

## Chapter 13

# Dismantling Eurocratic Practices in Teacher Education: A Preservice Program Focused on Culturally Relevant, Humanizing, and Decolonizing Pedagogies

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### ABSTRACT

*This chapter provides a profile of an urban education collective that fosters relationships among preservice teachers, university faculty, and a local school district. The partnership supports preservice and in-service teachers serving marginalized communities using culturally relevant, humanizing, and decolonizing pedagogies. Drawing from decolonizing and humanizing theoretical and pedagogical frameworks, the collective highlights equity, asset-based, and anti-racist teachings. Insights gained from this initiative and recommendations for navigating challenges in equity work are presented. Implications for teacher education programs and future research goals are provided.*

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-6249-8.ch013

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Nationally, preservice teachers are entering the field of education with little to no awareness of issues of racism, xenophobia, heteronormativity, ableism, and gender bias (King, 2005; Sleeter, 2001; Swartz, 2005) that continue to dominate pedagogy, policy, and practice in educational institutions. In addition, they join a workforce that has had little opportunity (through their own teacher education programs or inservice professional development) to understand the ongoing effects of colonialism on curriculum, theory, and instruction (Asante, 2017; Au, Brown & Calderon, 2016). This means that Eurocratic (King & Swartz, 2016) curricula, policies, and practices continue to dominate in most educational settings rather than *normalizing* the community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) -- the strengths, accomplishments, values, and resources -- of cultural and racial communities that continue to be marginalized, misrepresented, or invisible in schools and in teacher education programs (Baines, Tisdale, & Long, 2018; Paris & Alim, 2017). Further, it is well documented that children of Color are consistently over-referred to special education (Codrington & Fairchild, 2013), under-referred to gifted programs (Ford, 2013), and inequitably disciplined (U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights, 2014) and assessed (Rosner, 2002). As a result, preservice teachers, who may experience a class here or a professor there in their university programs focusing on equity issues or assets-based pedagogies, rarely have the knowledge, experience, confidence, or support necessary to sustain equity ideologies once they enter the teaching profession and we continue to lose students most marginalized in schools to an inequitable pedagogical status quo.

As university faculty, we brought these concerns to the development of an Urban Education Collective which encompasses five schools, their administrators and teachers; five university faculty; and a two-year Urban Education cohort of preservice teachers majoring in early childhood education. The work focuses on issues of equity in early childhood (grades PreK - Grade 3) pedagogy, practice, and policy. Through the work, teachers, preservice teachers, and university faculty engage together in investigating how Eurocratic practice not only disempowers communities and disenfranchises children who are marginalized, but how it communicates the centrality of Whiteness to every student (King & Swartz, 2016). We worked to develop a cohort experience for preservice teachers and a professional development experience for practicing teachers that would help both groups of educators learn realities of inequity as well as **humanizing, decolonizing, and culturally relevant pedagogical strategies** (Ladson-Billings, 2014, 2017) for change.

The school district in which the Collective takes place is an urban district of about 23,000 students. Seventy-three percent of the students are African American, 19% are European American, and 8% are listed by the school district as "other." A total of 72% of the students receive free/reduced-price lunch. The university's student demographics are approximately 69% European American, 15% African American, 4% Latinx, 3% two or more races, 2% Asian, and 4% of the students did not respond when asked by the university to self-identify according to the categories provided. Three of university professors involved in this collective are African American and two are European American. The 25 university students in the urban cohort involved in this work included five African American students, one Latina student and 19 European American students.

Within and across these contexts, the Urban Education Collective seeks to build a shared knowledge base and a collaborative network to support teachers and preservice teachers in better addressing the strengths and needs of young children. The authors of this chapter are the university faculty engaged

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in the work. We work toward sustainable pedagogical transformation and document our processes and practices to better understand how and if the development of a network of shared knowledge acts to encourage and sustain the abilities and convictions of student teachers and practicing teachers to dismantle and replace unjust practices. In this chapter, we describe the theoretical frame that guides us as we engage in the work of the Urban Education Collective and the Urban Education Cohort. The insights and implications reported in this chapter are preliminary and represent in process work and were gained through analysis of our first two years of operation.

### **Theoretical Framework**

According to Bell (2007),

*social justice involves social actors who have a sense of their own agency as well as a sense of social responsibility toward and with others, their society and the broader world in which we live. (p. 2.)*

This chapter is theoretically and pedagogically grounded in a social justice framework, which examines how oppression and privilege perpetuate systems of power (Freire, 1970). The Urban Education Collective is situated in a school of thought that examines marginalized, mistreated, and mistaught early childhood education students through a humanizing and critical lens. Since, theory informs practice we use social justice as a framework to guide our data analysis and teaching practices in the urban cohort.

In order for students to strive towards a social responsibility for equitable teaching, our framework is dedicated to first disrupting years of distorted and incomplete teachings. Our pre-service teachers and the teachers with whom we work are inundated with Whiteness in their education about history, science, authors, mathematicians, explorers, inventors, and world leaders. The presentation of anything non-Eurocentric was often learned as an ‘other’, less than, or barbaric. Asante refers to this as *White esteem curriculum* (1992, p. 20). The process of disrupting this learning at times creates discomfort among our preservice teachers, the majority of whom are White, female, monolingual, and middle class. However, university faculty continues to support them in recovering historical content that “re-members” or re-connects knowledge of the past that has been silenced (King & Swartz, 2014). All coursework, social gatherings, and learning engagements are purposeful and used to deepen preservice teachers’ insights and knowledge about equity pedagogies. The work is anchored in faculty convictions about social justice as directly linked to the concept of humanization (Kinloch & Dixon, 2018) recognizing that inequitable practices dehumanize students of color, students from low-income households, and LGBTQIA students. apply social justice as a theory to drive the process and as practice to propel us to the goal of building more equitable educational institutions.

