate teacher education programs as well as alternative certification programs, and less interest in indirect work with schools or policy. This course also seems to have increased interest in short-term work in urban schools and communities, but did not alter long-term career plans. Students' average responses to the statement "I plan to work in an urban area temporarily" increased from 3.13 to 2.81, while their responses to the prompt "I plan to work in an urban area long-term," although more positive, remained unchanged at 2.63.

### **College Student Experiences**

For students coming into the class with a background in teaching through Garrett's Education Department, the course provided insight about teaching in urban environments and allowed for discovery of the various roles young educators can play in education reform. Within the class, several students planned to become urban teachers upon graduation. They were drawn to the course for its focus on urban issues in schools as well as the opportunity to see where they could best make an impact on students' lives. Upon completing the course, these students reaffirmed their career paths as educators and had a clearer sense of what professional moves best made sense to them personally.

Eva, a White woman from an affluent area of New Jersey, came to the class with a desire to teach in urban schools, honed from outrage at what she perceived to be systemic inequity in urban areas as well as a passion for creating change and inspiring students sparked by the film *Freedom Writers*. Early in the semester, Eva described her belief that, "there is a huge difference between 'saving' and learning. In order to make change to the greater issues facing society we can begin by breaking down individual barriers [and] learning from one another on the same level." These initial beliefs were developed further during her time in Baltimore, where she described her "extreme belief in maintaining the uniqueness and individuality of each of my students." However, Eva's increased desire to become an urban teacher clashed with plans to return to her hometown and teach at her old high school once she is ready to start a family. She struggled with this apparent contradiction, noting a need to "make sure that the choices I make align with my goals." While this experience did not lead to a clear solution, it did help Eva to complicate her thinking about her future as both an educator and a parent.

Martin, a White man himself raised in Baltimore, also came to the course with the intention of becoming an urban teacher. He believed that although he would initially struggle in the classroom, he would eventually be able to create change. Once involved in the course, Martin noted that this perception of teaching in an urban school "is almost plagiarism out of one of Hollywood's movies on the White outsider giving his or her students a real chance to succeed in life." Like Eva, this course also helped Martin think through issues related to his role as an urban educa-

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tor. He explained that his personal desires for a family and well-educated children might not align with his plans to teach in urban schools:

I decided as a future parent that I would not send my children to a private school since that would simply be a form of white flight and abandoning the public school system. I reasoned that I would want to teach in a school that made a difference and that a good school for me as a teacher would be a good school for me as a parent.

After the trip to Baltimore, however, Martin realized that this issue was more complex than he had previously thought. His ability to grapple with complex life choices related to both family and schooling indicate a refinement of his own personal role in promoting education equity.

Other students came into the course with no intention of becoming educators but with investment in social justice and a commitment to the eradication of issues relating to class and race in society. After the course, these students were better able to not only understand how socio-economic inequity and minority discrimination affect urban students but also were able to see what work they could do as advocates for urban students to improve the education and quality of life for young people educated in cities like Baltimore. These individuals did not plan to work within the classroom, but became passionate advocates for educational change.

Maura, a White woman from Connecticut, opted to participate in the course because of a passion for social justice issues coupled with a lack of knowledge about how social justice manifests itself within the education system. Privately educated at the insistence of her parents, Maura considered participation in a program like Teach for America as a post-graduate option simply because it seemed to be an opportunity to “give back” and create change. After the course, however, she eliminated working in any classroom as a potential career option as a result of her inability to commit to an educator’s lifestyle. Her initial response to urban school reform following the Baltimore trip was that the issues themselves were too large to comprehend. She wrote, “I am now currently struggling with finding a balance between being overwhelmed by the challenges of urban school reform and being motivated to create the change that I believe our entire class can now agree is necessary.” After further discussion and reflection, both personally through assignments and with peers in class, Maura was able to identify herself as a champion for school reform, noting that “Although the knowledge that I can impact change is something that I have known my entire life, the motivation to do so came in great part from my experiences through this course.”

For Adele, a Black student from suburban Georgia with a major in Africana Studies, difficulties and problems associated with urban schools were directly connected to America’s history of slavery and oppression. She discovered throughout the course that while she thought had a good understanding of inequity within the school system, she came “to realize that the life outcomes of urban students are a lot worse than I could have ever imagined.” This revelation helped foster a drive to

raise awareness of issues relating to urban education. In fact, after her time in Baltimore, Adele noted, "To be completely honest, my interest in advocating for urban students has always been on the lower spectrum of my activism concerns ... Now I can't even imagine not taking some sort of steps to become involved in improving the education system for students in need." This emerging passion led Adele to see herself as a voice for students. While she noted that she was not yet sure what venue that advocacy would take, she had "made my own personal commitment to do what I personally can to help the urban education system."

