

7-1-2008

## Do as I Say and Do as I Do: Teacher Educators' Narratives about Urban Teaching

Grace McDaniel

Harriett Fayne

Susan Constable

Otterbein College, SConstable@otterbein.edu

*See next page for additional authors*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://newprairiepress.org/networks>



Part of the [Teacher Education and Professional Development Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

McDaniel, Grace; Fayne, Harriett; Constable, Susan; Knoblauch, Deanne; Ryan, Patricia; and Weiss, Adele (2008) "Do as I Say and Do as I Do: Teacher Educators' Narratives about Urban Teaching," *Networks: An Online Journal for Teacher Research*: Vol. 10: Iss. 2. <https://doi.org/10.4148/2470-6353.1119>

This Full Article is brought to you for free and open access by New Prairie Press. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Networks: An Online Journal for Teacher Research* by an authorized administrator of New Prairie Press. For more information, please contact [cads@k-state.edu](mailto:cads@k-state.edu).

---

## Do as I Say and Do as I Do: Teacher Educators' Narratives about Urban Teaching

### Authors

Grace McDaniel, Harriett Fayne, Susan Constable, Deanne Knoblauch, Patricia Ryan, and Adele Weiss



An On-line Journal  
for Teacher Research

## **Do as I Say *and* Do as I Do** **Teacher Educators' Narratives about Urban Teaching**

**Grace McDaniel, Harriet Fayne, Susan Constable, Dee Knoblauch, Patty Ryan, Adele Weiss**

Otterbein College

Teacher educators share much in common with their pre-service candidates, but neither group resembles the increasingly diverse PreK-12 student population in cities across the United States. In the words of Gary Howard (1999): *How can you teach what you don't know?* A group of faculty members at a small, suburban liberal arts college decided to address this dilemma head-on by creating an urban teaching group. In addition to reading about and discussing important issues related to urban education and culturally responsive pedagogy, we participated in community mapping with early childhood candidates and were assigned to inner-city elementary classrooms. Across a tenweek term, we observed, tutored, and taught lessons under the supervision of cooperating teachers, many of whom were our own graduates. Through direct experience, reflection, and dialogue, we challenged our assumptions and examined the realities of teaching in an urban setting.

Unlike the student population, which grows increasingly diverse, the U.S. teaching force remains overwhelmingly White, female, and monolingual (Applied Research Center, 2000). As a result of this "demographic divide" (Gay and Howard, 2000, p. 1), schools are staffed by teachers who, for the most part, "do not have the same cultural frames of reference and points of view as their students" (Banks et al., 2005, p. 237). The situation is unlikely to change in the near future, since the demographic profiles of prospective teachers and current teachers appear to be

quite similar (Zumwalt & Craig, 2005). Sleeter (2001) noted that White pre-service teachers, because of their limited cross-cultural knowledge and lack of awareness about the impact of racism, discrimination, or other structural aspects of inequality, are likely to hold stereotypical beliefs about urban students, particularly students of color.

Effective teacher education programs attempt to bridge the gap between what pre-service teachers know and what they need to know about ethnic, racial, and socio-economic diversity. However, the teacher educators who fill the ranks of schools, colleges, and departments of education are likely to be as monocultural as the candidates that they admit into their programs (Grant & Gillette, 1987). Howard (1999) asks a critical question when he addresses the issue of White teachers in multiracial schools: *How can you teach what you don't know?* Kitano, Lewis, Lynch, and Graves (1996) noted that there was unevenness in the level of understanding about diverse student populations among teacher educators and few faculty development opportunities designed to fill this knowledge gap. Cochran-Smith (2004) observes that only a handful of teacher preparation programs build in ongoing faculty development that aligns with themes such as multiculturalism, social justice, and urban education. Without a systematic approach, it is easy to assign these themes to faculty members who teach multicultural education courses while the rest of the faculty

go on with business as usual (Gallavan, 2000).

Ladson-Billings (2005) addresses the cultural homogeneity that exists in most teacher education programs and challenges us to take a critical look at what she refers to as the “team.” She posits that the “Whiteness” of teacher education faculty paired with the distance that exists between the nation’s schools and colleges/universities result in programs that are out of synch with current realities. “Despite verbal pronouncements about commitments to equity and diversity, many teacher educators never have to seriously act on these commitments because they are rarely in situations that make such a demand on them” (Ladson-Billings, 2005, p. 230).

As teacher educators at a small, suburban liberal arts college, we decided to take Ladson-Billings’ words to heart. We wanted to re-enter the world of urban schools, not as college supervisors or as outside experts, but as learners. We adopted Clandinin and Huber’s (2002) metaphor of “three-dimensional narrative inquiry space” (p. 163) to guide our thinking. By moving backward and forward (from past experiences, to the present, and eventually to the future), looking inward (at ourselves) and outward (at our relationships with each other, urban teachers, and elementary students), and situating ourselves in two locales (one in urban elementary schools and the other on our college campus), we hoped to author narratives based on “lived experiences” that would not only inform our own work but also serve as an impetus for other teacher educators to examine their practice as well. In order to become part of the national conversation, we followed the advice of Clandinin, Pushor, and Orr (2007) and “positioned” our inquiry in relation to other studies of culturally responsive pedagogy and urban teacher preparation by immersing ourselves in the professional literature throughout the life of the project.

