

Aspiring Educators, Urban Teens, and Conflicting Perspectives on the Social Contract

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Watts, Williams, and Jagers (2003) define critical consciousness as an awareness of existing social inequities and their history, including the processes and outcomes of oppression. Many scholars and reformers are asking secondary-level educators to deepen the critical consciousness of their teenage students by teaching them about ways in which race, class, and gender systematically influence Americans' access to economic and educational opportunity. However, the widening demographic gap between teachers and students in urban secondary schools and associated differences in their beliefs about America's opportunity structure can pose serious challenges for teachers who are committed to critical consciousness education. In this article, we suggest that teacher preparation programs must offer aspiring urban teachers not only a sociological and historical perspective on inequality but also a developmental perspective on how people's beliefs about inequality evolve and are influenced by their social positioning. We also offer specific recommendations for human development content that may be useful in this endeavor.

The gap between the rich and poor in America is approaching historic proportions. Income inequality between poor and affluent Americans has been growing since the mid-1970s and is now wider than at any period since the Great Depression (Johnson, Smeeding, & Torrey, 2005; Madrick, 2003). The top 1% of households in the United States now possess more wealth than the bottom 95%, and the average CEO earns a salary 250 times that of the average worker (Gudrais, 2008; Sklar, Collins, & Leonard-Wright, 2003). At the same time, more than 37 million Americans are currently living below the poverty line, a figure that represents one out of every eight Americans (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007). Moreover, the 13 million American children living in poverty represents the highest rate of child poverty among advanced nations worldwide (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007).

Many thanks to Kathy-Anne Jordan, Morgaen Donaldson, Dorinda Carter, Elaine Whitlock, and two anonymous referees for their feedback on an earlier version of this paper.

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In response to this widening inequality and its associated levels of poverty, many scholars have called for curricular reforms in secondary schools. In an effort to challenge the social reproduction of the status quo, a number of reformers are asking secondary-level educators to deepen the critical consciousness of their teenage students—their awareness of existing social inequities and their history—by teaching them about the ways in which race, class, and gender systematically influence Americans' access to economic and educational opportunity (Banks, 2007; Cochran-Smith, 2004; Freire, 1970; Mueller & O'Connor, 2007; Nieto, 2006; Watts, Williams, & Jagers, 2003). In so doing, these scholars seek to “equip and ignite students for social action and change” (Haviland, 2008, p. 41).

A potential challenge in this endeavor, however, is the widening demographic gap between teacher and student populations in America's public schools and associated differences in their beliefs about the mechanisms of social reproduction. Population trends suggest that America's public schools are increasingly serving poor and working-class youth from ethnic and racial minority groups while the majority of teachers in these schools remain middle-class, white females raised in suburban communities (Freeman, Brookhart, & Loadman, 1999; Hodgkinson, 2002; Latham, 1999; Martin, 2005; McAllister & Irvine, 2000; Yasin & Albert, 1999). We contend that, as a result of these demographic differences, many teachers and students—particularly those in urban secondary schools—will possess conflicting understandings of poverty, affluence, and inequality.

These conflicting understandings can pose serious challenges for educators committed to deepening the critical consciousness of their students. Developmental psychologists Jean Piaget (1969) and Erik Erikson (1968) characterize adolescence as the stage in life where young people begin both to shape their identity and to think in more complex and abstract ways. For these reasons, secondary school is an ideal time to engage in discussions of the nature of our society's stratification and its impact upon students' life opportunities. Such discussions are particularly important for adolescents from subdominant social groups who are likely to face serious structural obstacles that in many ways constrain the potential responses to the typical adolescent questions of “Who am I?” and “What can I be?” Many researchers and educators have suggested that we need to teach adolescents in these subdominant groups about the realities of the social structure in empowering ways (Carter, 2008; Cochran-Smith, 1995; Delpit, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Perry, 2003; Ward, 1996). This critical understanding should be cultivated in both the school and the home settings.

We suggest that teacher preparation programs have a dual role to play in equipping aspiring urban teachers to help adolescents develop this understanding of empowerment-under-constraints (the phenomenon whereby groups that are facing particular structural challenges to educational achievement can be motivated and empowered by a well-framed awareness of their unique social circumstances). To prepare teachers equipped to deliver such a framing, teacher education programs should continue to provide participants with a sociological and historical perspective on poverty and inequality—one that acknowledges the role that structural barriers play in educational and economic attainment in the U.S. Additionally, these programs should provide prospective teachers with a developmental perspective on these issues—one that offers insight into how people's beliefs about inequality develop over time. In calling for this developmental perspective, our goal is to equip future educators with the contextually appropriate tools necessary to deepen their teenage students' critical consciousness across cultural barriers without negatively impacting their sense of efficacy or optimism.

