

Emerging Voices: Toward Improved Educational Outcomes in Urban Education

Guest Editors

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Introduction

This issue, *Emerging Voices: Towards Improved Educational Outcomes in Urban Education*, features junior scholars who currently attend or recently graduated from Michigan State University. Collectively, we are Black and Latino/a former classroom teachers, graduate students and faculty in teacher education, educational administration, education policy, and educational psychology. The intelligence and leadership in communities of color, and among scholars of color are not readily accepted as valid in academia. Therefore, we assert the legitimacy of our lived experiences, our training, and our academic integrity through our scholarship. We do this for the benefit of the academy, but more intentionally for the benefit of our respective communities. Our emerging voices have significant depth and breadth in providing both theoretical and practical pathways toward academic success for youth of color in urban contexts. This special issue privileges the perspectives of Black and Latino/a students, parents and teachers. This issue illuminates academic success by carefully and critically examining classroom and schooling experiences. Altogether, the articles highlight major implications for policies that inform the preparation of teachers and administrators in daily practice.

Overview of Literature

Policy

Over 30 years ago, the seminal report *A Nation At Risk* was published; and despite its subtitle, “*The Imperative For Educational Reform,*” we are still looking for the kind of policy changes that improves outcomes for our most challenged constituencies. In this special edition two scholars, Elizabeth Gil and Darrius Stanley focus on policy concerns specifically addressed in *A Nation At Risk*. Gil identifies educational programs that result in notable college student success. Stanley defines problems related to teacher quality and teacher assignment that must be faced and overcome if administrators are to successfully pursue excellence in education.

Excellence in education cannot be achieved without policies that overtly seek to improve teacher quality and teacher assignment in communities of color. Nye, Konstantopoulos, and Hedges (2004) found quality teachers are one of the most important site-based factors that facilitate learning. Unfortunately, the ability to attract and retain educators of high caliber is not uniform across educational contexts (Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2002). Additionally, Kalogrides, Loeb, and Béteille (2013) found that tenure status, Whiteness, and maleness influence if teachers are assigned classes with students of color or lower achieving students. White males are most likely to teach Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), and Honors classes, which are not likely to have lower achieving students. Stanley’s interrogation of Black teacher tracking and their absence from these domains attempts to inform policy conversations around equitable teacher assignments as well as academic equity for students.

Gil hones in on the nuanced approach necessary to ensure Latino students fare well in college. 2014 census data tells us Latinos represent the largest ethnic group in the United States at over 17%. Yet, less than 50% of Latinos go on to graduate from college (Lopez and Fry, 2013). This is problematic for the impacted individuals, the collective trajectory of the ethnic group, and our entire country.

Vincent Tinto's (1987) articulation of models of student departure provided a theory on how why students leave college. He followed with, *Research and Practice of Student Retention: What Next?* in 2006 and a 2012 book, *Completing College: Rethinking Institutional Action*. Eschewing a generalist approach, Tinto, highlights the unique needs and strengths of this population has implications for students, parents, higher education educators and administrators.

Practice

In addressing problems of practice in education, it is important to acknowledge whose voices are and are *not* represented at the metaphorical table. In this special edition, researchers, Sakeena Everett, Theda Gibbs Grey, Ashley Johnson, and Tonisha Lane are intentional about addressing problems of practice through the lenses of teacher, parents, and students- those stakeholders in education who are rarely seen as resources and assets in the classroom. These articles employ culturally relevant and sustaining theories in practice and critical reflection as it affects teachers, parents, and students.

Most teachers enter the field of education because they find joy in teaching and they want to positively affect children's academic outcomes. Everett and Gibbs Grey found many teachers of urban students are seeking concrete skills and strategies to implement curriculum that authentically meets the needs of their diverse students. Furthermore, many of these

teachers need institutional support to develop these skills and execute effective strategies. As teacher educators, Everett and Gibbs Grey, offer ways to utilize culturally relevant and sustaining theories in practice through hands-on workshops with teachers, administrators, and faculty in education. These workshops provide safe spaces for teachers to share their genuine concerns in the classroom, reflect on positionality, and acquire dispositions and strategies to address student needs.

Within the broader context of public education, a school's successes and failures largely depend on the conditions outside the four walls of the school building (Nieto, 2015). When we examine many urban contexts, Black students, families, and communities are disproportionately impacted by poverty. Due to systemic inequalities, many Black urban parents and students lack the social capital necessary to understand and navigate the complexities of dynamic educational environments (Noguera, 2001). Johnson and Lane focus on how Black parents and students learn to acquire social capital through parental empowerment and student enrichment Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) programs. Addressing the issue of social capital is a particularly urgent concern because for the first time in our nation's history, students of color are the numerical majority in public schools.