For several students in the class, the course was an opportunity to experience urban schooling from the perspective of a teacher rather than a student. This examination allowed for a newfound perspective on their own relationships with urban communities as well as the role that they, as products of urban schools, can play in school reform. These students faced the challenge of critically analyzing and critiquing schools in communities similar to the ones they themselves attended as students. They also took on the challenge of simultaneously representing both urban areas and higher education.

For Anisha, a Black woman from Philadelphia, the course sparked a passion for education while also challenging her to make sense of her own role in an urban community. Throughout the course, Anisha struggled as both an insider and an outsider in school and college contexts. Readings assigned early in the course that included descriptions of ghetto life were reassuring and comfortable for Anisha to read because they felt like home. She was hurt by the reaction of some of her peers who called this environment "a third world country or war zone." Likewise, while she was of the same race and background as many of the Worthington Charter School students, she found it difficult to present herself as a young adult receiving a good education at a predominately White liberal arts college. Notably, Anisha's greatest challenge throughout the course was feeling like a "foreigner in my own culture." Anisha's reflection upon her experiences helped relieve her feeling of being a "traitor" for transcending the barriers faced by many peers. At the conclusion of the course, she said she instead felt like a catalyst for change in urban schools and a "foundation of community."

Warren, an African American man, also attended the public schools in Philadelphia. He came into the course having experienced many of the common problems in urban education. His teachers, he noted, "often baby sat" rather than taught and used "non-challenging coursework, tracking, and strong reliance on trades in the school." These shortcomings had inspired him to become an educator. Throughout the course, Warren struggled with his peers', and even his own, discomfort working with impoverished communities. He explained that he was frustrated with society because it, "was the cause of these stereotypes by teaching us to have these premature ideal and thoughts about these people." However, by the conclusion of the course Warren had come to a more complex understanding about the challenges of working for social justice. He wrote:

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I walk away with this experience with a more critical differentiation of comfort zones and how shock from stepping out of comfort zones could be easily mistaken for more negative things such as prejudices and racism. This experience was rough and exciting, but my God did I learn.

***Middle School Student Outcomes***

The College and Career Institute aimed to help middle school students, at the cusp of important high school and life decisions, understand the need for, academic and personal life at, and logistics of college. Their survey responses following the conclusion of the week-long Institute and campus visit indicated increased perseverance and confidence regarding college as well as in-depth understandings and concrete skills needed for higher education. The middle school students indicated that they had a better understanding of the value of a college education following this program, with one student writing, “I learned that college is a good place to go to become what you want to become.” The program also seemed to help the students reflect upon what they as individuals needed to do in order to reach college. One student wrote, “I learned to work hard now to open opportunities for myself in the future.” Others echoed this sentiment, noting, “If you hate a subject, try to do well and don’t let your friend tell you what to do. Never play around,” “If you have a dream, go for it,” and “If you are going to college, keep your head up. Never stop until you get there.” This increased attention to higher education also seemed to translate into greater confidence about reaching college. One student wrote, “I gained a new experience and I feel more confident about going to college. It just seems normal.”

The middle school students also reported gaining a more in-depth understanding of the personal and academic sides of college. One student noted, “I got to see how real college students lived, how the classes were, and what the campus dorms looked like.” Another commented, “I found out what a college campus looks like.” The middle school students were impressed with the positive aspects of college life, noting, “I learned that college is more than a lot of work” and “Even though classes can be boring, these ones were actually interesting!” They also seemed to appreciate the skills necessary for college success, commenting specifically on time management and responsibility. Finally, the middle school students indicated more knowledge about the steps leading to college. Students explained that they had learned about the process of selecting, applying to, and paying for college.

In addition to college-related outcomes, another striking outcome of the Garrett-Worthington partnership was the strength of the connections between the middle school students and their college mentors. Calling them brothers, sisters, and best friends, the Worthington students commented again and again on their meaningful relationships with Garrett students. The middle school students wrote, “I felt like I built a bond with the students from Garrett,” “I think they gave us good advice and since they were close to our age they related to us,” and “I con-

nected with the students in a social and friend way, because they were easy to talk to and they were fun but still made sure we new [sic] what we were talking about.” The strength of their connection was also evident at the concluding celebration, in which both college and middle school students wore matching Institute T-shirts and spent the morning hugging and signing each others’ shirts with permanent pens. The Worthington assistant principal commented that the atmosphere in the room felt like the “end of summer camp.”