Specifically, we anchor our work in pedagogies that are decolonizing (Battiste, 2013), humanizing (Freire, 1970), culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1995) and culturally sustaining (Paris & Alim, 2017). Similar to Baines, Tisdale, and Long (2018) and Wynter-Hoyte, Braden, Rodriguez, and Thornton (2017), we seek to disrupt, dismantle, and replace deficit views that have been cultivated in colonized curriculum. We support teachers in acknowledging and appreciating the humanity of all students by building understandings that students’ language (Boutte, 2016), literacies (Gregory, Long, & Volk, 2004), and funds of knowledge (Gonzalez, Moll & Amanti, 2005) are relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1995 and must be sustained (Paris & Alim, 2017) through equitable teachings.

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### **The Urban Education Collective**

From the first days of our thinking about an Urban Education Cohort, we (cohort faculty) knew that a part of the success of the model would depend on the schools where our students would be placed for practica and internships. In our program, students are engaged in schools from their sophomore year with longer internships in the senior year. Past experiences demonstrated that many of the insights about inequities and socially just teaching that our students took with them were often contradicted by teachers in their internship placements. This was not through the fault of the teachers. Most of them had not had opportunities for professional learning that focused on humanizing or culturally relevant pedagogies and had little understanding about ongoing presence of Eurocentric pedagogies or the need to decolonize practices. Their contradictions often came in the form of deficit language and dispositions about children and families of Color, those who are adding Standardized English to their linguistic repertoires, and children from households where income was low.

However, to paraphrase Maya Angelou, “when you know better you do better,” so we began working with personnel in a local, urban school district to build relationships with a small group of schools which ultimately became known as the Urban Education Collective. Our agreement with the schools and the school system was that we would provide professional learning for teachers interested in serving as coaching/cooperating teachers for our student teachers. The goal was to create a collective across schools and with the university to build knowledge and impact practice together.

With five public school partners, five full time faculty members, and 25 undergraduates, the Urban Education Collective began to take shape. We designed a professional learning model to help educators address issues of individual, institutional, and pedagogical inequity by helping classroom teachers, administrators, and university students recognize and teach against those realities. We felt a strong commitment to supporting our undergraduates in teaching students most often marginalized and disenfranchised in schools as well as children representing dominant groups (White, middle class, Christian, heterosexual). We hoped that the Urban Collective would serve school children by deepening teacher and preservice teacher knowledge and ability to effectively teach students who have historically been underserved in schools as well as students from dominant cultural and linguistic groups who can easily develop inflated views of their place in the world (Baines, Tisdale, & Long, 2018; Nieto, 2010).

We worked to organize our goals around the school district’s strategic plan which calls *for teaching that transforms lives, collaborates with an engaged community, and empowers all students to achieve their potential in safe, caring, academically challenging learning environments to develop productive citizens for a changing world*. By foregrounding the work in these goals all stakeholders (district personnel, university professors, and preservice teachers) are able to strongly align the goals of the schools and university. The overarching objectives for the Urban Collective schools were jointly constructed by district administrators, school-based educators and university professors include a commitment to:

- Children’s academic growth resulting from deepened teacher/preservice teacher knowledge and ability to effectively teach in urban settings.
- Professional development tailored to each school’s needs and conducted *in schools and regularly over time* as opposed to singular workshops or disconnected PD; facilitated by USC professors who consult nationally and internationally, but *who understand and are particularly committed to better educational outcomes in South Carolina*.

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- Guidance to connect practices to district/state standards and teacher evaluation systems including *Read to Succeed* competencies, the *SC College and Career Readiness Standards*, and recently adopted *NIET SC* teacher evaluation system.
- A variety of delivery methods to meet the needs and schedules of teachers: after-school teacher study groups in individual schools, all-day PD sessions with all four schools together, and sessions in which all schools and the USC students come together for Urban Collective-wide conferences.
- Opportunities to address the curricular opportunity gap faced by children who have long been academically marginalized thereby creating local and national models of excellence.
- Opportunities for teachers to serve as coaching teachers for Urban Education students during their practicum and Internship experiences.
- Possibilities for graduate course work tailored to needs of teachers in the Collective.
- Opportunities for interactions with national collaboratives also committed to excellence in teaching in diverse communities and to highlight the schools at national conferences.

To reach these goals teachers are offered clear defined support from the faculty members. For each school, one professor serves as the school's university partner/consultant taking responsibility for ensuring that the professional learning for that school is regular and systematic, getting to know the school and its teachers, children, and community. Teachers also have opportunities to learn from the expertise of the other Urban Cohort professors through in-services that brings all four schools together. The tools being used to accomplish this ongoing, consistent, onsite scaffolding of teachers and preservice teachers include:

- Full and half-day in-service workshops (during the school year and in the summer)
- Biweekly professional study groups tailored to the needs of each school
- Onsite support for teachers in these classrooms
- Tailored sessions at local conferences

These components are developed in collaboration with each school's administrators and teachers, engaging them in learning about literacy, mathematics, science, and social studies depending on the needs of the school. Content is grounded in principles of culturally relevant, humanizing, and decolonizing pedagogies long documented as vital to the success of diverse learners. The content is typically delivered in 60-minute after school sessions (or their equivalent - on some occasions, this may be in the multi-hour sessions, in-class demonstrations and/or grade level sessions), three full day sessions (5 hours each, one per semester), and two-to-three full days in the summer. All of these professional development sessions provide continued education credit towards recertification and, in the state of South Carolina, part of the required *Read to Succeed* certification.