## Context

The demographic make-up of pre-service teachers at Otterbein College, a small, liberal arts college located in a suburb of Columbus, Ohio, mirrors the homogeneity that exists in a majority of U.S. teacher education programs. Coming largely from suburbs or rural communities, few of our candidates (who are typically White, female, and monolingual) have had any first-hand experience in urban schools. In order to expose candidates to diversity, Otterbein requires a one-hundred-hour field placement in a Columbus City Schools classroom as part of a methods course taken by undergraduates during their junior year. According to the 2006-2007 fact sheet posted on the district’s website ([www.columbus.k12.oh.us](http://www.columbus.k12.oh.us)), Columbus has a student population of 56,151 (61.4% Black, 28.3% White, 5.2% Hispanic, 2.9% Multiracial, 1.9% Asian, 0.3% Native American), with 8.5% receiving English as a Second Language services. For most of our candidates, this experience is their first prolonged encounter with urban schools, diverse students, and, in many cases, the discomfort that results from being a visible minority.

Just like our candidates, the teacher educator “team” at Otterbein is composed largely of White females. Faculty members are very aware of the mismatch between the current candidate population and the increasingly diverse student population in area schools. The desire to prepare pre-service candidates to meet the challenges of a changing society has been a regular point of discussion during formal and informal department meetings.

## Getting Started

Grace, as the only African-American faculty member in the department, was constantly asked to represent the viewpoint of all individuals of color and to educate the rest of us on what constitutes good practice in urban settings. Ironically, Grace had neither attended nor taught in urban schools. She grew up in a small, tight-knit Black community that educated its elementary

children in a segregated village school and then sent them to a middle- and high school in a large district that had rural and suburban areas within its boundaries and was over 90% White. Thus, Grace, too, had much to learn about Columbus Public Schools, its teachers, and its students when she was first assigned the methods course with the required urban field experience. While she was seen as a cultural translator by her colleagues, Grace viewed herself as a co-learner.

In an attempt to move the department forward by engaging in frank dialogue about urban teacher preparation, Grace invited faculty to join her in a study group. Bi-monthly meetings of the “Urban Teaching Group,” as we came to be known, attracted six to nine faculty members, depending on the term. The group read and discussed works on teacher education reform (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Haberman, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 2001) as well as texts by and about professionals who were able to talk from a personal perspective about the challenges of urban schools and diverse student populations (Compton-Lilly, 2003; Delpit, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Meier, 2002; Michie, 1999; Weiner, 2006). In addition to book study, the group wanted to find out for themselves what other teacher education programs were doing to prepare teachers for urban settings. The College provided the group with faculty development funds so that four individuals could visit classes and field sites at Teachers College, Columbia University, and another team of five could visit schools that participated in the Academy for Urban School Leadership Chicago Teaching Residency Program.

Reading and visiting were necessary but insufficient for six of us who wanted more hands-on experience. Serving as the coordinator, Grace placed us in elementary schools that she used for her early childhood pre-service candidates. From the start, we viewed ourselves not as teacher educators but as field participants. During the first week in our new roles, we joined Grace’s early childhood methods students in community mapping. Community mapping is an exercise

designed to help participants contextualize teaching and learning (Tindle, Leconte, Buchanan, & Taymans, 2005). In small groups composed of field participants assigned to a particular school, we engaged in systematic information gathering through a visit to the neighborhood surrounding the school. We collected data on housing, businesses, social service agencies, recreational facilities, and religious institutions; interviewed residents and business owners to gain an understanding of the neighborhood’s history and current local issues; collected artifacts such as flyers and newsletters; and took photographs of residential and non-residential structures.

After acquainting ourselves with the community, we spent at least one morning or afternoon per week across ten weeks in our field assignments. Two of us were placed at a school with a large homeless population, two in a school that had experienced recent shifts in population because of reassignments, and two in an alternative school that had an Afrocentric philosophy. Working under the supervision of cooperating teachers, several of whom were relatively recent program graduates, we followed the lead of our cooperating teachers, supporting the students in whatever ways the teachers saw fit (one-on-one tutoring, small group instruction, and/or large group teaching). For most members of the group, not only did teaching in an urban school present a new experience, but teaching at the elementary level was new and challenging. Back on campus we met, debriefed, and shared experiences at least twice each month. We all kept journals that were shared with the group during our campus meetings. In addition, if cooperating teachers had the time and interest, we communicated journal content or had them read and respond to journal entries in an effort to co-construct the classroom narratives.

When the ten weeks were over, we each wrote up our own “field text” (Clandinin, Pushor & Orr, 2007, p. 27). As a group, we presented them to colleagues at one statewide and two national teacher education conferences. At

these sessions, we shared our story drafts and asked for feedback. The final versions of the five narratives included in this article have been transformed into research texts through an iterative process of peer review that involved telling and retelling our stories not only to departmental colleagues in the study group but also to a wider audience of education faculty interested in urban teacher preparation. The sixth participant, whose story is not included, retired before we arrived at the final stage of the project.