ASPIRING TEACHERS' BELIEFS ABOUT POVERTY, AFFLUENCE, AND ECONOMIC INEQUALITY

The scholarship on Americans' beliefs about economic inequality suggests the prominence of two competing attributions for this inequality: individualistic explanations and structural explanations (Bullock, Williams, & Limbert, 2003; Cozzarelli & Wilkinson, 2002). Individualistic explanations offer character traits, such as laziness, perseverance, and intelligence, to account for differences between affluent and poor citizens while structural explanations point to societal factors, such as job shortages, low wages, discrimination, and unequal schooling opportunities. Compelling research shows that the majority of Americans consider individualistic factors to be the primary causes of economic inequality (Cozzarelli & Wilkinson, 2002; Kluegel & Smith, 1986; Ladd & Bowman, 1998; Mantsios, 2003; Schwarz & Volgy, 1992; Stuber, 2006). Moreover, the 2006 General Social Survey found teachers, as a disaggregated group, to hold opinions similar to the general public on whether the government ought to reduce income differences between the wealthy and poor and whether the government should help the poor (Slater, 2008). However, several studies on the belief systems of *urban teachers* suggest that educators who choose to teach in urban schools have a greater propensity to attribute inequality to structural factors than do their fellow Americans or suburban (and rural) counterparts (Harding, 2006; Levine-Rasky, 2001; Nieto, 2003). That is, these teachers are perhaps more likely to attribute inequality to the system rather than to its participants.

Numerous large-scale surveys have found that one of the primary reasons individuals cite for entering the teaching profession is out of a desire to "help society improve" (Brown, 1992; Cheune, Lubben, & Newson, 1999; Kyriacou & Coulthard, 2000). Focusing specifically on teachers in urban public schools, Harding (2006) reports that her subjects "articulated an understanding that inequity was a key problem in public schools and in society at large, thus affecting their students' access and opportunities" (p. 262). Harding found that many urban teachers had explicitly chosen to work in urban public schools in order to play a role in combating "systemic inequality" and "saw their teaching as a key component in fighting race and class oppression" (p. 262). Likewise, in her study of urban teachers from the Boston Public Schools, Nieto (2003) reports that "a commitment to social justice—the ideals of democracy, fair play, and equality—figures prominently among the reasons why these teachers chose this profession" (p. 16). Nieto found that many of her study's participants had been involved in social justice movements for civil rights, bilingual education, and to end apartheid, and she described her participants as "angry at the injustices their students have to endure, including racism and poverty" (p. 17). This perspective is likely reified by the social justice-oriented coursework, readings, and curriculum encountered in many teacher preparation programs, as described in detail further in this article.

URBAN TEENS' BELIEFS ABOUT POVERTY, AFFLUENCE, AND INEQUALITY

Despite the social consciousness that many urban teachers bring to the classroom, the teenagers populating these classrooms are likely to view the world through a different lens. Developmentally, the period of adolescence is defined by the quest for identity in the individual (Erikson, 1968).

That is, as young people proceed through their teenage years, they are constantly trying to define who they are, to which groups they belong, and of what they are capable. In respect to educational attainment and social mobility, critical to this development for young people is the degree to which they believe themselves capable of high achievement in educational and economic domains (Bandura, 1982; McCabe & Barnett, 2000). It is not surprising, then, that scholars have found most young people at this early life stage to be very optimistic about their life chances, and that, as youth enter adolescence, they grow more likely to cite individualistic explanations for poverty, affluence, and inequality (Arnett, 2004; Chafel, 2003).

Perhaps more surprising is that adolescents from poor and working-class backgrounds are more likely to offer individualistic explanations for inequality than are their middle-class and affluent peers (Eisenberg-Berg & Mussen, 1976; Flanagan et al., 2003; Flanagan, Patreese, Galley, & Galley, 1997; Simmons & Rosenberg, 1971). Flanagan and Tucker (1999) conducted a study of over 400 adolescents from six urban and six suburban school districts. On a composite of survey items about the logic of opportunity in the United States, Flanagan and Tucker found that a belief in the availability of equal opportunity decreases systematically as the SES of adolescents rises. Strikingly, high SES adolescents' endorsement of societal causes of inequality was almost a full standard deviation stronger than that of low SES students.¹ Thus we see that, paradoxically, poor and working class youth expressed more robust optimism regarding the equity of opportunity in the United States than did their wealthier peers.

Such findings would initially seem counter-intuitive. To explain, Flanagan and her colleagues (1997) surmised that low-income youth who stay in school have a strong psychological incentive to conceive of one's economic status as dependent upon individualistic factors. Flanagan and Tucker (1999) note:

Economic hardship is a concrete reality not an abstraction for youth living in low-income communities. Holding individuals accountable may be a way to separate one's own fate from that of the poor and to maintain a sense of control over one's future. (p. 1199)

Flanagan et al. (2003) suggested that it is *not* that youth from poor neighborhoods are unaware of the structural factors that contribute to the poverty around them, but, rather, that "it may be necessary for them to disregard those [societal] failures in order to remain committed to education and the American Dream" (p. 4).

Thus, we see from a developmental perspective, that as youth begin to envision their place in the world and their capabilities within it, the adolescents' social positioning is an important contributor to their beliefs about success and upward mobility. Scholarship from developmental psychology on Just World Theory and fundamental attribution error can shed light on the relationship between teens' social positioning and beliefs (Lerner, 1980; Ross, 1977; Weiner, 1980).

