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PUBLICATIONS AND RESOURCES FOR TRANSFORMING PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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Authors: Jeannie Oakes, Megan Loef Franke, Karen Hunter Quartz, & John Rogers
Date: May-June 2002
Series Number: PRP001-X044-2002

ABSTRACT

Using research focusing on urban schools, the authors articulate the need for expanding the definition of urban teacher quality, understanding teacher learning within the context of urban schools, and developing processes and structures that support urban teachers. They conclude with a call to develop ways to gauge the success and impact of efforts to develop urban teacher competencies that go beyond teacher retention rates and student achievement data.

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Defining It, Developing It, Assessing It
Jeannie Oakes, Megan Loef Franke, Karen Hunter Quartz, and John Rogers
University of California, Los Angeles
Published in the *Journal of Teacher Education,* 2002

Policymakers and school district administrators have responded to the current teacher shortage with a characteristic focus on the short run. Popular responses include peace corps-like recruitment strategies to persuade college graduates to teach for a year or two on alternative or emergency certification. To compensate for the shortcomings of an under-prepared teaching staff, policymakers have adopted highly prescriptive, "teacher proof" curricula. These "solutions" accomplish little in the short run and will diminish the capacity of the teaching force for decades to come.

Nowhere has the rush to boost supply and de-skill teaching been more acutely felt than in urban schools. The tight labor market for teachers places low-resourced, urban districts at a competitive disadvantage relative to better-resourced suburban districts. Although periodic economic downturns may temporarily heighten interest in teaching jobs, historically, this easing of pressure has not had a lasting impact on the supply of qualified teachers in urban schools. Hence, urban students who face the challenges of poverty, immigration, limited facility with English, and/or racial discrimination have the least access to a qualified teaching force.

Often overlooked by short-term policy initiatives is that the shortage of qualified urban teachers is fueled at least as much by high rates of teacher turnover and attrition as it is by insufficient numbers of qualified people being attracted to teaching. Therefore, in addition to increasing the supply of new teachers, we must learn what makes teaching in urban schools a fulfilling career and offer policy solutions to enact that knowledge. We have early indications that a key to such career satisfaction and longevity lies in creating cadres of urban teachers who

have the technical, collegial, and political support required to have an impact on the quality of students' lives in classrooms and communities.   Data about our UCLA graduates, for example, suggest that they are remaining in classrooms longer than most new teachers precisely because of such support (Quartz, et al, under review).

Longer-term solutions to the crisis in teaching require addressing a more broadly defined and intertwined program of research on urban teacher competency, teacher recruitment, and career longevity.

An Expanded Definition of Urban Teacher Quality

Through our experience crafting a program of teacher education that promotes social justice for urban schools, we have learned that urban teachers need more than the generic teaching competencies articulated by the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards. They need to understand local urban cultures, the urban political economy, the bureaucratic structure of urban schools, and the community and social service support networks serving urban centers. They need skills to draw upon and develop urban youth literacies across the academic content areas; promote college access for first-generation college-goers; build social capital across schools and community organizations; and create alliances and engage in joint work with other reform-minded teachers.

We have come to see competent urban teachers simultaneously as skilled classroom practitioners and as public intellectuals who work for educational equity and access through multiple forms of democratic participation. In urban schools "competence" cannot be parsed into teacher skills and social action. An effective urban teacher cannot be skilled "in the classroom" but lack skills and commitment to equity, access, and democratic participation. Likewise, if one is to be a teacher, a deep caring and democratic commitment must be accompanied by highly developed subject matter and pedagogical skills. Such teachers are

agents of fundamental change, helping to shape urban educational contexts—in and out of school—where being a "good teacher" means that people are accountable to each other, express themselves authentically, and negotiate common understandings that support collective action.

Understanding Teacher Learning within the Context of Urban Schools

An important first step toward understanding how to develop these expanded competencies is to conceptualize teacher education as a process of learning. Our prevailing theories of teacher learning are remarkably underdeveloped. While many researchers are working to develop theories of teacher learning, much of the work within teacher education has relied on traditional behaviorist notions that ignore the social, dynamic, and generative quality of learning that can support the development of competencies needed in urban schools. We believe that a theory of teacher learning must account for and perhaps promote a much-expanded conception of teacher competence.

The research of Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger[1] is helpful to reframe conventional notions of school environments and processes for learning and teaching. Lave and Wenger argue that "learning, thinking, and knowing are relations among people engaged in activity *in, with, and arising from the socially and culturally structured world"* (Lave, 1991, p. 67, emphasis in original). They see learning as a process whereby novices and more expert peers work together in a community of practice. A community of practice is a site of learning and action in which people come together around a joint enterprise, in the process developing a whole repertoire of activities, common stories, and ways of speaking and acting. Communities of practice are social sites where people participate in activities as they become certain "kinds of persons." These activities embody distinctive ways that participants relate to each other and the broader world. Learning occurs constantly in these communities as people participate in activities that are more

and more central to the core practice. This changing participation leads participants to take on new identities that are necessarily bound up with new knowledge and skills. In Jean Lave's words, "crafting identities is a social process, and becoming more knowledgeably skilled is an aspect of participation in social practice. By such reasoning, who you are becoming shapes crucially and fundamentally what you 'know.'"