Joint sessions are offered when the four schools and pre-service teachers come together to share and deepen learning. Several of the preservice teachers' courses are taught on site at Urban Education Collective schools providing additional opportunities for inservice and preservice teachers to interact. An Urban Collective Facebook site provides a space where web links, instructional video clips, articles, questions and responses are posted by teachers, preservice teachers and instructors.

Each of these professional learning elements use a strong demonstration-and-engagement, theory-to-practice model meaning that the university faculty regularly present theoretical concepts (and research), provide examples of theory in practice, and engage and support teachers in generating, trying out, and evaluating the impact (and potential need for revision) of their work. Online support includes viewing

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videos of classroom practices and other national experts, responding to professional literature, sharing practices and receiving feedback.

The elements and competencies outlined above are simultaneously assessed through the following measures.

- **Lesson Plans:** Teachers develop, share, implement, and evaluate plans verbalizing how those plans support the major theories and research explored through the professional development sessions.
- **Documentation of Teaching:** Teachers collect data about the implementation of their lesson plans to share during professional development including: photos, children's work, video clips of children at work, interviews with children to assess engagement, and achievement data according to measures learned through professional development as well as those required by the district and in their schools.
- **Teacher Questionnaire:** Teachers respond to regular questionnaires and reflection queries prepared by university faculty to assess their understanding of key concepts as well as questions to assess further professional needs.
- **Classroom Collaboration:** University faculty spend time in classrooms collaboratively (with teachers) teaching together and assessing the implementation of new practices or revisions to existing practices. These collaborations also inform further professional development sessions in terms of teacher need.
- **Responses to Online Resources and Professional Reading:** Teachers regularly respond either online, as written reflection during professional development or verbally during class visits and grade level meetings, sharing specific take-aways or learning gained from their engagement with online resources and professional reading.
- **Using Learning to Plan:** During summer sessions teachers use the year's learning to develop plans for teaching as well as a classroom design (layout, culturally relevant and linguistically diverse and supportive texts and other materials)
- **Growth Reflections:** Teachers reflect regularly about their own growth particularly in terms of overturned deficit models, building belief in every child and family, and understanding how recognizing prior assumptions and biases impacts more equitable teaching.

The vision is to continue this collective as an ongoing program of professional learning and collaboration as we build long-term relationships with schools as new cohorts of Early Childhood students enter the program. In each successive year, the plan is for university faculty, preservice teachers, and teachers to engage family and community members in the collaboration as they continue to fine tune a model which includes more equitable, humanizing, and culturally relevant pedagogies.

### **The Urban Education Cohort**

The Urban Education Cohort is typically made up of 25-28 undergraduate majors in early childhood education. During the students' sophomore orientation, faculty members explain that the purpose of the cohort is to focus on issues of educational equity in terms of issues such as race, class, language, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identification, and religion. We describe curricula that uncover educational inequities and strategies for taking part in pedagogical and institutional transformation. Soon after the

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sophomore orientation meeting, we call a special meeting for all students who have expressed interest in the Urban Education Cohort to orient them to the cohort and the courses within it. We explain fundamental elements of the cohort experience:

- The focus on humanizing, culturally relevant, and anti-colonial practices.
- Understanding how to teach literacy, mathematics, science, and social studies grounded in principles of culturally relevant pedagogy and why that matters.
- Courses in child development, play, classroom community and family involvement also grounded in identifying and countering exclusionary practices.
- Out-of-class experiences focused on issues of social justice such as films, speakers, and being involved in civil acts that challenge unjust conditions or events.

The courses taken by students in the Urban Education Cohort are the same as those taken by every other cohort. The difference is the intensity with which each course is undergirded by the issues and purposes at the forefront of the Urban Education Cohort purposes. The courses taught by Urban Education Cohort faculty typically include:

- Culturally Relevant Pedagogy
- Family Dynamics
- Community of Learners
- Linguistic Pluralism Across the Content Areas
- Child Development in the Primary Grades
- Teaching Reading in Early Childhood Education
- Teaching Writing in Early Childhood Education
- Teaching Social Studies in Early Childhood Education
- Internship Seminar

Some students in the Urban Education Cohort are also members REACH (Race, Equity, and Advocacy in Childhood Education) which is a student organization focusing on issues of race and racism in schooling and society. The organization meets evenings every other week where discussions emanate from local and national events, invited speakers, and video clips.

As professors who teach in the Urban Education Cohort, we bring a collective history of teaching, research, and publication in the fields of educational equity, culturally relevant teaching, critical race theory, and humanizing and decolonizing education. We are a collective within ourselves who regularly share readings, present together at conferences, and support each other in thinking through complex pedagogical and institutional issues. In addition, each faculty member serves within larger national and international networks of social justice educators bringing their experience to those bodies while learning from them and bringing new insights back to the collective.

### **Insights**

Our examination of data from the first two-year Urban Education Collective and Cohort experience leads to insights that inform our ongoing work to build the program and that we offer for other teacher

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educators embarking on the same process. Below we discuss some of the insights that we have gained about successes and challenges.

### **Successes**

The successes of the Urban Collective (which is now completing its second year) already seem impressive and exciting enough for us to persevere in deepening the impact and strengthening sites of challenge. We note successes among: (a) preservice teachers; (b) classroom teachers, and; (c) university faculty.