Just World Theory emerged from research by Melvin Lerner (1980) that found that people want to believe they live in a world where people get what they deserve. As a result, individuals tend to interpret events or circumstances in ways that allow them to maintain this perspective. Even individuals negatively impacted by systemic forces, such as racism or job shortages, tend to maintain their belief that the world is a just one in which honest work will ultimately be rewarded (Montada & Schneider, 1989). In short, then, Flanagan and Tucker's (1999) finding that youth from low-income backgrounds expressed significant optimism about America's opportunity structure can be explained, in part, by Lerner's just world theory.

Fundamental attribution error can also speak to Flanagan and Tucker's (1999) findings. Fundamental attribution error refers to the tendency of individuals to attribute an individual's success or misfortune to personal qualities rather than to external factors such as racism, nepotism, privilege or even luck (Carr & McLachlan, 1998; Gans, 1972). As a result of this tendency, individuals typically overestimate their ability to control outcomes in their lives and underestimate the influence of situational factors beyond their control (for example, racial discrimination). Such a tendency can help to explain the belief in America's opportunity structure expressed by the teenagers in Flanagan and Tucker's study attending urban, low-income, secondary schools. Attributing success and failure to individual capabilities rather than to societal mechanisms allows these teens to conceive of themselves and their decision to continue attending school as taking the steps necessary to achieve the future economic success they deserve.

Taken together, a nuanced picture of opportunity beliefs among urban students emerges, whereby students may acknowledge the obstacles they face but may not actually internalize them as they adapt to their particular contexts. Furthermore, Mickelson (1990) has shown that when students subscribe to the paradoxical duality of holding both abstract optimism regarding life outcomes and simultaneously acknowledging concrete societal barriers, the acknowledgement of the barriers is associated with significantly lower achievement levels in African American students. Thus, a prominent optimism within the attributional schema serves as a protective factor to the psyche in urban student populations, and we see some evidence that the acknowledgement of obstacles can be detrimental to school success. For this reason, one of the key recommendations with which we conclude this article focuses on preparing preservice teachers to raise their teenage students' awareness of societal inequity without damaging these teens' sense of efficacy or optimism about the future.

To summarize, while urban teachers are likely to bring with them to their classrooms attributional beliefs to suggest that society is at fault for social inequalities, their students are likely to hold largely optimistic beliefs that may acknowledge the obstacles present in their specific life circumstances but do not fully internalize the reality of these obstacles. Furthermore, there is evidence to suggest that the acknowledgement of these concrete obstacles may be detrimental to both their psychological well-being and their academic performance. Accordingly, we first argue that this disconnect in perceptions can and should be both acknowledged and reconciled by prospective urban teachers as they enter their classrooms, particularly those teachers who wish to help students negotiate the paradox of concrete and abstract aspirations through critical consciousness curricula and pedagogy. Next, we offer recommendations for teacher education programs intended to facilitate the preparation of urban educators who are able to recognize and account for divergent perceptions of the opportunity structure (that is, teacher and students' perceptions of the opportunities and obstacles to socioeconomic advancement in the United States) held by teachers and students.

IMPROVING CURRENT PROGRAMMING

Freire (1970) defined critical consciousness as an awareness of existing social inequities and their history for a given people. Scholars, such as Grant and Sleeter (2004), Nieto (2003), Cochran-Smith (2004), and Ladson-Billings (1995), have characterized raising students' critical consciousness as one of the primary roles of secondary-level educators. For example,

Ladson-Billings asserts that teachers must help teens develop “a broader sociopolitical consciousness that allows them to critique the norms, values, mores, and institutions that produce and maintain social inequities” (p. 162). Through her portraiture of eight exemplary urban teachers, Ladson-Billings (1994) concludes that the most successful teachers of African American students are those that “see their role as helping students become aware of inequities and . . . to critique social norms, values, and institutions that produce and maintain socioeconomic inequities” (p. 118).

There is also a large body of literature that characterizes social critique as an essential component of raising children from non-dominant populations. Perry (2003) asserts that education as resistance and liberation is an indigenous trait in the African American educational tradition and is essential in combating the social forces that eventually depress many individuals with naïve conceptions of the structural realities. In schools, O'Connor (1997) and Carter (2008) suggest that understanding social inequalities can be a motivational tool for some students. Thus, we see that teacher preparation scholars, as well as caretakers and educators of children of color, are calling for both the raising of awareness around social inequalities for these students and for improved student outcomes. In this way, the explicit engagement with obstacles that psychologists thought could damage psyches (Lerner, 1980) and lower achievement (Mickelson, 1990) can be turned into an asset. When employed effectively, critical consciousness education seems to have a unique advantage for students from socially subordinated groups.

Given the unique potential of effective critical consciousness education in urban learning communities, an essential question is: How can teacher educators prepare aspiring urban teachers to raise the critical consciousness of their students in ways that motivate rather than discourage? One school of thought, exemplified by Tozer (1993) and Ryan (2006), argues that social foundations courses are powerful vehicles in this endeavor. Specifically, Ryan asserts that “social foundations courses, especially courses in the history and sociology of education, are critical for teacher candidates to understand the power of racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic inequalities” (p. 10). As we discuss below, however, the most effective of these courses will include discussions of how these teachers' future students will envision the world from a social justice perspective, including where that vision comes from and what types of learning will be most critical to their long term success.