Accordingly, we have grounded our own approach to teacher learning in five, principles:

• Learning occurs as novices participate with each other and experts on meaningful tasks. The desire to participate in more and more competent ways leads participants to try out new strategies and understandings that stretch their skills and capacities and in turn lead to the development of new practices.

• Learning unfolds as individuals participate in groups. This joint participation enables participants to draw upon one another's particular knowledge and expertise, thereby expanding their shared repertoire.

• Learning emerges in and through dialogue, often around tools and artifacts connected with practice. Such dialogue provides participants with opportunities to make their knowledge explicit, to argue and challenge one another's beliefs, and to forge new ways of making sense of existing practice.

• Learning involves the emerging identities of participants; these identities develop as knowledge and skills are acquired. In this sense, learners take on new dispositions, skills, and beliefs as they become more competent in practice.

• Learning through mutual engagement in a joint enterprise enables participants to develop socially valued work-products—for example, stories, texts, and presentations—that become tools for further learning.

Our hope is that educating teachers guided by these principles provides hope for urban schools as democratic institutions where low-income, students of color become eager and accomplished learners. However, we have only begun the conversation and in conjunction with the work of our colleagues the propositions and the theory that drives them need elaboration and systematic investigation.[2]

Developing Processes and Structures That Support Urban Teacher Learning

The theory of learning we pose as key to improving the supply, competence, and commitment of urban teachers demands that teacher preparation be structured far differently from conventional university courses and highly prescribed observation and student teaching in "master" teachers' classrooms. Accordingly, we have structured our UCLA pre-service program so that teacher learning can be situated within the larger context of urban schools and communities, and teachers' participation in these contexts is structured in variety of ways, both formal and informal (Oakes, 1996; Oakes & Lipton, 1999). Importantly, because learning is fundamentally a social process that involves the histories and cultures of the participants, we have attempted to provide novice teachers with multiple opportunities and spaces to interact with one another and with "experts" as they reflect on, inquire about, and change their practice. We have found that the idea of expert needs to be broadly construed to include not only guiding teachers, colleagues, and university faculty but also parents, community members and the students themselves. We have come to suspect that, if novice teachers participate in multiple sites of learning, they can develop competencies and skills in one context that with support can be used to negotiate participation in other contexts. Below we provide examples from our experience of what these sites of learning might be and the type of research that might help establish them.

Recruitment to Urban Teaching. The first and one of the most critical "sites" for urban teacher learning exists in the interactions around the decision to choose a teaching career in urban schools. We need a range of research-based tools and strategies for attracting prospective students to urban teaching. We need to better understand who considers becoming an urban schoolteacher and why. We need strategies for developing the potential pools of applicants—including urban community members—and for assisting them to surmount barriers to access and opportunity. Some current projects, not often connected with university-based teacher education, have promise—such as those that support community members employed as school paraprofessionals to attain teacher certification. Driven by our theory of teacher learning, this support could be more than financial. It could also bring these prospective teachers into a community of practice, allowing them to develop identities as urban educators and acquire knowledge and skills, as they participate in the real work of teaching.

We also need to develop ways for teacher education faculty to frame their initial interactions with prospective teachers that confront the obstacles—real or perceived—that deter some prospective teachers' from choosing to work in urban schools and to build on the challenges and possibilities that attract others. We have found, for example, that capable and ambitious young people are eager to become "social justice educators," even in the face of realistic portrayals of the political and economic realities that make urban schools so challenging. Developing such an identity along with the knowledge and skills for this difficult work seems far more compelling than polished apples, happy faces, and the other traditional symbols often used to recruit new teachers.

Systematic research on these and other ways to reframe "recruitment" within our theory of teacher learning could be extraordinarily helpful in addressing teacher shortages.

Communities of Learners. Once students enter a teacher education program they need to become members of stable learning communities where they reflect together on the intersection of research and theory with teaching practices in urban schools.[3] Our experience keeping our own students together in cohorts for two years suggests that these learning communities must engage students together in activities that bridge and cut across university courses, schools, and neighborhoods. In these learning communities, prospective teachers must bring all these perspectives to bear as they delve into the theories and practices that guide teaching, learning, and life in urban schools and communities. They must grapple with the failure of many instructional techniques to engage students of color; and they must learn to work collectively to move beyond this impasse.

These communities of developing teachers will be most effective, we believe, if they focus on a set of habits—information gathering, hypothesis building, dialogue, experimentation, and looking to a broad pool of potential experts. For example, we have watched teachers' competencies develop in promising way**s** through course assignments that engage them in systematic urban community studies. These studies have yielded concrete and useful work products, such as maps of the human, cultural, and learning resources that teachers and students in local schools might access.

Our work and that of others could be greatly enriched by research that identifies the characteristics critical to stable learning communities and the activities through which these communities foster teacher learning.