## Sue

Sue is a White, middle-aged reading professor who has been teaching at the college level for ten years. Prior to being a college professor, she worked for ten years in a variety of public schools, mostly rural, with a brief stint as a reading teacher in an urban elementary school. As a child in the 1970s, Sue attended a school where everyone still remembers the one African-American child's name and where most families were outraged when the Jewish child's parents convinced the school to include a Hanukah song in the Christmas pageant. As a teacher educator and researcher, Sue has studied literacy acquisition and instruction in urban, rural, and suburban schools. Her dissertation research looked at conversations between urban first-grade students and their tutors engaged in the act of storybook writing.

Sue's Story: Good Luck, Desiree! Literacy is Alive and Well in Ms. Angel's Room

It was my first day in Ms. Angel's third grade classroom and it didn't take long for Desiree, the class ambassador, to make herself known to me.

"My friend Ashley is coming to my house for a sleepover this Friday!

We're going to have a Japanese party and eat oranges because did you know oranges are good luck in Japan?"

My heart warmed at this all-at-once eager and informative welcome into Ms. Angel's classroom. Soon after I arrived, students began an hour-long independent reading

block. Yes—Independent Reading. This was a surprise to me. In this large, urban district, with its never-good-enough test scores and mandated scripted reading curriculum, children were *reading*. Not only were they reading, but reading with eagerness and enthusiasm—like the kids in the Reader's Workshop videos—the ones to which my college students often respond:

"Yes, but she only seems to have about 10 students."

"This would never work in my classroom."

"These are obviously White, middle-class kids."

"But these kids are all good readers...."

Yet here it was—a class of 22 third-grade students; all from a poor neighborhood and 20 of whom were African American students. This was not the classroom of teaching videos, although maybe it should have been. In my eagerness to dig deeper, I returned to Desiree, in whom I'd found a trusted friend and potential informant.

"What are you reading?" I asked.

"Oh—this is *Chocolate Fever*. It's a really funny book!" Desiree responded.

"What's so funny about it?" I continued.

"Well, this kid, see, he really loves chocolate...wait—I want to read you a really funny part."

Desiree flipped back a few pages (re-reading), skimmed through a paragraph or two (retrieving), and located, then read aloud, her example. Desiree—the literary luminary (Daniels, 1994) in action!

She read and laughed while she read. I laughed with her. When our talk about *Chocolate Fever* (Smith, 1989) reached a lull, I changed the subject:

"So tell me about this sleepover that you and your friend are planning."

"We're going to my house and it's gonna be a Japanese party. My mom got us oranges so

we're going to cut them up and eat them like they do in Japan. Then we have good luck for the rest of the year". Desiree replied.

Impressed and curious, I asked, "How do you know that oranges are good luck in Japan?"

"Well, last week we read another book about this boy and his family and they had New Year. Not like our New Years but Japanese New Year. And they eat a lot of things but one of the things they have is oranges because Japanese people believe that oranges are good luck." she recounted without hesitation.

I left that day feeling excited about returning to the class, about Ms. Angel and her ongoing commitment to giving children time to read, and, yes, about Desiree's sleepover.

On the drive home I couldn't help but reflect on these "urban readers," so often problematized in the media for their low test scores, erratic behavior, and illiteracy.

I thought about my mantra to future teachers—"You can't teach students effectively unless you build on what they already know." Desiree, who I later found out was one of Ms. Angel's lowest-performing readers, knew about Japanese traditions. She made text-to-world connections (Keene & Zimmerman, 1997); she reread and skimmed for specific information. She loved to read and share what she was reading, even with the awkward college lady who just strolled into her classroom unannounced one day. I later learned that Desiree could not pass the Ohio Third Grade Reading Achievement Test, despite intensive test preparation and remediation. But she certainly **knew** a lot! And she was an *engaged* reader!

As teacher educators, we exhort our students to find out what children know and what their social and cultural values are and to build on these to optimize learning. What was most interesting in Ms. Angel's classroom was how the *children* actively constructed meaning from others' cultural experiences and made them their own. Desiree is a prime example—an African American child from a poor urban

neighborhood who throws a Japanese New Year party for her friend, Ashley.

Literacy was alive and well in Ms. Angel's third grade. By providing designated time and a flexible structure for independent reading, and by introducing them to books that reflected the world around them, Ms. Angel gave Desiree and the rest of the class permission to seek out literature about children who, while like them in many ways, were unlike them in many other ways. She gave them opportunities to read, discuss, and explore the cultures and traditions of people outside of their classroom, their school, their city, and their country. In marked contrast to what might be inferred from test results, Desiree knew how to build schema, and how to make text-world connections. In this era of test-driven curriculum and panic and despite what test scores would indicate, Desiree was a reader.