Other scholars have advocated for the centrality of providing aspiring teachers with opportunities to engage in self-reflection of their own life stories and experiences against that of the “other” (Britzman, 2003; Causey, Thomas, & Armento, 2000; Cochran-Smith, 1995; Santoro & Allard, 2005). In other words, these scholars advocate helping aspiring teachers consider the experiences, opportunities, advantages, and challenges that have influenced the development of their own perceptions and use these reflections as a starting point for considering differences in opportunity across racial, ethnic, gender, and socioeconomic lines. In the recommendations that follow, we suggest that this reflection on their own development should be consciously designed to help aspiring teachers better empathize with the developmental stage and position from which their students will be regarding these issues.

A third group of scholars have advocated for providing aspiring urban teachers with immersion experiences in the communities where they will be teaching (Cazden & Mehan, 1989; Holmes Group, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Sleeter, 2001). For example, Martin (2005) described engaging her aspiring educators in action research projects that helped them to consider issues of inequality through visits to social institutions in high income areas of the city vs. low income areas of the city. Narode, Rennie-Hill, and Peterson (1994) send their preservice teachers into the

urban communities in which they will be teaching to interview community members about their aspirations for the community's children. Other teacher educators have advocated for aspiring educators to tutor children from the urban communities in which they will later be teaching (Aaronsohn, Carter, & Howell, 1995; Barton, 1999; Boyle-Baise & Sleeter, 2000; Rodriguez, 1998). Such experiences have been found to increase student-teachers' knowledge of contexts different than their own as well as to heighten awareness of their own stereotypes about urban communities. To enhance these efforts, we suggest below building explicit opportunities into each of these experiences for a program's aspiring teachers to learn about the ways in which teens from these urban communities conceive of their own life chances.

In short, there are a number of ways in which teacher preparation programs are already striving to prepare preservice urban teachers to carry out critical consciousness education. Yet all these approaches would benefit from highlighting not only the structural factors that contribute to inequity and inequality but also the perspective regarding America's opportunity structure that urban teenage students are likely to possess. In the remainder of this article, we discuss in detail the implementation within teacher education programming of human development curricula designed to offer aspiring urban teachers just such an understanding. In so doing, our objective is to strengthen the ability of aspiring urban educators to raise the critical consciousness of their teenage students by helping these future teachers recognize and negotiate the conflict between individual and structural attributions that they will ultimately face in their classrooms.

RECOGNIZING CONFLICTS BETWEEN INDIVIDUAL AND STRUCTURAL ATTRIBUTIONAL BELIEFS

While we would not deny that, over time, individual responsibility makes a large contribution to one's life circumstances, we simultaneously acknowledge that individual behavior is shaped in myriad ways by the environment in which one is born and raised (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Garcia Coll et al., 1996, Patterson, 2000). Ultimately, we believe that the oft-emphasized distinction between individual responsibility and structural factors is a false dichotomy. These mechanisms are interwoven strands of economic and educational achievement for any individual, and the causal arrow, if there must be one, is multidirectional. For this reason, we are in agreement with the assertions by multicultural education scholars that secondary-level educators in all types of schools must support their students' development of a critical consciousness, an intervention that, by its very nature, incorporates both sides of the causal debate. Moreover, because of research suggesting that many prospective teachers continue to bring to the classroom perspectives that hold exclusively individualistic attributions for class inequality (Slater, 2008), we support the actions described in the preceding section for deepening prospective teachers' recognition of structural factors that contribute to social inequality (Allard & Santoro, 2006; Bartolomé, 2004). We also recognize, however, that there may be a conflict between urban educators' and urban youths' perspectives on the social contract, a conflict that can lead students to resist multicultural and social justice curricula aimed at deepening their critical consciousness.

There is a robust body of scholarship on student resistance to multicultural and social justice content (Chizhik & Chizhik, 2005; Goodman, 2000a, 2000b; Higgenbotham, 1996; Seider, 2008). Scholars have found that secondary and post-secondary students can react to this content with anger, defiance, silence, refusal to participate in class discussions, and decreased support for

addressing the issues under consideration. In considering these findings, Rodriguez (1998) and Wertsch and Polman (2001) assert that one source of this resistance is that students and their instructors lack an intersubjectivity (i.e., a common understanding) of the material or ideas about which they are learning. In other words, students are more likely to offer resistance to social justice content when their teachers fail to recognize the perspective with which their students approach this content. In the case of urban teachers and students, for example, we suggest that educators committed to deepening their students' critical consciousness may inadvertently trigger their students' resistances by focusing too forcefully on structural causes of inequality without recognizing their students' need to believe in the availability of personal opportunity. Such a clash can be detrimental to teaching and learning about inequality, teacher/student relationships, and students' confidence and commitment to their own academic aspirations. Chizhik and Chizhik (2005) assert that educators teaching about privilege, oppression, and opportunity are unlikely to be effective without an understanding of their students' existing beliefs about these issues.