Alternative Sites of Dialogue and Learning. In addition to stable learning communities, such as student cohorts, those becoming teachers also need spaces for inquiry and support outside of more conventional courses and fieldwork sites. For example, we've encouraged

students to join activist groups focused on particular school problems, participate in community initiatives, and collaborate with faculty in urban research projects. We believe these alternative learning sites allow prospective teachers to bring to bear the funds of knowledge of teacher educators, urban educators, students, and community members as they take on new roles, hear diverse voices, develop their own identity as urban educators, and engage in productive dialogue. The alternative sites of learning become increasingly important as teachers learn to challenge the status quo within schools and, importantly, as they engage one another in making meaning out their experiences in these alternative sites.

We are only beginning to recognize the value of these alternative sites of learning within teacher education; we need to learn more about how to capitalize on them.

Early Career Learning Communities. The range of understandings, skills, and dispositions that urban teachers require can not be fully developed even in two years of intensive teacher preparation, nor should they be. Continuous development of these commitments and competencies is a vital part of high-quality professional practice. Yet, the typical conditions in urban schools provide few opportunities for teachers to continue to learn and develop. We believe that this lack of opportunity contributes to the high rates of attrition from urban schools. Our experiences suggest that teachers' involvement in professional learning opportunities, where communities of practice develop, can influence their decisions to remain teaching in urban schools.

For example, of those entering the program, less than five percent fail to complete. All the rest earn Masters degrees and teach in low-income, predominantly minority schools. Moreover, our most recent data show that as of spring 2001, 90 percent of our 326 graduates from the past five years have remained in teaching—most in urban schools. Several have reported that they would not have been able to remain in urban schools were it not for their

involvement in a few pilot initiatives of our early career network, such as monthly inquiry group meetings, contributing to our online journal www.TeachingtoChangeLA.com, and developing urban alternatives to advanced placement curriculum.

We need to design and study the processes and structures that support new urban teachers as they forge connections to schools, communities, and networks of teachers that sustain their commitment and hence keep them in urban schools. Such sites can also provide teachers access to the social and political capital that comes with continued formal affiliation with the university. Both are critical, we believe, for developing and sustaining teaching that goes against the grain of most urban school practice.

Gauging the Success and Impact of Efforts to Develop Urban Teacher Competencies

Finally, teacher education researchers must carefully evaluate efforts to redefine and develop urban teacher competencies. We need to do the technical work of designing assessments that allow us to determine whether and in what contexts teachers develop the commitments and competencies to meet the demands of urban teaching. We must also hold ourselves accountable to the broader public—from urban students, their schools and their communities to state policymakers—for documenting and reporting the educational, social and economic benefits of high-quality urban teacher education.

One of the most widely used measures of successful urban teaching is teacher retention. Whether through induction programs, mentoring, early career support or some other structure, many define their success in terms of how many teachers they prevented from leaking through teaching's career pipeline. Though important, the retention measure must be taken a step further: to what extent does a program, structure, or intervention help retain competent urban teachers? To what extent do these teachers promote student success, the reform of their schools, and the health of their urban communities?

Linking teacher success to student success or achievement is complex and misleading. Yet in the face of discriminatory standardized tests and other inadequate yet widely used student outcome measures, researchers must offer meaningful ways to assess student achievement. We advocate looking to indicators that carry meaning in students' lives. In urban schools, for instance, how many students were prepared to enter a four-year college following graduation? How many of those were first-generation college goers? We also need to assess the impact urban teachers have on the school and community as a whole. To what extent are teachers able to build social capital within the teaching staff and across school and community organizations? To what extent do they engage as activists for more equitable urban schooling? To what effect?

We believe that there are important implications of this line of thinking about urban teacher development, quality, and persistence for teacher education research generally. The field badly needs research that is robust enough to provide a solid basis for developing new ways to conceptualize, measure, and report urban teacher quality. This work is both technically and politically important. Technically, we must construct a research-based model that offers a clear understanding of what constitutes urban teacher development. Here, the task at hand parallels the work conducted by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) over the past decade. We need to articulate a vision of what constitutes high quality urban teacher development and construct ways that this vision can be realized in practice and assessed to inform teacher development policy. We imagine this process as an elaboration of the NBPTS work. Politically, we must make the case to policymakers, the profession, and the public for why it matters for urban teachers to develop competencies that extend beyond generic conceptions of teacher quality. This will require that researchers carefully assess an expanded set of competencies for their impact on teachers' engagement with students, families, and communities; on teachers' participation as reform leaders; on teachers' persistence in urban

schools; and for their cost-effectiveness. This is a meaty research agenda that will require our collective effort to accomplish.

Notes:

1. Lave & Wenger, 1991; Lave, 1991; Lave 1996; Wenger, 1998.

2. Many researchers are working in parallel to develop similar views of teacher learning. Their work as well has informed our thinking. We draw often on the work of Cochran-Smith and Lytle; Borko & Putnam; Brown & Campione; Bowers, Cobb & McClain; Grossman & Weinberg; Lieberman & Miller; Richardson and many others.

3.   While we cannot detail here our perspectives on communities of practice we have drawn on the work of Rogoff, 1994, 1997 and Wertsch, 1991, and Wertsch & Kanner, 1992 to elaborate our conceptualization .

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