## Adele

At 50 Adele has had very limited hands-on experience with urban education. She is the product of a blue-collar suburban public school, where diversity was conspicuously absent among the second-generation Greeks, Italians, and Jews. Adele's only true urban experience was as a kindergartener in the Crown Heights area of Brooklyn, New York, in the 1950s. However, her memories of that year are limited to hopscotch and jump rope in a playground filled with little girls and boys with scrubbed faces, homemade coats, and saddle shoes. Active in the education of her own children, now ages 17, 19, and 21, Adele has volunteered extensively in classrooms, "fought" for the honor of being room mother, and attended every standing-room-only play, concert, and athletic event along with hundreds of other affluent suburban parents with movie cameras slung around their necks. Adele's own years of teaching middle-school special education were also spent in districts that, while having the word "city" in their names, were not urban settings but rather districts surrounded by cornfields or affluent suburbs. Adele says that her direct experience in urban education and diverse

settings truly began when she joined the “Urban” Teaching Group at Otterbein.

#### Adele’s Story: Getting a Clearer Message about Urban Classrooms

As a child I loved to play the game “Telephone.” For those unfamiliar with the game, it is one where ten or so people sit around in a circle, the first one starts a message and whispers it to the next person until the final message sounds nothing like the original and everyone sits around and has a good belly laugh. That’s exactly how I got much of my information about urban teaching. I must have been the person at the end of the line because by the time I received the message, it was distorted. One of the messages I received came out something like this: “Academics suffer in urban settings because teachers have to focus on inappropriate behavior.”

My assigned school was not only inner city, but also served a unique population of students. Many were currently living either in homeless shelters or transitional housing. During my time in Mrs. Vaughn’s classroom, five of twenty-two children were being housed in shelters, seven were in temporary housing, and the remaining ten were “neighborhood” children. During my ten-week experience I saw four new faces while five others left the school.

All of the classroom management texts I’ve ever used in my college courses stressed the importance of building a classroom community, an environment of trust, a collaborative classroom where children share in the development of rules and policy-making. With those important factors in place, learning could take place. But how could learning occur in an atmosphere where students are frequently absent, exhausted from lack of sleep, here today, gone tomorrow? Wouldn’t managing student problems take center stage? My expectations for the academic achievement of the students in Mrs. Vaughn’s class were different than the reality of their achievements. Teaching took place every day. Time on task was maximized. The classroom was child-

centered and structured. The students were learning. The problematic issues that could impact a classroom because of hunger, lack of sleep, tardiness, absences, and transition were anticipated and managed by the classroom teacher before they impeded learning. Part of the success of the classroom was teacher attitude. Children arrived any time within the first hour of school. No tardy marks were given. No fuss was made. And parents were always acknowledged, even if the teacher was instructing the class. Late students were quietly incorporated into the classroom routine by a set of well-established procedures. A table away from the instructional area served as a private “dining room” for those who had missed breakfast. New students shadowed veteran students in order to learn important routines. A nap-mat placed in the coat room was always available.

There was a pattern to the day and a comfort in the familiarity of that pattern that, I believe, enhanced learning. After signing in, the students had group circle time. Here they learned the days of the week, counted by ones and tens, read weather words, and recognized numerals. One dreary February day, it was my turn to take over calendar time. We counted the days together 1...2...3...4... 29...I kept going but not before a chorus of little voices informed me that since it was February I really did have to stop. Shavon asked me with great sincerity, “*Dr. Weiss, don’t you know the poem? “Thirty days hath September, April, June, and November. All the rest have 31 except for February...”*”

Teacher-led lessons were fast-paced. Student responses to letter-sound relationships were choral in nature, but everyone had to be alert because you never knew when Mrs. Vaughn would call on you to answer all by yourself. “By yourself” was a coveted event since Mrs. Vaughn lavished praise on the child who was able to respond. Follow-up lessons were well-organized, systematic learning center affairs.

The writing skills expected by the teacher and delivered by the students were impressive. Mrs. Vaughn set high standards for each child. Charles was able to compose three

simple sentences summarizing the morning read-aloud; Takesha was able to compose one sentence; Ginette could fill her paper with words; and Dixon drew symbols, a few recognizable letters, and some awesome stick figures. All of the papers were posted, adorned with stickers, and the object of much admiration when parents, college students, or the principal came to visit the classroom.

Was discipline even a factor in Mrs. Vaughn's classroom? Absolutely. It certainly wasn't utopia. Rule infractions were managed by a total classroom behavior management plan. Were the problems in Mrs. Vaughn's urban kindergarten classroom different from those I'd seen in other districts? Some were. Many of the children were coming to school exhausted and unable to concentrate because they had slept in a noisy shelter. Some were hungry.

I was not used to an unofficial but habitual come-when-you-can policy that disrupted morning lessons. But little hands and feet that are hard to hold still, outside voices being used inside, and an inability to sit in one place for any length of time were management problems all kindergarten teachers deal with (or so I learned). There were plenty of management issues, but none of them detracted from the teaching and learning going on inside Mrs. Vaughn's urban kindergarten classroom.

I do believe that, the next time I play a game of Telephone, I'm going to be the one who starts the message. I want to send a clearer, more positive message about urban schools.