### **Preservice Teacher Growth**

The growth of the preservice teachers who self-selected into the Urban Cohort has been exciting to watch. For example, one student's response when asked to name one experience that she remembered as influential captures the feelings of many. She explained, "I can't pick a course or experience that didn't make me feel brand new and special." In the sections below, we offer a range of responses to the UC experience as it impacted students personally and professionally in a variety of ways.

#### **"It Has Changed My Life and Opened My Mind"**

Repeatedly, students told us about how the Urban Education Cohort had changed their lives. The majority of our students come from towns and cities around the state, both rural and urban. Some of the students whose quotes are provided below describe their upbringing as segregated, others were not but the sentiments are similar:

*The Urban Cohort has changed my life. I was brought up in a small, White community not knowing the impact and beauty of culture in our society. It has opened my heart in so many ways with each class and professor. I am able to go into my first classroom this fall and find inclusion through culture and the relevance of my students' backgrounds.*

*I have learned to grow through others and to be able to listen to them and reflect that in the early childhood classroom.*

*I feel as if I came into the college with a very narrow, blinded view of life. I was so oblivious to all the hurt but also the beauty that was around me. The Urban Cohort broadened my perspective and helped me see the rich culture that is all around me.*

*The Urban Cohort helped shape my views on race and racial issues.*

*Because of the training and learning that I received in the urban cohort, I have a new set of eyes. I can see systemic racism and its effect on the oppressed more clearly. Also, I can see the correlation between our education system and systemic racism.*

These quotes highlight the impact on students' personal and professional growth as they critically self-reflect on their segregated living experiences and address issues of systematic racism, which is



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often challenging for pre-service teachers. Subsequently, students were able to juxtapose personal K-12 schooling experiences with institutional racism in education.

#### **“I Learned About My Own Biases”**

Over and over *and over* students told us about how their Urban Cohort experience not only broadened their worlds but helped them identify their own embedded biases, confront those biases, and work toward dismantling them. As one student expressed, essential to this was the “it’s-okay-to-be-uncomfortable” environment we tried to create in each class. She wrote that, initially she felt challenged to open up and worried that she would say the wrong thing but, “the professors made it so that I could be myself, unjudged and so I blossomed daily.” Students felt that they learned content knowledge and instructional strategies but that, beyond that and foundational to that, they learned about themselves and the biases they did not realize they held. A few of many testimonials about bias provide a glimpse into the impact of a focus on self-examination had on the cohort:

*I have realized that I have biases and learned how to push those away to create an appreciative, supportive environment for all children who enter my classroom.*

*Personally, [the UC] has affected me being more open-minded. Coming from a small town . . . I had biases I didn’t even know I had.*

*The Urban Cohort has taught me a lot about myself. I have learned about my personal bias and micro-aggressions and throughout the courses was able to reconstruct my ways of thinking.*

*The UC opened my eyes to a variety of different cultures that I had never had the experience of learning or talking about. I learned about biases and become (SIC) aware of my own biases.*

*Personally, I didn’t realize the biases that I already carried with me when I entered the Urban Cohort . . . I’ve become more aware of my own microaggressions and have been more intent with my own words and actions.*

The Urban Cohort Initiative provided a safe space for pre-service teachers to reflect and share how they were socialized in society and how this fostered the development of unconscious biases. This is another daunting process for pre-service teachers to engage in yet they acknowledged their discomfort and sustained through the difficult conversations and learning activities.

#### **“I Gained Courage and Learned to Advocate for Children”**

Perhaps one of the strongest outcomes was the development of the preservice teachers’ ability, courage, and sense of purpose in advocating for students most often marginalized, misperceived, and oppressed in schools. They learned together about “awareness and ways to advocate for students.” This was evidenced repeatedly in their outcome interviews with comments such as:

*I now advocate for fellow students and women like myself to become strong and able to speak up.*

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*The Urban Cohort has made me so strong.*

*I have found my voice through the Urban Cohort and I am much more comfortable talking about and advocating for children of Color.*

*When talking to other early childhood students, they are lost in the sense of inclusion and culturally relevant pedagogy. I was taught to be strong. Be bold. Be more than simply going into a classroom and teaching.*

*[My] internship stuck out to me because I feel like it showed me that there is a strong need for culturally relevant teachers who really care about their students. It is important that they not only care about them, but that they advocate for them.*

*The urban cohort gave me the tools that I needed to advocate for my students through the countless academic articles and textbooks that I have read. Therefore, I have documentation and research that I can use to support or disprove certain educational practices.*

Most important, students learn how to take course content to inform and inspire advocacy. They accept the call to go beyond course learning engagements and become agents of change.

**“I Loved Being With Like-Minded Peers”**

For many of the students, being a part of a cohort that was together through most of their course work in their junior and senior years was an important and strong element of their undergraduate experience. They formed bonds that they feel they will carry into their professional life. As one student said, “I can’t get over how tight we feel as a cohort.” This closeness helped them deepen their knowledge and build courage. Another student explained the importance of being with peers who were developing the same dispositions: “Personally, the Urban Cohort linked me with a group of people who have the same mindset [so] we were able to learn together and grow together.” Yet another student shared, “The Urban Cohort has given me a family of scholars with like ways of thinking.”

It was crucial for students to have self-selected in the Urban Cohort with others who want to explore issues of racism and equity. This provided a non-combative space for students as well as instructors to stand in solidarity while engaging in anti-racist work.