For this reason, we argue here that teacher education programs should offer aspiring teachers not only sociological and historical perspectives on inequality, but also a developmental perspective on how individuals' beliefs about inequality are shaped over time by their life experiences and social contexts. It is not only important to understand how inequality operates in the United States on a large scale but also how individuals from different backgrounds and at different stages of life conceive of their own (and others') opportunities for prosperity.

INTERWEAVING STRANDS OF TEACHER EDUCATION

We believe that preparing preservice urban teachers to effectively raise the critical consciousness of their students requires the interweaving of what are typically separate strands within a teacher education program. Specifically, we call for teacher educators to consider aligning the curricula and final assessments of social foundations, content methods, and human development courses with the goal of helping their preservice teachers recognize the intersecting roles that these skill sets play in teaching for critical consciousness.

What follows are four recommendations for human development content that should be incorporated into teacher preparation programs to complement prospective educators' learning in foundations and methods courses. In each of these recommendations, we have sought to provide specific lessons or curricular ideas that illustrate our point about the contributions of a developmental perspective to teachers' practice. We also have sought to describe how the developmental content conveyed through these lessons can be aligned with curriculum from foundations and methods classes, recognizing that some teacher education programs offer stand-alone courses on adolescent development while other programs must incorporate this content into foundations and methods syllabi.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Expose Prospective Teachers to Diverse Perspectives on the American Dream

Recall that Tozer (1993) and Ryan (2006) describe social foundations courses as valuable forums for educating prospective teachers about structural causes of inequality. We suggest first that as

future teachers are surveying the structural conditions that affect education in the US in their social foundations courses, they should simultaneously consider, from a human development framework, how different Americans come to understand the American Dream, dependent upon their own social contexts.

Scholars all the way back to de Tocqueville (1835/1969) have marveled at the depth with which Americans of all backgrounds express faith in the American Dream. Aspiring teachers might read and reflect upon scholarship finding that Americans are nearly twice as likely as Europeans to believe that achievement in life is dependent upon education and ability rather than on family background (Gudrais, 2008); 75% of Americans believe that the chances of moving up in class status have risen over the past three decades (Leonhardt, 2005); and that even the poorest quintile of Americans express their belief in personal responsibility and hostility toward welfare recipients (Epstein, 2004). Aspiring teachers might consider these beliefs about inequality through the frameworks of Just World Theory and fundamental attribution error (described earlier). In so doing, aspiring teachers should become aware that, regardless of actual structural conditions, they may well be working with a student population for whom these obstacles lack visibility or salience.

A promising approach for aspiring teachers to consider the ways in which different individuals develop an understanding of their life opportunities is through a multi-step action research project. In Part I of such a project, aspiring teachers would reflect upon the development over time of their own beliefs about the American Dream, class mobility, and opportunities for success for various Americans and then carry out an interview on these same themes with a senior member of their family. These prospective teachers would then sit down with youth from the sites at which they are carrying out their practicum or pre-practicum experiences, and learn about these youths' perspectives on the American Dream, class mobility, and beliefs about the opportunity structure. In class-wide discussions of these interviews, prospective teachers could compare notes about the strength with which the individuals they interviewed expressed their belief in the American Dream, what informed those beliefs, and how their own findings correspond with the aforementioned scholarship. Teacher educators might also lead their student-teachers in discussion of *why* the American Dream has such a firm grasp on the American consciousness as well as the implications of this belief system upon American public policy.

Offering preservice teachers the opportunity to consider the development of American Dream beliefs from the perspective of various individual citizens yields several benefits. First, the interviews that these prospective teachers conduct both inside and outside of their families, as well as the class discussions about these interviews, will enable prospective teachers to consider the extent to which Americans of all class and racial backgrounds are invested in attributing inequality to individualistic factors. Second, through both their interviews with youth at their practicum sites and the ensuing discussion of these interviews, prospective teachers will gain a deeper understanding of their students' perspectives on opportunity and class mobility in America. As described by Rodriguez & Berryman (2002) and Wertsch and Polman (2001), this understanding can inform their own future efforts as in-service teachers to guide their students' learning about issues of inequality and inequity. In the end, we might expect aspiring teachers who have learned about the widespread belief in the American Dream across diverse socioeconomic groups to be better prepared for the urban youth they will go on to teach who may resist heavy-handed structural explanations for inequality and inequity.

Educate Prospective Teachers about Self-Efficacy and Positive Future Orientation

Psychologist Albert Bandura (1977, 1982) defines self-efficacy as people's beliefs about their ability to exercise influence over events that affect their lives. Bandura et al. (1996) found that self-efficacy is a key predictor of an individual's willingness to take on a daunting challenge or persevere at overcoming an obstacle. In other words, individuals who believe themselves capable of achieving a particular task or outcome are significantly more likely to put in the effort necessary to do so.

