UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

Choosing to Teach:

Lessons from the Lives of Effective Urban Teachers

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Education

in

Teaching and Learning

by

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The dissertation of Heather Lattimer is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm:

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DEDICATION

In recognition of all they do to improve educational opportunities for students, this dissertation is dedicated to those teachers who choose to work in urban schools.

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ACKNOWELDGEMENTS

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Lessons from the Lives of Effective Urban Teachers

by

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Reform efforts intended to improve teaching and learning in urban schools often include teacher professional development as an important component. However, the results of such efforts are mixed, in part because little is known about what truly matters in supporting the long-term growth of effective urban teachers. This study seeks to better understand those experiences that best support the professional development of teachers in urban high schools.

Using a community nomination approach, this study identified 12 effective urban teachers based on recommendations from students and administrators. These teachers

were then interviewed extensively about everything from their own K-12 education to their decision to become a teacher to their experiences in the classroom. Although the identified teachers differed significantly based on surface level characteristics such as years of experience, academic subject, and personal background, they all shared important similarities in their professional growth experiences. In particular, all identified opportunities to develop meaningful relationships with students and opportunities to critically reflect on practice as having had significant impact on their professional growth.

These teachers all chose to become teachers because they wanted to work with students. All sought opportunities to develop relationships with students beyond the traditional teacher-student classroom interaction. These interactions with students provided opportunities for teachers to gather knowledge and ideas, which prompted growth in pedagogy, classroom practice, and socio-political consciousness. In addition to student interactions, critical reflection on practice was essential in supporting the growth of participating teachers. Such reflection went beyond re-thinking a lesson; teachers in this study reflected on the nature of their content, their beliefs about teaching and learning, their classroom approach, and the achievement of their students.

The common professional growth experiences of these teachers, all of whom were identified as effective in urban high schools, may indicate directions that could be helpful in supporting the professional growth of all urban high school teachers. Increasing opportunities for meaningful teacher-student interactions and opportunities for critical reflection on practice may lead to teacher growth which could result in improving the learning environment for students in urban high school classrooms.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Research Foundations

A good teacher makes all the difference. Parents and students have recognized this bit of folk wisdom for a long time, and, in recent years, educational researchers and policy makers have been reaching similar conclusions. In 1996, the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF), drawing on research by Elmore and McLaughlin (1988) and Langer (2002), among others, found that after parent and community background, teacher knowledge and ability are the strongest predictors of student success. Teacher knowledge and ability trump all other school-based factors including class size and class composition (Sanders & Rivers 1996). These findings have held true for all grade levels, all school types, and students from all socio-economic backgrounds.

Unfortunately, those students who come from the most disadvantaged backgrounds are the least likely to have qualified teachers in their classrooms (David & Shields, 2001). Schools in urban communities have been found to have increased the number of teachers on emergency credentials and teachers teaching out of their fields in recent years, in spite of significant efforts to reduce this trend (Darling-Hammond, 1998). And even among those who are credentialed, and therefore technically qualified, many researchers and practitioners question whether the acquisition of such a credential truly prepares teachers to be effective in urban classrooms (Anyon, 1997; Darling-Hammond, 1996; Oakes, 1990).

Too often new teachers are placed in the schools serving the poorest students. These teachers typically have little support, experience few successes, and eventually their own sense of failure drives them from the classroom (Darling-Hammond, 1998; Haberman, 1991; Nias, 1989). This situation perpetuates a vicious cycle where urban districts need ever-increasing numbers of teachers to work in ever less supported conditions. Ladson-Billings (2001) notes that Chicago, for example, hires approximately one thousand to fifteen hundred new teachers each year. In Los Angeles, the number is closer to five thousand. In the face of such numbers, she comments, "Is it any wonder that this constant teacher turnover results in school failure for so many students?"(Ladson-Billings, 200l, p. 17).

In addition to the demographic challenges facing urban schools and teachers, there is also the challenge of teaching and learning in urban classrooms. Truly effective teaching in urban settings goes far beyond rote memorization or basic literacy skills, it requires that teachers create conditions within which students can think critically about texts, identify problems, gather, evaluate, and apply information to solving problems, critically analyze the world around them, and work toward creating change both for themselves and for the larger community (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Shulman, 1987). Being an effective teacher in an urban setting requires "substantially more knowledge and radically different skills than most [teachers] have now and most schools of education now develop" (Darling-Hammond, 1997, p. 154).