### ***Middle School Student Experiences***

Just as Garrett students made sense of their work through the lenses of their previous educational background and life experiences, so Worthington students began to think about their career and life plans in relation to their previous interests and experiences. Case studies of two middle school students indicate that their participation in the College and Career Institute allowed them the opportunity to explore their own talents and interests through structured thinking and reflection exercises and imagine a future that incorporated those essential parts of their personalities.

Martinique was one of the youngest students participating in the Institute. Although she was not yet applying to high schools, the College and Career Institute gave her the opportunity to reflect on past experiences and their relationship to future plans. In particular, Martinique considered the ways in which a domestic burglary incident inspired her interest in protecting her friends and family from negative forces in society. Through conversations and activities with college mentors, Martinique began to aspire toward a successful career as a lawyer. During an exercise in which students described their future selves and asked their peers and parents to guess “Who Am I?” Martinique wrote, “I am the most famous African American lawyer. I defended my mother in a case when a bad guy broke into her house and she had to hit him on the head with a frying pan. I had to prove it was self defense.” Her participation in the College and Career Institute fostered important reflective thinking for this middle school student about the relationship between her past experiences, interests, and future plans.

Raffi initially presented himself as a challenge to the college students through his inquisitive nature, apparent inability to focus, and constant physical motion. When asked a question, Raffi tended to giggle and squirm his way out of answering by asking another question in response. While easy to engage in conversation about video games and future wealth, it was difficult guiding Raffi in discussions about his future. After several days of talking about future plans and ambitions, Raffi still was disinterested and unable to focus. It almost seemed as though he would be the one student in the group who would not make the connection between sixth grade, high school, and the college years beyond. However, it was when the college students posed the question “Who makes the video games you play?” that Raffi began to consider how his passion could translate into a career. In his “Who Am I?” exercise, Raffi saw himself as “making games for Nintendo in Florida after



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graduating from Florida State University.” By the end of the week-long Institute, Raffi was better able to conceptualize the possible connection between his interests, his education, and his future career plans.

**Surprising Outcomes**

It is never possible to anticipate all of the outcomes of teacher education, particularly new institutional partnerships bringing together students from distinct racial, socioeconomic, and cultural backgrounds. One of most surprising outcomes resulting from this real-world collaboration around urban education came not from the interaction between groups of students, but rather from within the group of college students. Garrett students noted that this course thrust them out of the normalcy of their everyday lives. They either agreed or strongly agreed with the survey prompt, “This course pushed me to step out of my comfort zone.” The challenge of working in new educational contexts brought up feelings of discomfort for all participating students and raised tensions between students. Some White students, like Maura, who themselves were educated in private school settings, worked to “transcend the social barriers of class and color ... [and] walk into the school with an open mind and a willingness to try.” Students like Maura worked side-by-side with students like Anisha, a Black student educated within urban public schools who felt that returning to these same schools from the perspective of a teacher made her an “outsider” or a “foreigner in her own culture.”

Both of these groups of students, for different reasons, felt uneasy about their new roles as urban educators and their anxiety at times produced conflict around perceived dedication to urban communities, use of leisure time for stress-release versus enrichment, and willingness to fully engage with individuals different from themselves. Although these differences in background and perspective led at times to disagreement, they also ultimately helped these students develop the ability to look at urban education from perspectives other than their own. At the conclusion of the semester, both Maura and Anisha had grown in their capacity to consider complex issues in urban education from multiple lenses, many of which they learned from their classmates. At the conclusion of the course, Maura indicated she had learned that her “socio-economic status and education history can be used as a tool, not a barrier, to reform efforts.” In the final reflections, Maura also wrote:

I wrote in some of my prior reflections of the immense guilt that I have felt as a privately-educated middle-class White female. I have discussed my struggle with trying to merge my privilege into action. Additionally, I have been able to express my frustrations with the class system in America and how it continues to isolate me from those people that I most want to connect to ... I continue to have these feelings, but I feel as though they have diminished significantly because I have taken the time to become educated about the issues ... I still don't know exactly how I feel about many of the issues that we have discussed in this class ... I do, however, believe that I am now better equipped to continue to challenge myself in

regard to those questions. In this sense, learning together with other like-minded students as well as our community connections in Baltimore has been the most eye-opening experience that I have had this semester, and I am a better student and activist for it.