## Dee

Dee is an assistant professor of education, whose interests are educational psychology and multicultural education and literature. She previously taught at an urban middle school/high school, and she also has fifteen years of collegiate basketball coaching experience. While recruiting she traveled to many, many high schools in Ohio, and she saw firsthand the "savagely inequalities" in terms of school facilities and resources. She

and her partner have a three-year-old daughter.

## Dee's Story: Creativity in an Urban Classroom?

When I walked into an all-Black, all-male, urban third-grade classroom, I expected to see lots of drill-and-practice on basic skills with an emphasis on convergent rather than divergent thinking. I assumed that, because of the district's emphasis on test results, James, a young, relatively inexperienced teacher, would feel constrained to adhere closely to the district's prescribed curriculum and teach the content in a straightforward (and uninspired) fashion. Nothing could have been further from the reality I encountered in that busy, productive room.

James was working with his students on a CD remix of the school song when I arrived. He integrated math, communication, language arts, business, and music in a highly creative, culturally relevant, and engaging project. He and the students re-wrote, practiced, performed, and then actually recorded the school song. The goal was to sell the CD, so they researched their target audience, designed the CD jacket, crunched numbers to ensure a profit margin, and explored ways to market and advertise their product. I can only imagine the depth of learning that resulted from this integrated unit. As for student engagement and excitement, I would be willing to bet that not many of the boys missed school during this project.

Maria, a pre-service teacher assigned to James, was given permission to find interesting ways to present important ideas. She planned to do a unit on technology and was determined to make it interactive and engaging. One day when I went to observe, there was a large pile of electronic apparatus on one of the tables. Maria had brought in old, used electronic devices – there was a radio, a toaster, an iron, and other assorted household items. The lesson for the day involved taking apart a device and recording (in a methodical fashion) the steps that it would take to put it back together again. The boys were arranged in small groups, given a

large piece of chart paper on which to record their steps, and instructed to get to work. Despite the fact that they were like excited kids in a candy store, their focus and determination were wonderful to see. While I wasn't able to stay and see them put the devices back together, I found out later that most of the groups were successful.

It was during this science unit that I witnessed the power of multicultural literature. Maria had brought in many library books featuring African American main characters, and one of the books was a collection of stories about famous Black inventors. One day while I was moving around the class offering my assistance, I noticed Marcus working diligently, with a book propped open beside him. Since he had to return the book, Marcus was writing down the story of a Black inventor so that he could always have the story! I asked Marcus if he wanted to be an inventor someday, and he replied affirmatively, "I'm going to be an inventor or a pilot." This underscores the importance of having all cultures represented in educational books, materials, and resources – when students can see themselves in their school books they feel both valued and inspired.

I got caught up in the creative energy and wanted to try my hand at teaching a stimulating lesson. James gave me the district's pacing guide and told me simply to pick a standard and teach it however I wished. He explained to me that he is directed *what* to teach, but he decides *how* he teaches it. So I flipped through the pacing guide and landed on a social studies standard (making decisions). I decided to use Faith Ringgold's picture book, *If a Bus Could Talk: The Story of Rosa Parks* (1999), as an example of decision making and as a discussion starter. The boys enjoyed the book and found the notion of a boycott quite interesting. I asked them if there were any conditions at the school that would warrant a school boycott. I had to laugh; the boys certainly had no problem thinking of reasons for a school boycott: school uniforms, cafeteria food, and the fact that they weren't allowed to go

outside to play during lunch time. There were some budding political activists in that room!

And so it seems that the misconception that urban teachers are limited in terms of creative opportunities is just that: a misconception. Suffice it to say that creativity was alive and well (indeed, thriving) in this urban classroom. Every day when I walked into that classroom I saw eager and excited learners. These third-grade boys actively participated in the lessons: during whole class discussions, their hands waved, begging to be called on; during hands-on activities, they explored excitedly; and during seatwork, they worked industriously (albeit for a short while). I learned that the picture I had had of an urban elementary classroom – which was based primarily on research literature – needed to be adjusted. I had pictured endless worksheets and a drill and grill mentality, not the vibrant classroom I encountered. James taught creatively and energetically, and the boys responded in kind. For my own collegiate courses, I now have a clearer and more balanced picture to present.

## Patty

Patty is in her twenty-seventh year as a teacher educator and has taught at least 15 different graduate and/or undergraduate courses during this tenure. At one time she served as chair of the department and, at another time, as a graduate program director. Patty has neither lived nor taught in a suburb. Prior to her role as teacher educator, her teaching experience was primarily in urban secondary schools. As a trained and experienced interpreter of the Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), Patty has always been attracted to the richness and importance of differences. She passionately and proudly relates to her Irish American ethnicity. Patty grew up in a middle-class family, which consisted of a pack of professional educators.

### Patty's Story: Mrs. B—The Right Stuff

My headline goal for this urban initiative was to become a more culturally responsive teacher educator. For the past 10 years, my focus has been secondary schooling. This

means that I observe approximately 30 secondary methods students per year, assess high schools for the North Central Association, and frequently deliver in-service workshops to secondary teachers. For this professional development initiative, we were to experience an elementary school—of course, I was a proverbial fish out of water.