There are teachers in urban schools who create these kinds of opportunities for their students. But unfortunately, there are not presently enough to meets the needs of all of our students. This reality has severely hampered efforts to reform and improve urban

schools (Darling-Hammond & Falk, 1997) and the achievement gap between urban students and their suburban counterparts persists (English, 2002; Lee, 2002).

Given the critical importance of serving all our students at the highest levels if we are to live up to our democratic ideals, and given the crucial role that teachers play in achieving this objective, it is imperative that we develop a greater understanding of how individuals develop the beliefs and knowledge needed to be effective teachers in urban schools. The present study has sought to understand those experiences that help teachers to develop the skills and beliefs needed to be effective in urban high school classrooms by looking at the life stories of individuals identified as effective urban high school teachers.

Personal Connections

As a teacher, coach, and instructional consultant my interest in the research question is not simply academic. As a classroom teacher I experienced firsthand the multiple challenges of teaching in urban settings. When I came out of my own classroom and began to support professional growth in peers as an instructional coach, I was truly amazed by the range of teaching abilities that I witnessed when observing in others' classrooms. Teachers within the same school, the same department, even the same hallway had very different abilities. Some struggled with management issues and relied on worksheets as the primary teaching tools. Others, faced with the same challenges from the same students, were able to engage students in high-level readings, writings, and discussions. When I was in my own classroom it was easy to believe the talk in the teachers' lounge and to perceive most of the teachers in the school were caring, quality

teachers and high expectations for student achievement. When I emerged as a coach I was confronted with the reality that far too many urban students were attending classes that failed to engage their intellect in meaningful academic learning opportunities.

As a coach I was an active participant in reform efforts that were intended to improve instruction in schools, particularly urban schools. Most notably, I participated in San Diego City School's literacy reform program, which was part of the district's Blueprint for Student Success (San Diego City Schools, 2000). This reform was envisioned as an instructional reform that would introduce a balanced literacy approach (Atwell, 1998; Calkins, 1994, 2001) into English Language Arts classes and integrate literacy instruction across the curriculum. It invested heavily in teacher professional development, bringing in multiple national and international consultants to work with teachers and administrators, purchasing many professional resources for teachers, and introducing a coaching program which brought successful teachers out of the classroom to support the development of their peers through one-on-one classroom based modeling, observation, and collaborative planning. Unfortunately, despite a program design that was intended to be supportive of teachers, the implementation of the Blueprint for Student Success caused significant frustration among teachers, both those who were struggling and those who were successful (Cuban & Usdan, 2003; Hess, 2005; Hubbard, Mehan, & Stein, 2006). The reform was perceived as heavy-handed, top-down, and anti-teacher. Seven years into the reform, although there were some significant gains among students' literacy scores at the elementary level, results at the high school level showed insignificant gains in most areas, and declines in a few; the reform largely failed to reduce the achievement gap at the secondary level (Betts, Zau, & King, 2005).

Furthermore, recent analysis has shown that most of the success of the reform was due to structural reorganization and that efforts to support teacher professional development, most notably the coaching program, had little direct impact on student achievement (Betts, Zau & King, 2005). While there are a number of different explanations for the failure of the reform at the secondary level, it noteworthy in relation to the present study, that this reform was intended to support the growth of effective urban teachers, that it spent significant time, money, and effort to pursue this goal, that it cost teachers a considerable amount of time and physical and emotional energy, and that it largely failed.

Research Question

Drawing on both personal experience and a review of the relevant research literature, it would be easy to conclude that urban, high school teaching is simply too difficult and that reform efforts are inherently doomed. However, during my career in education, I have also been privileged to witness numerous urban high school teachers who persevere and are successful despite the odds that are stacked against them. In their classrooms, students thrive. This strange juxtaposition-- gloom and doom findings from large scale studies of urban teaching and reform efforts, coupled with personal observations of urban teachers who create classrooms of high expectations and significant learning-- led me to question what it is that has allowed some teachers to be effective in the midst of such challenging conditions. Were teacher professional development programs helpful in supporting their growth? What was the role of teacher education? How about the role of the teacher community at their school site or even the larger teacher professional community? Do relationships with student or parents matter?

Is there growth over time in their teaching practices or do effective teachers emerge fully developed from some mysterious wellspring of good teaching? Did these teachers all choose to teach in these settings? Do they have personal experience attending urban schools? What helped them the most along the way?