Black Students' Classroom and Schooling Experiences

In the early 1990's, education researchers, Erickson and Shultz, (1992) rearticulated Dewey's (1916/1944) calls for greater attention to students' experiences. Students' classroom and schooling experiences reveal insights into schools that may not have been considered before (Sands, Guzman, Stephens, & Boggs, 2007). These insights may ultimately help educational stakeholders better understand the supporting and constraining factors may impact student success both inside and outside of school. An understanding of these factors that may also help schools to identify and target critical areas of students' concern, which in turn directs

educators to enhance the resources needed to promote student experiences (Mitra & Gross, 2009).

Black and Latino/a students are more likely to have schooling and classroom experiences that do not reflect access to a high-quality education (Kozol, 1991; Milner, 2012; Sealey-Ruiz & Greene, 2011). Some of those experiences include a lack of positive teacher-student relationships (Howard, 2001) and disregard for students' cultural knowledge (Delpit, 2006). Students grapple daily with making connections, decisions, and choices to fulfill adults' expectations. Yet, "the significance of students' experiences is neither well understood, nor commonly explored" (Rubin & Silva, 2003, p. 1). This special issue of authors elucidates Black students' experiences. Justin Coles relates these experiences to symbolic violence in schools; Chris Seals adds a race lens for expectancy value theory; and Lateefah Id-Deen and Ashley N. Woodson consider interpersonal relationships and their connections to student learning.

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Overview of Articles

Collectively, we illuminate the conditions and experiences from the perspectives of members of the communities we serve. This special themed issue consists of seven articles, the editors' introduction, and overview of the issue. Below contains an abstract of each article that will be included in the special issue.

Black Lives, Too, Matter in Schools: An Exploration of Symbolic Violence Against Black Youth in America's Schools

Urban educators often focus their attention on the violence of inner-city neighborhoods causing them to ignore the urban school as a violent institution—positioning it as a safe haven, both physically and emotionally. However, to build ways to effectively respond to violence in schools, urban educators must begin to reflect on the history of these institutions and the current ways in which they subjugate and marginalize Black children. Through in-depth semi-structured interviews with Black, high school students, the author investigated the presence of symbolic violence in their schooling experiences and the impact it has on their social and academic identities. The author uses Critical Race Theory (CRT) as the guiding theoretical and methodological framework. Highlighting the gentle and imperceptible nature of symbolic violence, it was discovered that their schooling experiences are laced with undertones of invisible, yet violent attacks.

Keywords: teacher education, critical race theory, symbolic violence

Contributor: Justin A. Coles (Michigan State University)

Creating Inclusive Excellence: A Model for Culturally Relevant Teacher Education

With increasing racial and linguistic diversity in U.S. public schools, scholars argue for teacher education programs that explicitly focus on issues of diversity. Based on this assumption, teacher education programs must consider: *How* do we successfully prepare teachers to teach diverse students? As teacher educators, we support effective preparation of teachers in meeting the needs of *all* students, but we are especially concerned about the preparation of teachers in urban classrooms. We developed a *culturally relevant* teacher education model that demonstrates our efforts to connect theory and practice. For this initiative, we organized a daylong conference with eight professional development workshops. The workshops in this paper focused on culturally relevant pedagogies addressing racial, cultural or linguistic diversity. We analyzed 122 post-workshop surveys to capture the effectiveness and relevance of the workshops. Findings indicate several nuanced processes are necessary for adequately preparing educators in culturally relevant traditions, even when educators are already well-meaning.

Keywords: culturally relevant teacher education, critical teacher reflection, teacher education, urban education, teacher professional development

Contributors: Dr. Sakeena Everett (University of Illinois, Chicago) and Dr. Theda Gibbs Grey (Ohio University)

First-Generation Latino College Students: Institutional Practices that Support Four-Year College Degree Completion

Although college enrollment of Latino students has increased over the last decade, this group still lags in attainment of 4-year college degrees. Only 14.5% of Latinos aged and 25 and older had earned a bachelor's degree in 2012 (Lopez & Fry, 2013). Greater educational attainment for Latinos is of significance as levels of educational attainment are associated with quality of life, lifetime earnings, and the country's economy in terms of the overall capacity of its workforce. This brief, based on literature about Latino college success and Latino college student retention, finds that four-year institutions that make a commitment to retaining their first-generation Latino students have higher graduation rates than the national average for these students. To foster Latino college completion, these institutions recognize and respond to these students' unique needs by institutionalizing Latino-specific initiatives through providing funding for them within the schools' operational budgets, by developing systems of integrated support, and by fostering inclusive campus climates.