I was assigned to a third-grade classroom with Ms. B as my cooperating teacher. For my first two visits, I assisted Ms. B with cooperative learning activities, ran errands, gathered materials, and observed her “direct” instruction of the third graders. During my third week, Ms. B asked me if I would work with Marcus. Marcus, a fourth grader, was sitting in time-out at the back of Ms. B’s classroom. He had been banished from his own room. Ms. B had taught Marcus the previous year and knew he had serious reading problems; in fact, he was two years below grade level in reading.

Marcus and I collected markers, paper, and books and headed for the library. We sat in the section of the library where the early reader trade books were housed. I asked Marcus to choose a book of his interest from this early reader section with the plan I would read a page aloud and he would read the next page aloud and so on. My underlying belief was that if I could model the joy of reading and have Marcus experience success, I would get buy-in. But when it was Marcus’s turn, he struggled with every word. There was no way he could enjoy the story or even make sense of the story. After that first session, I realized how inadequately prepared I was to be an effective tutor for a struggling third grader.

Back on campus, I collected both “how to teach reading” books and high interest-low vocabulary trade books. I was determined to make our time together both fun and meaningful. It took a few sessions, but eventually Marcus began to enjoy our sessions and, according to Ms. B, look forward to my visits. By the end of our time together, Marcus, while advancing only inches in his reading, managed to write and illustrate an eight-page book.

Looking back, I am humbled by the trust that students like Marcus place in educators like me. I gave Marcus what I had to give—individual attention and positive regard. For schools to be successful with all students, one teacher per classroom is simply not enough. Without intensive remediation, how do the Marcuses of the world ever catch up?

Another observation—Ms. B persisted despite personal and professional challenges. Kids would come and go on her ever-changing class roster. There were so many children with so many profound problems. In addition to absences and transience, Ms. B, recently diagnosed with breast cancer, had to cope with her own chemo treatments. Through it all, students were cared for and taught.

More than ever, I am thoroughly convinced that character (what we in the teacher education business call dispositions) is the key ingredient in successful urban teaching. Ms. B’s perseverance stemmed from a sincere love of children, a strong work ethic, and a belief that teachers can and should make curriculum accessible to all learners. I now ask my to-be teachers: *How will you make a difference?* I listen to their answers and look for the next Ms. B among them.

## Harriet

Harriet, currently Chair of the Education Department, is a White, middle-aged female, a product of private schools and Ivy League universities, with seven years of teaching experience in an affluent New York suburb and 25 years in teacher education at Otterbein. A member of the 60s generation, she marched for civil rights in her youth and still wants to believe that the U.S. can become a more just, equitable country. Banking on the notion that education will help to “level the playing field,” Harriet has made an effort to stay actively engaged in urban schools by serving as a campus liaison for several partnership projects involving Columbus City Schools and the College, providing in-service workshops for Columbus teachers, and involving Otterbein students in service learning opportunities in city schools and

agencies. During one sabbatical, she was a participant-observer in three first-grade classrooms in a low-performing Columbus school. In an effort to fight against the deficit model that was pervasive in that particular building, she worked collaboratively with the children and teachers to develop literacy portfolios that showcase children's abilities and strengths through the use of authentic reading and writing assessments. Harriet's Story: Typical Might Not Be So Typical

I came to the urban teaching group believing that in order to be effective in urban schools, a candidate needed to be outside of the norm. I had been convinced by Martin Haberman (1996) that a "typical" teacher education candidate would fare poorly in an urban setting. These typical candidates, at Otterbein and elsewhere, are White females between the ages of 18 and 22 from suburban, middle class backgrounds. Excellent urban teaching candidates, on the other hand, are likely to be non-traditional students, often products of urban education, who can handle the emotional as well as the intellectual challenges that teachers face in schools that serve inner city children.

My field assignment was in a fourth-grade classroom. Lindsey \*\*\* was my teacher's name. I had no idea that I already knew her. In fact, Lindsey had been a student in my educational psychology class during her sophomore year at Otterbein. Why didn't I recognize her name? She was now married and had a new last name. When I realized that Lindsey was that Lindsey—the blonde, social young lady who seemed as focused on the young men in the class as on course content—I swallowed hard. Well, I thought, this will be an interesting ride.

I assumed that Lindsey had taken a position straight out of college in a Columbus school because it was her only job option. But she had graduated six years ago. Why was she still there? After all, typical candidates in urban schools burn out and leave, if not during their first year, certainly by their fifth.

I arrived that first day at about 1:00 p.m. We smiled wanly at one another. Clearly her

recollection of me was no more positive than mine of her. I indicated that I would just take a seat in the back of the room and that we could talk later after the children were dismissed at the end of the day. What I observed was a capable classroom manager who worked with 27 young adolescents but was able to key into the emotional and cognitive needs of each individual. Never raising her voice, Lindsey redirected a fidgety boy and stopped the social chit-chat between two girls without missing a beat. When a young lady straggled into class late and slumped in her seat, Lindsey gave her time to decompress and then moved over to her desk to whisper in her ear.