These smaller questions are encompassed within the larger research question that this study has sought to address –What experiences support the growth of effective urban high school teachers? In seeking to answer this question, the present study utilized a process of community nomination to identify 12 effective high school teachers at a range of urban high schools in Southern California. These teachers were then interviewed at length in an effort to understand those personal, educational, and professional experiences that matter in the development of effective urban practitioners. Among the experiences that have been considered as potential factors influencing effective teacher development are the following: K-12 educational experiences, interactions with community and family, academic experiences within the college or university, pre-service teacher education, in-service professional development, classroom interactions with students, and professional interactions with colleagues.

The findings from this study have implications for teacher education, recruitment, training and support. The experiences of teachers who are already effective in the urban high school classroom have a great deal to teach us about the conditions needed to nurture the development of all teachers who seek to be effective in similar settings. If teachers, school leaders, and those involved in supporting teacher growth make changes based on the from the findings of this study, it is possible that teaching may improve in

urban settings and urban high school students may have access to high-quality, more equitable learning opportunities.

CHAPTER 2: URBAN EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE

Introduction

There are three bodies of literature that inform this research. The first concerns research on the characteristics of effective teachers in urban settings. The second addresses the processes by which teachers develop over time. The third investigates the successes and failures of teacher education and professional development programs intended to support the development of effective urban teachers. These three bodies of research are addressed below.

Characteristics of Effective Urban Teachers

For many years, the primary criteria used to determine efficacy in teaching, particularly in urban settings were longevity and control. The assumption was that teachers who had been teaching in these communities for a number of years were stronger, more effective teachers than novices. Or, looked at another way, that one had to be a strong teacher in order to have survived for so long, particularly under the difficult conditions found in urban settings. Within the classroom, effective teachers were judged (and, all too often, continue to be judged) based on their level of student discipline. The primary tasks that teachers were seen as responsible for included giving information, making assignments, giving directions, monitoring seatwork, punishing noncompliance, and giving grades. Haberman (1991) characterizes this control-based approach to teaching as the "pedagogy of poverty," an approach founded upon a deficit view of the

students in urban schools, a belief that they could not and would not achieve at high levels but needed to be force-fed the basics. However, Haberman, notes, the pedagogy of poverty does not work.

> Youngsters achieve neither minimum levels of life skills nor what they are cappable of learning. The classroom atmosphere created by constant teacher direction and student compliance seethes with passive resentment that sometimes bubbles up into overt resistance. Teachers burn out because of the emotional and physical energy that they must expend to maintain their authority every hour of every day. The pedagogy of poverty requires that teacher who begin their careers intending to be helpers, models, guides, stimulators, and caring sources of encouragement transform themselves into directive authoritarians in order to function in urban schools. (Haberman, 1991, p. 291)

Recognizing the need for a better understanding of effective urban teaching, researchers in the 1980's and 1990's began to more thoughtfully investigate the practices of effective urban teachers. A summary of this work is presented below.

Pedagogical Content Knowledge

In determining what effective urban teaching is (a much more challenging task than identifying what it is not), it is appropriate to begin by looking at what Shulman (1987) terms "pedagogical content knowledge." Although not specific to urban settings, pedagogical content knowledge nevertheless has significant implications for the present investigation. Pedagogical content knowledge, according to Shulman, is of particular interest when considering the many bases of knowledge that effective teachers must command. Shulman describes three distinct types of knowledge teachers must possess. The first is subject matter knowledge, an understanding of the central themes, concepts, principles, and investigative approaches connected to the field of study. The second is

knowledge of pedagogy, an understanding of strategies and techniques appropriate to engage students in the process of learning. The third, pedagogical content knowledge, goes beyond simply blending subject matter knowledge and pedagogical knowledge. Shulman asserts that to be effective, teachers need to know how to transform their understanding of content in order to make it accessible for students in the classroom.

> Comprehended ideas must be transformed in some manner if they are to be taught. To reason one's way through an act of teaching is to think one's way from the subject matter as understood by the teacher into the minds and motivations of the learners.... These forms of transformation, these aspects of the process wherein one moves from personal comprehension to preparing for the comprehension of others, are the essence of the act of pedagogical reasoning, of teaching as thinking, and of planning—whether explicitly or implicitly—the performance of teaching. (Shulman, 1987, p. 17)

Teachers must select which pieces of content to present, determining the essential ideas, themes, concepts, principles, events, or texts that students need to understand. They need to decide how to best represent that content, purposefully selecting resources that will best convey an understanding of the subject matter under investigation. And they need to determine how to involve students in the content itself by selecting pedagogical approaches that will allow students to transform the content knowledge and make it their own.