Keywords: Latino educational attainment, Latino college student retention, Latino college success, Latino educational success

Contributor: Elizabeth Gil (Michigan State University)

“I Know I Can Do Harder Work”: Students’ Perspectives On Teacher Distrust In An Urban Mathematics Classroom

Teacher turnover broadly refers to changes in a teacher’s classroom or school assignment, either during or at the end of an academic school year (Ingersoll, 2001). Though this phenomenon affects many schools to some degree, it is especially problematic in urban settings (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). This qualitative study examined the perspectives of five Black urban students on the experience of teacher turnover in their 7th grade Pre-Algebra classroom. Findings suggest that these students highly valued the interpersonal features of their relationship with their initial teacher, and described the types of teacher behavior that they associated with expressions of a distrusting relationship with their subsequent teacher. Specifically, the data indicated that the absence of a teacher’s trust negatively affected students’ mathematics experience and learning. Concluding comments focus on the importance of trustful student-teacher relationships to promote academic and interpersonal continuity, and to better attend to the needs of urban students in cases of teacher turnover.

Keywords: Black students’ perspectives, distrust, teacher turnover

Contributors: Dr. Lateefah Id-Deen (University of Louisville) and Dr. Ashley N. Woodson (University of Pittsburgh).

Understanding Educational Interventions that Enhance Social Capital among Black Urban Parents and College Students: A Comparative Case Study

The purpose of this qualitative comparative case study was to understand how educational interventions enhanced the social capital of Black urban parents and students to navigate dynamic educational environments. The authors present two case studies in which relationships and the acquisition of new knowledge, resources, and skills emerged as critical findings that enabled the participants in each educational intervention to reach their desired goals. The first case study examined a parent-empowerment program that teaches participants how to identify and select high quality schools in an urban K-12 school choice environment. The second study explored a science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) enrichment program designed to support the transition of first-year college students at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI). Findings revealed that bonding capital (i.e., internal homogenous social networks), an element of social capital, was especially helpful for establishing and leveraging resources, knowledge, and experiences that empowered participants. Implications for future research are provided.

Keywords: social capital, educational interventions, urban parents, college students

Contributors: *Dr. Ashley Johnson (Collective Impact at Excellent Schools Detroit) and Dr. Tonisha B. Lane (University of South Florida)*

Expectancy Value Theory and Racial Opportunity Cost: Racializing Values In Motivation Theory

Expectancy value theory (EVT) of motivation is used to better understand student cognitive processes and achievement. The theory has expanded to be more inclusive of various motivational experiences since its origin in 1964 by Atkinson. However, the work can be further expanded to examine how EVT can conceptualize achievement behavior for underrepresented students. Racial opportunity cost (ROC; Chambers et al., 2014) has similarities that overlap with EVT, but uses constructs having to do with racism to define the student experience. In this conceptual paper, I used those same constructs to redefine the four value types of EVT. This exposes the gap in theory by using constructs from ROC to nuance values so they can be applied directly to the educational experience of underrepresented and urban students. This paper shows that racializing the motivational experience of underrepresented students is complex and influences all elements within the EVT model.

Keywords: expectancy value theory, motivation

Contributor: Chris Seals (Michigan State University)

Dangers Unforeseen: Inequity In Contemporary Teacher Assignment Practices

Research shows that Black teachers are severely underrepresented in Honors, Advanced Placement (AP), and International Baccalaureate (IB) programs within secondary schools. This literature review expands the concept of “Teacher Tracking”, originally coined by Finley (1984), to develop a better understanding of how this phenomenon disproportionately affects Black teachers. This work draws from sociological, political, historical, statistical, and organizational theory literature to further develop the “Teacher Tracking” conversation. Through in-depth analysis of existing research this work introduces six contributory factors to the phenomena, including teacher experience, credentials, residence, internal school politics, race, and racism. This research presents significant evidence of racial discrimination in teacher assignment practices suggesting that race and racism could be the most influential factors contributing to “Teacher Tracking”. This research has significant implications for district assignment policies, leadership preparation programs, and school administrative practices in a pursuit of social justice leadership.

Keywords: teacher tracking, teacher assignment

Contributor: Darrius A. Stanley (Michigan State University)