As I looked around the room, I could see a wealth of adolescent literature, samples of student writing, learning logs for content area subjects, math manipulatives, and bookshelves filled with social studies resource material. The fourth-grade teachers at the school had organized the school day in such a way that each teacher was responsible for reading/language arts and math; children changed teachers for social studies and science. Lindsey taught language arts and math in the morning and three sections of social studies in the afternoon.

We talked briefly at the end of that first visit. I shared my positive impressions of her management skills. Lindsey seemed to relax. She then, in a very businesslike manner, asked me to define my expectations for the term. I indicated that I was willing to do whatever would be good for her students and for her. My only request was that I be allowed to teach at least one whole-group lesson.

By my next visit, Lindsey knew exactly what she wanted me to do. She had a new student, Jay, who was painfully shy, passive, and far behind in writing and math who needed some special attention. Jay and I hit it off. He looked forward to our weekly sessions, as did I. Lindsey grew more and more comfortable telling her old professor what to do. I was assigned additional children to work with individually or in small groups each week.

We took time at the end of each day to talk about Jay and my other charges.

During these after-school conversations, Lindsey talked not only about her current classroom but also about her journey across the last six years. When I asked Lindsey why she stayed at the school, she immediately talked about her in-school network. In her first few years, Lindsey had the support of two other young teachers who had started with her. While one of the original threesome had left the school, the remaining two found a few other kindred spirits to add to their network. Together, these teachers not only helped one another with classroom crises but also created after-school book clubs and proficiency test tutoring groups. Without her support system, Lindsey feared that she would burn out.

Was Lindsey a typical graduate of a teacher education program? She was young, White, female, and middle class. She had attended suburban schools. What kept her in urban teaching? It was the school, the support network, and the families that made her stay. She had become part of the community. She knew parents, siblings, grandmothers, aunts, uncles, and cousins of her current students. She walked down the hallways and acknowledged her colleagues in a very personal manner. Lindsey may have come as an outsider, but, after six years, she had become an insider. In our last conversation, Lindsey ruminated about her future. *“I’ve thought about getting an administrator’s license, but then I think about taking a job as principal. I know that I wouldn’t get assigned to this school. I can’t see myself ever leaving this school.”*

## Reflections and Next Steps

A group of White Otterbein faculty members, guided and supported by an African-American colleague, set out to learn by doing. Our Urban Teaching Group was built on the notion that direct experience should inform practice. While we enjoyed reading about and discussing issues related to urban schools and culturally responsive teaching back on campus, the most significant learning

occurred when we entered those elementary classrooms. Our field assignments gave us the opportunity to identify our own misconceptions, to reconcile our understandings with current realities, and to appreciate first-hand what it feels like to work in someone else’s classroom.

So what did we learn? One important lesson learned was not to rush to judgment on a candidate’s suitability for urban teaching. We don’t accept as a “given” that traditional candidates are poor matches for city schools; instead, through self-study and structured inquiry, we let them draw their own conclusions. Readings such as *Holler if you hear me: The education of a teacher and his students* (Michie, 1999) provide specific examples of culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1997). Community mapping, now a routine part of field-based courses, foregrounds the interrelationship between school and neighborhood. In field assignments, candidates are generally placed in cohort groups and encouraged to create a support system that includes peers and mentor teachers. Through reading, participation, and reflection, candidates get a clearer picture of what it takes to be a successful urban teacher.

We also learned to avoid limiting urban youngsters by taking the tenets of culturally responsive pedagogy too literally. While Ladson-Billings (1997), Gay (2000), and other experts in the field encourage teachers to know, understand, and build on children’s own cultural experiences, it is important that we do not make assumptions about what children’s “cultures” are. Young learners’ cultures are represented not only in their families and neighborhoods, but also in their peer groups, the literature they read, and the media to which they are exposed. They must not be denied access to knowledge about the world beyond their neighborhoods because we assume that they have no connection to or interest in these worlds. In fact, we should encourage them to relish opportunities to read, discuss, and explore other cultures and traditions if materials and approaches make this knowledge accessible.

We reminded ourselves that urban youngsters are youngsters first and urban second. As is the case with all young children, they can experience the joy of discovery, are capable of higher order thinking, and enjoy solving “real world problems” that stretch them beyond the known. However, we recognized (and therefore need to point out to our pre-service teachers) that often children must move backwards in order to move forwards. Teachers need to provide “just in time” remediation without stigmatizing those learners in their classes who come with holes in their skill sets. In order to maintain that perfect balance of challenge and support, networking with colleagues and other adults in the building is a necessity.

We were sensitized to the fact that the tenets of culturally relevant classroom management (CRCM) are every bit as important as culturally relevant pedagogy. CRCM can be learned by teachers who do not share the cultural backgrounds of the youngsters in their classrooms, and we have an obligation to teach it to our pre-service students. While CRCM has a significant impact on student achievement in urban schools, perhaps more than intellectual capability, home environment, motivation, or socioeconomic status (Wang, Haertel & Walberg, 1993/1994), it is often a missing component in teacher preparation programs (Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke & Curran, 2004). Following up on a suggestion made by Villegas and Lucas (2002), we became more intentional about incorporating CRCM into our methods courses by using case studies, role-playing, and follow-up discussion. Candidates are regularly asked to examine their beliefs about appropriate teacher and student behavior and to think about how these beliefs might have to be tempered in order to meet the needs of diverse learners.