Bandura's work on self-efficacy is underscored by Nurmi's work (1991, 2005) on adolescents and positive future orientation. Specifically, Nurmi, an adolescent development scholar, reported that thinking positively about the future increases adolescents' motivation to achieve their goals. McCabe and Barnett (2000) add that a positive future orientation is particularly important for adolescents from low-income and marginalized backgrounds. For these adolescents, a positive future orientation can serve as a protective factor against the negative life circumstances (e.g., racial discrimination, lack of financial resources) with which adolescents from these groups are often forced to contend. As explained by developmentalists Kerpelman, Eryigit, and Stephens (2008), a positive future orientation "allows an adolescent to dream and hope for better possibilities in the future, setting the stage for actions that increase goal attainment" (p. 998). In short, a positive future orientation is a key ingredient for healthy adolescent development.

It is crucial, then, that educators in urban, low-SES schools introduce their students to issues such as social and economic inequality in ways that, while acknowledging obstacles, do *not* lead these adolescents to conceive of their own pathways as limited. Well-meaning educators committed to teaching for social justice could negatively impact their students' aspirations through lack of a clear understanding of the role that efficacy plays in an individual's ability to be high-achieving. This is not to say that educators need to fear their lessons will facilitate helplessness in their students but, rather, that the way in which teachers frame lessons about opportunity in America will impact their students' beliefs about their own opportunities.

Teacher preparation programs have an important role to play, then, in educating their aspiring teachers about the role of self-efficacy and positive future orientation in their teenage students' development and achievement. To that end, teacher educators can work with their aspiring teachers on identifying curriculum and pedagogical strategies designed to strengthen students' self-efficacy. For example, Perry (2003), Ward (1996), Carter (2008), and others show that the acknowledgment of inequalities can actually be used as a protective factor for academic achievement. With these findings in mind, a particularly salient way to introduce urban adolescents to structural causes of inequality might be through a close review of cases of successful communities in similar structural circumstances, such as that of Geoffrey Canada and the Harlem Children's Zone (Tough, 2008).²

Geoffrey Canada is an African American social entrepreneur born and raised in the South Bronx. After completing college and graduate school and becoming an educator himself, he founded the Harlem Children's Zone, an organization that seeks to off-set the structural factors that can inhibit the chances of success for the children of Harlem. The Harlem Children's Zone offers parenting classes for young parents, early childhood education, access to quality healthcare and high-performing public schools, and numerous other resources. In short, Canada seeks to offer the children of Harlem the social and cultural capital that are already infused in the communities where more affluent children are raised.

Because of the program's comprehensive offerings, an investigation of the Harlem Children's Zone may be a particularly effective means of introducing urban teens to the structural factors that contribute to inequality. Geoffrey Canada and the other individuals who developed the Harlem Children's Zone clearly recognized a range of factors that can inhibit the success of the children of Harlem, but they chose to take on these factors as a challenge to be overcome. In this way, then, introducing urban teens to inequality through the work of Geoffrey Canada can serve as a model of what can be accomplished by highly efficacious individuals rather than a dispiriting laundry list of the barriers to success.

In preparing prospective teachers to recognize the crucial role of self-efficacy in critical consciousness education, teacher educators might first work with their prospective educators to develop a curriculum unit (relevant to their respective content areas) that draws on the accomplishments and challenges of the Harlem Children's Zone as a case study. Teacher educators might then assign their preservice teachers to evaluate an existing unit on poverty or inequality (or to design one themselves) through the lens of an efficacy perspective. We might reasonably expect aspiring teachers who have been introduced to the relationship between self-efficacy and perseverance to be able to design lessons on poverty and inequality that infuse "achievement-as-resistance" identities and/or ideologies into their students' understandings of their social contexts, and in so doing will include concrete examples of high-achieving black, Latino, and low-income communities (Carter, 2008).

Introduce Prospective Teachers to Constructive-Developmental Theory

Robert Kegan's (1982) constructive-developmental theory holds that people make meaning of ideas and experiences through a process of confirmation, contradiction, and continuity.³ According to Kegan, in order to be reflective, individuals require a safe and supportive environment that offers "confirmation" of their existing beliefs and identity. Then, when individuals experience the "psychological safety and readiness" that such an environment provides, they can genuinely consider ideas and viewpoints that contradict their own perspectives and assumptions. Finally, in order to synthesize these contradictory ideas and viewpoints, individuals require a period of stability—a period in which they are *not* being confronted with new ideas and viewpoints—in order to make the necessary adaptations to their self-concept and world view.