**“There Is Too Much Knowledge [for Me] to Describe”**

Many elements of the Urban Education Cohort experience were shared by students as being particularly influential. Those elements often occurred when students connected university course learning with the Urban Cohort emphasis on self-reflection and experiences in early childhood classrooms. For example, one student drew on her class with Dr. Nathaniel Bryan and learning about the school-to-prison pipeline she recounted an experience in a PreK (four-year-olds) internship:

*An experience I will always think about is when I realized the truth behind the school-to-prison pipeline. I had one student who was an African American male. Anything he did was called out and many times*

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*he was sent off the rug [away from class gathering time] for doing the exact same thing other students were doing. One day at recess, the student's turn on the bicycle was over so I asked him to give the next student a turn. He was very upset and I saw him go over to stand by the wall, breathing deeply. When I turned around, he was running at me and jumped on me and punched me in the throat. I brought him over to the wall and said 'I understand you're upset but you cannot hit me, that hurts me.'" By this time, the teacher walked over, grabbed his hand, and took him to the office for the third time that week. I never saw that four-year-old again because they suspended him for three days and his mother withdrew him from school. Suspend a four-year-old? My heart broke. I was so emotional and vowed never to feed into the awful school-to-prison pipeline. I can only hope that student finds a way to beat the systemic racism in schools.*

Another student wrote about how her ability to take learning from Urban Cohort classes into the early childhood classroom allowed her to impact children typically marginalized in schools:

*At my field placement, I tried my best to use the strategies that they Urban Cohort gave me to make my classroom inclusive and to make my students feel loved and cared about. At the end of the semester, one of my students wrote me a note that said, 'Thank you for letting me be my true self.' He affirmed that I had made some sort of impact on him and that he felt cared for.*

These journal entries embody the Urban Cohort's strong impact on teaching. The first student was able to connect course content with the school-to-prison pipeline. She identified how teachers' disciplinary reactions and school suspensions are directly correlated with pushing students of color into penitentiaries. The second student described ethic of care with students and the importance of holistically valuing young learners. Both of these entries, exemplify how the knowledge gained empowered students and impacted their dispositions toward students of color.

#### **"It Must Continue"**

Students were adamant that the Urban Cohort should continue. They felt this not only from their course work but from experiences in public schools which helped them understand the need for a challenge to the Eurocratic status quo (King & Swartz, 2016). Their words about continuing the focus on anti-bias, anti-racist, decolonizing teaching using a cohort model came through loudly and clearly:

*I hope this continues through USC's future . . . I cannot express my gratitude for the love and the experiences I have had. I want to relive your teachings in my classroom.*

*The Urban Cohort should live forever! I'd be happy to speak on behalf of our cohort and tell anyone why this NEEDS to be a part of the school of education for years to come.*

*While I have always had a heart for kids, I was still so far removed from the heart of teaching. It is so much more than the content and I feel much more prepared to embrace the beautifully diverse students who will walk into my classroom. I can't wait to be their home away from home.*

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*The urban cohort should continue to ensure that future students get the education they truly deserve. The current education system is not made for all students' success. Right now, students of color or oppressed groups are being negatively impacted by our education system because it is not built for them. The urban cohort prepares future teachers with this reality. It teaches future teachers how to fight against this system in and outside of the classroom. Without the urban cohort, I would have never learned about culturally relevant practices to use in the classroom. I would not have faced my personal biases, and how they can potentially affect my students and my teaching. The urban cohort gave me the tools that I needed to be an effective teacher for all students. I cannot imagine future college of education students not receiving the knowledge, support from professors, and training that I received through the urban cohort.*

These data points affirm the need for the Urban Cohort to maintain this work in social justice and equity. Students characterize their learning experiences as life changing by providing multiple ways to teach from a culturally relevant and sociocritical approach.

### **Classroom Teacher Growth**

The growth in teacher knowledge and their excitement for pedagogical transformation is also exciting to see. The introduction of African American Language (AAL), for example, as a structured, historically-based, linguistically-recognized language (Boutte, 2016) was eye-opening for many teachers. In some cases, their attitudes toward languages altered significantly. They moved from “correcting” students’ English use to teaching students that the language they brought from home was a legitimate language with structure and history. They taught lessons to children from kindergarten to third grade about the term bilingualism and West African roots of AAL. They taught the history of how languages change and grow and AAL as anchored in a past that reflects People who made foundational contributions to the world’s knowledge. In this way, they began countering Eurocratic notions of history that typically marginalize, inaccurately portray, or suppress normalized inclusion of those contributions. They taught lessons in contrastive analysis using children’s literature to demonstrate the literary use of AAL and taught each student how to translate from AAL to standardized English and back again. As a result, some of the teachers moved from thinking of AAL as bad or incorrect English to teaching students the art and skill of linguistic translation across languages. One teacher in particular reported that children who had rarely ventured to participate verbally in class became far more verbal once they recognized that they were not speaking poorly or incorrectly but they there were in fact bilingual and speaking a legitimate language.

After one professional development session on AAL with Dr. Gloria Boutte, a first-grade teacher commented, “So what I am learning is that it is not the students’ language that is the problem, but how I have been seeing it.” Several teachers also shared how they grew up speaking AAL and had been taught in schools that there was something wrong with their language.

In addition to language, teachers were able to acknowledge how they were indoctrinated through a colonial curriculum and replicated these same practices in their classrooms. During a professional learning session, teachers were instructed to Envision a Different World (Boutte, 2016, Box 2.1). This activity prompted teachers to fill in the blank with a list of nouns: What if all the \_\_\_\_\_ were African American? Some of the nouns included Presidents of the US, teachers, doctors, greeting cards, TV shows, colleges, faces on currency, members of the Senate, and police officers. One African-American female teacher confessed to the group that she was having difficulty with this activity, “I just can’t picture it. This is hard and it makes me emotional that my mind won’t let me do this. All my life I have been inundated

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with Whiteness.” Her voice began to tremble. Another teacher, Ms. Brown, poised a series of powerful questions to the group, “If we can’t imagine this as adults then what are our kids seeing? What kind of deficits do the kids see with their own race and culture?” As the facilitator of the session, I then asked, “When we start teaching African American history where do you start? Do you start with Blacks being enslaved or them being royalty before they were forced to the United States?” Another African-American female teacher responded, “That’s not in our textbooks, that’s why we don’t teach it, right?” Ms. Brown challenged her colleagues to think about how different our viewpoints and teaching would be if Africans came to this country with all their culture, their languages were not stripped from them. Where would we be today? How would we see our students? And how would they see themselves?”