By connecting to classrooms, our Urban Teaching Group is better able to address issues that our candidates raise and incorporate a “real” perspective in our courses. For all of us, the benefits of the experience exceeded our expectations. Interaction among group members

encourages reflection, a key element in sustaining energy and idealism (Weiner, 2005), while keeping us humble. This humility will allow all of us to think deeply and to listen carefully as we continue to look for ways to prepare teachers for urban classrooms.

## References

- Applied Research Center (2000, May). *46 years after Brown v. Board of Education: Still separate, still unequal* (ARC Research Brief). Oakland, CA: Author.
- Banks, J., Cochran-Smith, M., Moll, L., Richert, A., Zeichner, K., LePage, P., Darling-Hammond, L., Duffy, H., & McDonald, M. (2005). Teaching diverse learners. In L. Darling-Hammond & J. Bransford (Eds.), *Preparing teachers for a changing world: What teachers should learn and be able to do* (pp. 232-274). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Clandinin, D.J. & Huber, J. (2002). Narrative inquiry: Toward understanding life's artistry. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 32(2), 161-169.
- Clandinin, D.J., Pushor, D., & Orr, A.M. (2007). Navigating sites for narrative inquiry. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 58(1), 21-35.
- Cochran-Smith, M. (2004). *Walking the road: Race, diversity, and social justice in teacher education*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Compton-Lilly, C. (2003). *Reading families: The literate lives of urban children*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Daniels, H. (2001). *Literature circles: Voice and choice in the student-centered classroom*. York, ME: Stenhouse.
- Delpit, L. (1995). *Other people's children: Cultural conflict in the classroom*. New York: New Press.
- Gallavan, N.P. (2000). Multicultural education at the academy: Teacher educators' challenges, conflicts and coping skills. *Equity and Excellence in Education*, 33(3), 5-11.

- Gay, G. (2000). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, and practice*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Gay, G. & Howard, T. (2000). Multicultural teacher education for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. *Teacher Educator*, 36(1), 1-16.
- Grant, C.A. & Gillette, M. (1987). The Holmes report and minorities in education. *Social Education*, 51, 517-521.
- Haberman, M. (1995). *Star teachers of children in poverty*. Indianapolis, In: Kappa Delta Pi.
- Haberman, M. (1996). Selecting and preparing culturally competent teachers for urban schools. In J. Sikula, T. Buttery, & E. Guyton (Eds.), *Handbook of research on teacher education* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., pp. 747-760). New York: Macmillan.
- Howard, G. (1999). *We can't teach what we don't know: White teachers, multiracial schools*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Keene, E.O. & Zimmerman, S. (1997). *Mosaic of thought: Teaching comprehension in a reader's workshop*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Kitano, M.K., Lewis, R., Lynch, E., & Graves, A. (1996). Teaching in a multicultural classroom: Teacher educators' perspectives. *Equity and Excellence in Education*, 29 (3), 70-77.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1997). *The dreamkeepers: Successful teachers of African-American children*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2001). *Crossing to Canaan: The journey of new teachers in diverse classrooms*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2005). Is the team all right? Diversity and teacher education. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 56(3), 229-234.
- Meier, D. (2002). *In schools we trust: Creating communities of learning in an era of testing and standardization*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Michie, G. (1999). *Holler if you hear me: The education of a teacher and his students*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Ringgold, F. (1999). *If a bus could talk: The story of Rosa Parks*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Schulte, A. (2005). Assuming my transformation: Transforming my assumptions. *Studying Teacher Education*, 1(1), 31-41.
- Sleeter, C.E. (2001). Preparing teachers for culturally diverse schools: Research and the overwhelming presence of whiteness. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 52(2), 94-106.
- Smith, R.K. (1989). *Chocolate fever*. NY: Putnam.
- Tindle, K., Leconte, P., Buchanan, L., & Taymans, J.M. (2005). Transition planning: Community mapping as a tool for teachers and students. *Research to Practice Brief*, 4(1), National Center on Secondary Education and Transition Institute on Community Integration. Retrieved June 1, 2007, from <http://www.ncset.org/publications/viewdesc.asp?id=2128>.
- Villegas, A.M. & Lucas, T. (2002). Preparing culturally responsive teachers: Rethinking the curriculum. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 53(1), 20-32.
- Weiner, L. (2005). *Urban teaching: The essentials*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Wang, M.C., Haertel, G.D., & Walberg, H.G. (1993/1994). What helps students learn? *Educational Leadership*, 51(4), 74-79.
- Weiner, L. (2006). *Urban teaching: The essentials*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Weinstein, C.S., Tomlinson-Clarke, S., & Curran, M. (2004). Toward a conception of culturally responsive classroom management. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 55(1), 25-38.
- Zumwalt, K. & Craig, E. (2005). Teachers' characteristics: Research on the demographic profile. In M. Cochran-Smith & K.M. Zeichner (Eds.),

Studying teacher education: The report of the AERA panel on research and teacher education (pp. 69-110). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.