Like Maura, Anisha also felt that she grew tremendously from her interaction with peers. She explained:

The discussions that we had ... were eye opening to me. I thought that me, as an urban student in a class of predominately middle class students, would feel out of place and uncomfortable. But this was not the case. Every student was respectful to the opinions of others and every student had something different to bring to the table. The mixture of types of students is what made the class so exciting for me ... To view one reading from so many different aspects was astonishing. I was able to understand and interpret the readings in a variety of ways which helped me better understand the text.

Thus one of the most powerful, although unanticipated outcomes of first-hand work in urban schools was not only the interaction between college and middle school students but also the challenging and productive interaction between college students from different backgrounds as they struggled independently and together to make sense of their experience with urban schools and students.

## **Discussion**

Given the current disconnect between sites of teacher preparation and school contexts, close collaboration between teacher preparation programs and urban schools is vital (e.g., McDiarmid & Clevenger-Bright, 2008; Zeichner, 2003). Our model of shared ownership around mutually beneficial learning experiences both blends and expands current PDS, service-learning, and field experience models with its strong emphasis on concrete learning experiences for two participating groups of students. Like PDS partnerships, the outcomes indicate that ours was a mutually beneficial site for teacher as well as student learning, one which fostered growth among socioeconomically, racially, and culturally diverse college and middle school students (Byrd & McIntyre, 1999). Our partnership also exemplified the principles of service learning by complementing academic scholarship about urban education with meaningful experiences designed to serve identified school and student needs (Butin, 2005). And like the most powerful urban field experiences, student outcomes indicated a more developed pedagogy for urban students, a deeper understanding of urban communities, and a more thoughtful path toward becoming educators or advocates in these same communities (Darling-Hammond, 2006).

Case studies from our collaboration also indicate that while positive outcomes occurred for participating college and middle school students, the shape of those outcomes varied considerably based on individuals' backgrounds and previous educational experiences (Cole & Knowles, 1993; Johnson, 2007). Some college

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students refined their career paths, some became advocates for educational equity, and others developed new relationships with their communities, outcomes which were negotiated between their prior perspectives and new experiences. Moreover, the middle schools students also developed career plans which emerged from their past experiences and interests. Thus our experience in this partnership indicates that, as with broader educational endeavors, student outcomes are far from a one-size-fits-all venture (Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2005). Rather, student outcomes are by nature complex and mediated by the variety of backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives they bring to the project.

We also found Garrett students to struggle in a variety of ways with the notion of a teaching career in an urban setting. Some students considered either urban teaching or advocacy as a result of the experience, but only for a limited amount of time. Their long-term plans remained unchanged. Others grappled with the notion of working as an urban teacher but living or raising children in a different community. And some eliminated teaching altogether based on the time and dedication required. Garrett students’ reflections upon their personal lives, professional direction, and the relationships between the two speak to the ongoing challenge of recruitment and retention in high-need urban classrooms. Our experiences suggest that recruitment strategies cannot be generalized across all prospective teachers, but rather should be individualized to meet the needs of particular candidates in specific school contexts. Moreover, although some individuals ultimately decided not to pursue teaching, they nevertheless gained important understandings about urban schools and students which meaningfully inform a range of relevant work outside of the classroom.

Finally, our experiences also suggest the centrality of responsive relationships to the success of the collaboration (Dance, 2002; Noddings, 2001). The College and Career Institute was designed around several small learning communities, intended to facilitate mutual understanding and respect. For college students, these small grouping fostered a more complex understanding of urban student motivations, family involvement, educational opportunities, and career aspirations. For middle school students, they promoted a strong sense of mentorship as well as the “normalization” of higher education. We were also overwhelmed by the power of ongoing reflective communication among college students themselves. Although these interactions were at times tense, the responsive relationships which emerged helped course participants learn from each other, take on a variety of productive perspectives, and consider the complexities of urban schooling through multiple lenses. Finally, the mutually respectful and effective working relationship between institutional partners reinforced the importance of responsive relationships to the success of the collaboration itself (Marlow, et al., 2005; Russell & Flynn, 2000).

All together, we see shared ownership as an equitable approach to K-12 partnerships in which students of all ages serve as both teachers and learners. This small-scale case study illustrated the short-term learning and growth that occurred for

both college students and middle school students in terms of perspectives, reflective abilities, and career plans within the context of a week-long after school program. We recognize that the responsive relationships at the heart of our partnership and the complexity of student outcomes make scaling and program evaluation challenging. Nevertheless, we believe the model of shared ownership holds promise for fostering meaningful collaborative learning experiences between college and K-12 students.

## Notes

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