The implications for constructive-developmental theory in secondary classrooms are twofold. First, lessons and discussions that deepen teenagers' critical consciousness should only take place in classrooms where teens feel safe to express their current beliefs and perspectives and to consider those held by other members of the class. In their coursework on teaching methods and classroom management, prospective teachers typically learn about the importance of building a classroom culture in which students trust that their ideas will be valued by their teacher and classmates. Such a culture has clear academic benefits. Additionally, learning about Kegan's constructive-developmental theory can help prospective teachers understand why such a culture is conducive to raising teens' critical consciousness. Kegan's (1982) developmental perspective also underscores work by Sleeter (2001) and Tatum (2007) on the "silencing" that can take place among students of color in predominantly white classrooms or in classrooms led by white instructors around issues of race and class. Both of these scholars suggest that if students of color perceive their instructor to possess a fixed perspective on issues of race, class, or gender

that differs from their own, they may simply withhold their own viewpoints and experiences. It is crucial, then, that urban secondary teachers raising issues of poverty and inequality be careful not to “silence” their students by expressing too vociferously their beliefs about the structural *or* individualistic factors that contribute to social and class inequality. Rather, it is imperative in such a dialogue that *all* students within a classroom feel comfortable sharing their beliefs about opportunity in America and the factors they have witnessed in their own communities that can influence poverty and wealth.

Kegan (1982) also reports that learners require periods of stability in order to make deep and lasting changes to their worldview. In other words, individuals cannot make lasting adaptations to their worldview if they are *continuously* confronted with content that challenges their existing belief system. For this reason, educators committed to engaging their students in reflection upon social justice issues cannot simply leap from one challenging topic to the next—for example, moving from the study of poverty to the study of world hunger. Doing so can deny students the opportunity to reflect upon the content raised about poverty that challenged their existing beliefs and make adaptations to their world view. When individuals do not have a period of stability to synthesize new and challenging information, they often resist the new information (Seider, 2008).

To illustrate this point, imagine a high school social studies teacher about to embark with her students on a study of poverty and inequality through Barbara Ehrenreich’s (2001) *Nickel and Dimed: On Not Getting by in America*. This teacher might spend several weeks leading her students in reflection upon the struggles by the author to support herself in a series of minimum wage jobs, and then push students to consider the social, political, and ethical implications of these struggles. After completing the book, however, constructive-developmental theory would suggest that our social studies teacher needs to give her students time to process the content of *Nickel and Dimed* and make the necessary adaptations to their worldview before diving directly into another emotionally charged social issue. Without giving her students this time for synthesis, the lessons gleaned from *Nickel and Dimed* are unlikely to be lasting ones. Such a strategy is a pedagogical one, based on knowledge of human development.

After completing this unit, we might expect an aspiring teacher schooled in constructive-developmental theory to place a substantial emphasis on creating a classroom culture in which students feel comfortable voicing their particular viewpoints, even when such viewpoints contradict perspectives espoused by the teacher or fellow classmates. Moreover, we might also expect these aspiring teachers to space lessons likely to challenge teens’ existing world views far enough apart to provide these teens with the time and space necessary to synthesize new ideas into their world views.

Introduce Prospective Teachers to Emerging Adult Theory

Identity development theorist Erik Erikson (1965) characterized late adolescence as the period during which individuals move away from an unquestioned adherence to the ideologies and values conveyed by their parents and seek out new adult role-models as well as new systems of belief in religion, politics, art, literature, and peers. Specifically, Erikson (1968) asserts that in adolescence, “youth seek to identify with values and ideologies that transcend the immediate concerns of family and self and have historical continuity” (p. 32). In one sense, then, adolescence represents an ideal developmental period for secondary-level educators to introduce their students to content about

structural factors that cause social and economic inequality. Adolescents are actively seeking out new ideas and perspectives on the values they possess and are willing to consider viewpoints that may diverge from those held by parents and other close family members.

At the same time, however, emerging adult theory characterizes the period of life upon which teenagers are on the cusp as a peak period of self-focus (Arnett, 2004; Tanner, 2006). Important questions that are typically resolved during this period include the type of work that individuals will pursue; how much education he or she will attain; whether or not to settle on a romantic partner; and whether or when to begin forming a family. In short, emerging adults spend a substantial amount of time and energy making decisions about the type of adults they wish to become.

Secondary-level educators committed to engaging their students in reflection about social and class inequality need first to recognize that their students are at the dawn of this self-focused period of life and then plan their lessons accordingly. While statistics about the prevalence of poverty in the United States or the growing gap between the affluent and poor may influence aspiring educators, the teenage students of these prospective educators are more likely to be engaged by a focus on the personal. Toward this end, student teachers might consider introducing their students to social and class inequality by beginning with questions such as the following: When you think about your own future, what factors do you control? What factors do you not control? When you think about your ideal future, what are the supports in your life that might help you achieve your goals? What are the obstacles that can stand in the way? Engaging teens in reflection upon self-oriented questions such as these may be the most effective means of beginning a larger exploration of the factors that contribute to inequality and inequity in America.

To demonstrate, one means of focusing on the personal actually involves drawing upon an activity sometimes used by diversity trainers. In this activity, aspiring teachers express their own personal responses to a series of statements about inequality. For example, how strongly do students agree or disagree with the following statement: "In America, everyone has an equal chance to get ahead." Similarly, in secondary school classrooms, teachers can ask students to move to a side of the classroom that represents their opinion on the particular statement. Students in agreement with each other can discuss their varied reasons for this perspective and then debate these perspectives with students who have assumed positions in other areas of the classroom (and thus hold a different perspective on the given statement). Here, the goal is to engage students in consideration of inequity and inequality by recognizing and accounting for the self-focused developmental phase upon which they are on the cusp. Again, a pedagogical approach toward teaching for social justice can be informed by a developmental perspective.