These types of engagements provide a space for teachers to confront their Eurocentric ideologies. Teachers critique their own deficit thinking on language and begin to explore how language is directly tied to identity; so, when they demand students to speak correct, they are sending internal messages to students that their way of being is wrong and incompetent. The second data point reveals how emotional yet important this process is. The teacher discovers how disheartening it is that she cannot imagine African Americans as the racial group which is empowered and dominant. This self-reflection led to other teachers evaluating the colonized curriculum and the effect this has on students of color. In essence, if this activity is difficult for adults to engage in imagine how young learners are overtly inundated by White and oppressive curriculum.

### **University Faculty Growth**

The Urban Education Collective serves as a place of growth for university faculty as well as for teachers and preservice teachers. We continue to “up our game” as we are motivated to read further in the field of critical race, culturally sustaining, humanizing, and anti-colonial pedagogies. In conjunction with the larger group of Early Childhood faculty, we have been doing a book study of *Educating African American Students: And how are the children?* (Boutte, 2016). We continuously share readings among each other and post web links and video clips on our shared Urban Cohort faculty FB page.

Through our own networks of support within and beyond our university, we learn with colleagues across the country who are committed to the work of justice and equity in a racialized society. Each interaction with teachers and preservice teachers and the opportunity to spend time learning, planning, and teaching together with teachers and children in classrooms and teaching university courses onsite in schools deepens our learning and our commitment to seeking deeper knowledge. Through this learning, as we expect from teachers and preservice teachers, we commit to consistently examining our own embedded biases, particularly the White educators among us as we learn by listening and gain courage and confidence by continuing to commit to the work.

### **Deepening Understandings Through REACH**

A powerful offshoot from the Urban Education Cohort is a student organization called REACH which stands for Race, Equity, and Advocacy in Childhood Education. The organization was envisioned by six university faculty members (most of whom are listed as authors of this chapter) and an initial group of students. While REACH is open to all students, it is important to note that most of its members are Urban Cohort students. REACH members meet bimonthly and together examine issues in a racialized society and educational system as well as their roles in affecting change within and beyond those systems.

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National speakers are brought into meetings virtually such as Ronda Bullock who facilitates anti-racism summer programs for kindergartners and their families in Durham, North Carolina, Dr. Erin Miller, who shared her research about ways that White children learn White supremacy from an early age, and Dr. Jamila Lyiscott who shared the need for and forms of activism within and beyond educational spaces. Local guest speakers are also invited to REACH meetings including members of the local chapter of the #BlackLivesMatter movement who engaged the students in better understanding issues of racism locally and globally and strategies for engaged activism, and a university ad hoc student group organized to respond to racist actions in local student-patronized bars.

REACH faculty sponsors also present to the students: Dr. Nathaniel Bryan shared his work focusing on White privilege and microaggressions against Black male professors in the academy, Dr. Eliza Braden shared her research in bilingual education and diversity in children's literature, Dr. Kamania Wynter-Hoyte spoke about the importance of a focus on race, and Dr. Susi Long spoke about the colonization of society and curriculum. REACH members read texts such as Ta-Nehisi Coates' *Between the World and Me* and James Baldwin's *Fire Next Time*. Student and faculty representatives from the group presented their work at the 2016 National Council of Teachers of English national convention and at the "Let's Talk About Race" conference at North Carolina Central University in 2018. Continuing to build the network described in the introduction to this chapter, the intent is that REACH graduates will continue to meet with the incoming REACH members as they move into their first teaching positions. Through REACH students have gained confidence in their abilities to bring voice to their convictions and have done so by meeting with the Dean of the College of Education in addition to their professional presentations. During the meeting, they voiced concerns about micro- and macroaggressions in their college experience such as their peers sometimes negative treatment of Black professors in contrast to White professors teaching the same content; Black students being overlooked in class; and their feelings about the need for the REACH and Urban Education Cohort experiences for all students.

### **Issues and Challenges**

While successes have been many we have also experienced challenges that we work together to negotiate. A few of those challenges including overextended teachers, sustaining professional development in schools, and issues surrounding the PRAXIS Core Academic Skills for Educators standardized test are described in the sections that follow.

#### **Overextended Teachers**

The local school district recognizes that teachers are often burdened by too many programs that they are required to address and they are working to streamline their approach to professional development by creating more choice for teachers in terms of the focus they want to follow. We recognized this as it was often a challenge for us as we worked to fit our professional development sessions into teachers' busy lives. In several ways, we worked to overcome this challenge: (a) by limiting after school sessions and extending time we spent working with teachers in classrooms; (b) by engaging in professional development during grade level meetings, (c) by conducting full day series of summer sessions; and (d) by focusing on pacing guides and standards that teachers were using.

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### Sustaining Professional Learning in Schools

Even in circumstances like the one we have described in which we had strong district-level support, engaged faculty, and highly motivated university students, we acknowledge that it is difficult to sustain professional development. One realistic consideration is the associated costs for professional development. In order to pay faculty to conduct bi-weekly professional development sessions over a two-year period (our commitment), the four schools had to commit some of their funds beyond the district's contribution to do so. While schools, districts, P-3 educators, and faculty are committed to increasing the academic and social success of students who have been marginalized, it can be difficult to find funding to do so. In our case, the district found ways to sustain the professional development, but many districts have competing priorities and will need support in thinking creatively about use of funding to make this kind of work possible.

Another challenge is incorporating sustained professional development in settings where teachers are committed to a wide range of obligations. They often feel pulled in many directions. One way we are working to negotiate this challenge is by working to frame our work with teachers as the groundwork in which every other aspect of their teaching is embedded. For example, teachers in our state are required to take the equivalent of four courses in the area of reading instruction. We developed a proposal that was approved by the state department of education to deliver content for one of those courses within our professional development.

### PRAXIS (Core Academic Skills for Educators)

As is an issue in universities across the country, PRAXIS Core, the test approved by the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) as a measure of academic proficiency (ETS, 2018) is a gatekeeper that puts up roadblocks for some of our students, particularly students of Color. Recognizing that standardized testing was intentionally developed to maintain a White elite (Singer, 2016), students must confront systemic issues (e.g., mandated passing score to be admitted into professional programs) as well as individual issues (e.g., test anxiety, irrelevant content, language discrimination, and financial difficulties). Because one of the goals of the Urban Education Cohort is to diversify the teaching force, we also do everything we can to ensure that students entering the program have every opportunity for support in passing gatekeepers like the PRAXIS Core. We know that, many students of Color have come from P-12 experiences where their community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) was rarely appreciated or activated, thus large segments of their knowledge base are invisibilized by curriculum, testing, and teacher disposition. This occurs when preservice teachers may not recognize ability and expertise beyond dominant cultural definitions. This means that many students of Color come to us having experienced P-12 schooling where expectations were low for them and teaching was consequently less effective than it was for their White peer (Gershenson, Hold, & Papageorge, 2016) and, therefore, less success on the already biased - Whitecentric - standardized tests.

Recognizing that these realities are one reason for the Whiteification of the teaching force and of our teacher education program, we have been working within our department to identify the most effective PRAXIS support programs/strategies and are currently piloting a model to provide systemic PRAXIS support for every preservice teacher in need of it. Hand-in-hand with finding this kind of support and institutionalizing it is working with staff and faculty to identify bias in areas such as student advisement and Praxis support policies to find real expertise in testing support. This means being alert to assumptions

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that may be made about students' potential and effort which only perpetuates the experiences many of them have had in P-12 education. As Urban Cohort faculty, we have intervened to ensure that students are supporting knowing that they are more than capable of being effective teachers.

## **Implications for Teacher Education Programs**

We offer four implications for other teacher education programs that are interested in Advancing their equity emphasis: (1) ENSURE that equity is mission-critical to your Program; (2) Seek school administrators who will commit to a focus on equity; (3) engage internship supervisor, and; (4) recognize deflections to equity work and reject them. Each of these is discussed in the following sections.

### **Ensure That Equity Is Critical to Your Program**

One of the reasons that we have experienced the level of success that we have thus far is because our work is also supported by a departmental mission which is focused on teaching issues of equity and preparing our students to be able to effectively teach students who are marginalized. While the mission statement is symbolic on some levels and implemented in uneven ways across the department, it is politically important to have support for doing work which focuses on equity since pushback is likely to occur sooner or later.

### **Seek School Administrators Who Will Commit to a Focus on Equity**

As with universities and colleges, it is important for P-12 administrators to support work on equity. Hence, we suggest that teacher educators seek buy-in from administrators. Key to engaging administrators is to be able to emphasize that the goal is to increase the academic and social outcomes of students--particularly those who have often not fared well in school and testing (for a variety of reasons including those not inherent to the students and families).

### **Engage Internship Supervisors**

In order to be successful, all aspects of the teacher education program should be considered. This includes strategic field placements (as previously discussed) as well as university supervisors (some of whom may be faculty members or adjuncts). Depending on the size of the program, this can be a demanding task. Yet, internship supervisors must be involved in ongoing professional development (like program faculty) in order to be on one accord regarding the focus on equity.

### **Recognize Deflections to Equity Work and Reject Them**

Anyone who has engaged in equity work for any amount of time realizes that it goes against the grain in terms of conventions in P-12 schools and universities. Hence, deflections and push back should be anticipated as well as proactive ways of dealing with these. Common ones to expect during the early childhood school years are: (1) these issues are not 'developmentally appropriate' for young children; (2) we have to teach the standards and there is no time to do this--even though I think it is a good idea [the last part is often added for good measure], and; (3) we have to teach *all* children --or *I don't see color*.



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While not doubting that these deflections are offered in the spirit of what some educators truly believe, they also (intentionally or not) can serve to deflect a focus on equity. Thus, teacher educators must be prepared to address these deflective attempts must. Our best advice is for teacher educators to be conversant with the extant literature on this topic as there are a multitude of works which counter these assertions. For example, *Rethinking Early Childhood Education* (Pelo, 2008) and *Anti-Bias education for young children and ourselves* (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010) are a few of the many works which demonstrate rationales for why equity issues should be addressed in substantive ways early in life. (A sampling of others include Baines, Tisdale, & Long, 2018; Boutte, 2008; Boutte, 2016; Boutte and Strickland, 2008; Boutte, Lopez-Robertson and Costello, 2011; Cowhey, 2006; Delpit, 2007; Earick, 2009; Tenorio, 2007).