Aspiring teachers who participate in such learning around emerging adult theory might be expected as in-service teachers to be more adept at introducing content on poverty, inequality, and social justice issues in ways that effectively utilize the focus-on-the-self that they can expect from their teenage audience. Teacher educators might assess their prospective teachers' understanding of emerging adult theory by assigning them to develop the opening activity (or "activator") for several curricular units within their respective disciplines that incorporate such self-focus. In addition to the lesson plans for these opening activities, prospective teachers might submit a written explanation of how these particular activities explicitly account for key tenets of emerging adult theory.

TYING THE STRANDS TOGETHER

In the preceding recommendations, we described several ways in which human development curricula can complement prospective teachers' learning in their social foundations and methods courses. Perhaps the culmination of these learning experiences could be a single capstone project in which aspiring urban teachers design a unit appropriate to their respective content areas intended to deepen the critical consciousness of their teenage students. In an accompanying paper (or papers), these aspiring teachers explain how the unit they have designed is informed by pedagogy from their methods coursework; content about inequality from their foundations coursework; and content from their human development coursework about how urban teenagers are likely to understand inequality and America's opportunity structure.

Through such a capstone project, aspiring educators receive a clear program-wide message that their role as urban teachers involves not only strengthening the academic skills of their teenage students but also providing teens with the opportunity to reflect upon the culture, values, and institutions of the society into which they are coming of age. In assessing this project, human development faculty might specifically seek evidence that their aspiring teachers demonstrate recognition of: (1) a widespread belief in the American Dream among Americans of all class backgrounds, but with a paradoxically nuanced relationship between socioeconomic status and opportunity perceptions among adolescents; (2) the need to provide space for adolescents to synthesize ideas that contradict their existing world views; (3) the value of focusing first on the self when working with adolescents; and (4) the importance of framing structural inequities as barriers to be overcome by adolescents rather than insurmountable obstacles. Foundations and methods faculty, of course, will seek out evidence in these capstone projects of the pedagogical strategies and historical/sociological content raised in their respective courses.

CONCLUSION

Heeding the call of scholars, such as Nieto (2003, 2006), Cochran-Smith (1995, 2004), Banks (2007), and Ladson-Billings (1994, 1995), teacher education programs are increasingly offering content and coursework that seek to deepen prospective teachers' sociological and historical understandings of inequality. A goal in this endeavor is to develop educators who can deepen the critical consciousness of their students. We have asserted that urban educators who are able to most effectively raise the critical consciousness of their students will be those who are able to recognize and reconcile the divergent perceptions of the opportunity structure held by teachers and students. In other words, raising the critical consciousness of urban teenagers about inequality and other social justice issues requires an understanding of the ways in which individuals from different backgrounds and at different points in their life conceive of inequality and opportunity. We followed up this assertion with several curricular suggestions for human development content that can support the work already being carried out in educational methods and foundations courses.

A theory essay such as this one is, of course, highly influenced by the vantage point of the authors. We have chosen to focus our attention on secondary-level teacher education programs. This decision was due in part to our particular interest in adolescent development but also because the types of critical consciousness-raising efforts described here benefit from students possessing

a set of critical and abstract thinking skills that typically emerge in early to mid-adolescence (Dawson, 2002; Fischer & Bidell, 1998). That said, we recommend that future scholarship and research consider the implications of our central premise for teacher preparation programs focused on preparing urban educators for the primary grades.

In her important 2004 book on social justice and teacher education, Marilyn Cochran Smith utilized the phrase “Walking the Road” as a metaphor (borrowed from Myles Horton and Paulo Freire, 1990) for the “long, complex, difficult, and seemingly endless journey . . . associated with educating teachers for diversity and social justice” (p. xi). Cochran-Smith also intended this phrase to invoke the image of uncertainty—“the idea that there is no path already there and that the traveler must make the path while going along” (p. xviii). Unquestionably, there is much that teachers and teacher educators must discover for themselves as they set out upon this pathway. Our hope here, however, is to offer some modest recommendations for ways in which a human development perspective can illuminate this difficult but critical course.

NOTES

1. On a 5-point composited measure in which a “5” represented a strong belief in the availability of opportunity, high SES adolescents offered a mean attitude of 2.93 ($SD = 1.15$); middle SES adolescents offered a mean attitude of 3.65 ($SD = 1.05$); and low SES adolescents offered a mean attitude of 3.74 ($SD = 1.02$). All differences were statistically significant.
2. Perry (2008) makes a similar (and perhaps bolder) assertion for educational researchers, suggesting that the field should cease discussing the disparities in outcomes across groups and, instead, increase the attention to why particular high achieving Black, Latino, and low-income communities are so successful.
3. While Kegan (1982) is often characterized as an adult development scholar, his constructive-developmental stage theory outlines six “orders of consciousness” that begin at birth and extend through adulthood. The processes by which Kegan describes individuals as progressing through these stages and making meaning of events in their lives are applicable to adults, adolescents, and children.

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