The deflection regarding the need to teach the standard should be probed. For more than five decades since ‘standards-based’ instruction has been on the scene, there are vast examples of evidence that the academic needs of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students are not been met--as measured by current standardized test outcomes reported in yearly report cards and through data from the National Assessment of Education Progress. Hence, the standards *are not* and *have not* been successfully taught using conventional methods. On the other hand, there is evidence that instructional strategies such as culturally relevant pedagogy have been shown to be successful with CLD students (Boutte, 2016; Long, Hutchinson, & Neiderhiser, 2011).

Likewise, when educators pushback against focusing on students of color or students who have been minoritized in some other way (e.g., language, socioeconomic status) by explaining that the goal is to teach *all* students, it is important to recognize this as deflection and to interrupt it. Such assertions are often presented using colorblind ideologies which suggest that educators do not see color and should teach all students the same (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). It is important to call attention to the disproportionate percentage of students from minoritized groups are not faring well academically (as measured by test scores) and socially (as measured by disproportionality in special education, gifted classes, suspensions, expulsions, and dropout rates). Therefore, in order to enact effective instructional practices and school policies, it is necessary to identify and develop focused strategies for addressing these inequities.

## **FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS**

A number of teacher education scholars have written about experiences working with preservice teachers around issues of equity (Boutte, 2012; Boutte, 2017; Powers-Costello, Lopez-Robertson, Boutte, Miller, Long, & Collins, 2012; Picower, 2009; Ukpokodu, 2007). Like this chapter, much of the research would benefit from also focusing on the influence and impact of equity pedagogies on P-12 student outcomes. In evaluating student outcomes, school systems typically value results from statistical or mixed methods. While we can see the need to gather such data, particularly because large-scale and localized quantitative studies tend to be the measures of choice for most school districts, we also see tremendous problems with depending on numerical data to understand the impact of culturally relevant and humanizing teaching.

We know that standardized tests typically used as quantitative measures of student achievement “are narrowly normed along White, middle class, monolingual measures of achievement” (Ladson-Billings, 2017, p. 143) and have a history in racist, classist, xenophobic attempts to create an elite, European-American class. This goes as far back as the creation of the first Scholastic Aptitude Tests (SAT) in the early part of this century for the purpose of further racializing schooling (Singer, 2016). Because

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the purpose of culturally relevant teaching is to dismantle norms that perpetuate inequities, it stands to reason that, a part of our work is to fight against such unfair measures of achievement. Thus, while there may be some usefulness for quasi-experimental and mixed methods studies to provide large-scale and demographically-bound data, we believe that: (a) series of longitudinal qualitative studies (case studies and educational ethnographies, for example) are essential to providing contexts for any numbers-based research; (b) any quasi-experimental or statistical studies need to be contextualized within the problems with such research mentioned above, and; (c) in cases where numbers-based studies are done, efforts must be made to tease out numerous factors that cannot be controlled including: variation among teachers in their implementation of the same content; levels of experience and effectiveness; classroom dynamics and relationships; and teacher, curricular, and policy biases. All this is to say that, politically, policymakers and educators who focus on equity issues often expect large scale results with little or no understanding of the complexities of the nature of equitable teaching and this needs to be pointed out emphatically in any future research focusing on student outcome.

Another area of research that is needed is research on the effectiveness of and support for preservice and inservice teachers of color. Considering that many teachers of color matriculate through teacher education programs, which have often neglected addressing issues of equity and diversity in its programs, they enter inservice teacher education programs unaware of the internalized biases they carry into classrooms. As a result, they too engage in culturally assaultive teaching and contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline, which disproportionately impacts the schooling experiences of children of color (Bryan, 2017). Thus, more research studies are needed focusing on preservice teachers of color in preservice teacher education programs as well as teachers engaged in professional learning and ways to support them, especially those who are members of similarly described Urban cohorts.

Finally, research is needed that looks at the backgrounds and knowledge base of teacher educators attempting to engage in culturally relevant and humanizing teachers at the university level. Much is claimed as “diversity-focused,” “culturally relevant,” and “equity based” which, in the words of Ladson-Billings (2017) actually constitutes corruptions of the intent of the work. Often this occurs when teacher educators themselves have not taken opportunities to engage deeply in their own ongoing professional growth. Questions undergirding this kind of research could look at teacher educators’ knowledge base and the scholarship from which that is derived, the depth of time and study dedicated to ongoing knowledge building, relationships between knowledge building and programmatic planning, and impact on preservice and inservice teacher learning and curricular and dispositional change.

## **CONCLUSION**

When we look at the Eurocratic nature of pedagogy and practice today’s schools (King & Swartz, 2016) and, alongside that, the disenfranchisement of many students and families of Color and from other marginalized groups, we have no choice but to work toward change. Educational scholar, Molefi Kete Asante (2017), wrote that “our educational system does not need a tune-up . . . it needs an overhaul” (p. 90). As teacher educators, it seems clear that the buck stops with us. Teachers and preservice teachers cannot be held responsible for what they do not know. After all, the same system of miseducation (Woodson, 1933) has victimized all of us, a legacy of Eurocratic curriculum - developed intentionally to ensure White power, control, and wealth - instituted by colonizers and enslavers across the past five centuries. However, together, we can take responsibility for a better tomorrow. Thus, we can no longer espouse

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empty commitments to diversity and social justice in our institutions of higher education if we are not doing the work to overhaul our own practices. For us, one element in that work was the development of the Urban Education Collective as foundational to developing a broader network of social justice educators who, as one of the Urban Cohort undergraduates put it, “can look at everything through a critical lens . . . look[ing] out for whose voices are being heard and more important whose are not” and then taking action to change that status quo.

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