To illustrate the use of pedagogical content knowledge, Shulman offers the example of "Nancy" a twenty-five year veteran English teacher. Through a series of classroom vignettes he describes her teaching style varying from more teacher-directed to more student-centered, her instructional objectives moving from denotative and

connotative through to evaluation and interpretation, depending on the difficulty of the text and the needs of the students.

> Although as a teacher she maintained tight control of the classroom discourse, her teaching goals were to liberate her students' minds through literacy, eventually to use great works of literature to illuminate their own lives. Whichever work she was teaching, she understood how to organize it, frame it for teaching, divide it appropriately for assignments and activities. She seemed to possess a mental index for these books she had taught so often—*The Red Badge of Courage, Moby Dick, The Scarlet Letter, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*—with key episodes organized in her mind for different pedagogical purposes, different levels of difficulty, different kinds of pupils, different themes or emphases. Her combination of subject-matter understanding and pedagogical skill was quite dazzling. (Shulman, 1987, p. 2)

Although Shulman's use of the term "pedagogical content knowledge" to describe teachers' ability to affect the transformation described above is new, Grossman (1990) points out that the meaning of the term is akin to Dewey's charge that "teachers must learn to 'psychologize' their subject matter for teaching, to rethink disciplinary topics and concepts to make them more accessible to students" (p.7-8).

Of course, as noted in describing Nancy's teaching, in order to effectively exercise pedagogical content knowledge, teachers need to be responsive to the needs of their students. Shulman explains, "In the face of student diversity, the teacher must have a flexible and multifaceted comprehension, adequate to impart alternative explanations of the same concepts or principles" (p.9). This statement has relevance in almost every setting; however, it has particular resonance in urban settings where the backgrounds of teachers often do not match the backgrounds of the students they serve (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future [NCTAF], 1996). Thus, it is this

adaptive aspect of pedagogical content knowledge that many researchers of effective teachers of diverse students have chosen to investigate more closely.

Relational Knowledge

In order to be effective in the urban classroom, teachers need to know how to relate to students, to draw them into the world of the classroom and support their academic growth. This is particularly true when students come from ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds that are significantly different from the majority culture and from the background of many teachers. A first wave of researchers, most coming from an anthropological background, examined teachers' use of culturally compatible language use and interactional approaches as a means of establishing connections with students. Au and Jordan (1981), for example, studied the use of "talk-story" in classrooms of native Hawaiian children. They found that when teachers incorporated the home language pattern of talk-story into the primary classrooms students were able to achieve at higher than predicted levels on standardized reading assessments. Mohatt and Erickson (1981) undertook similar work with Native American children and classrooms, finding similar results. They determined that those teachers who approximated the language interaction patterns from the home culture achieved stronger results than those who did not. These researchers found that making the classroom a more inviting place by welcoming language and culture from home helped to connect students to the academic environment and allowed them to experience greater academic success.

A second wave of researchers pushed back against the adequacy of culturally compatible classrooms as described by Au and Jordan, Mohatt and Erickson. These

researchers, led by Delpit (1995) and Ladson-Billings (1995) argue that many academic problems attributed to children of color actually stem from a power structure in which the world views of those with privilege are taken as the only reality, while the worldviews and culture of those less powerful are dismissed as inconsequential or deficient. Research by Fine (1986) and Fordham (1988), for example, found that academic success often came for African-American students at the expense of their cultural and psychological well-being. Fordham and Ogbu (1986) used the term "acting white" to represent the ostracization that many high-achieving African-American students experience. Forced to choose between academic success and the maintenance of a cultural identity, many students chose the later, intentionally forgoing academic success in order to maintain their cultural identity. This second set of researchers argue that it is not enough to simply incorporate aspects of students' home language and culture into the classroom. Rather, they assert that teachers must help students to negotiate cultural differences and critique the existing social order, an approach which Ladson-Billings (1995) terms "culturally relevant pedagogy." Culturally relevant teachers, Ladson-Billings argues, provide a way for students to maintain their cultural integrity while succeeding academically.

To illustrate this point, Ladson-Billings provides the following examples:

> One of the teachers in the study used the lyrics of rap songs as a way to teach elements of poetry. From the rap lyrics, she went on to more conventional poetry. Students who were more skilled at creating and improvising raps were encouraged and reinforced. Another teacher worked to channel the peer group leadership of her students into classroom and school-wide leadership. One of her African-American male students who had experienced multiple suspensions and other school problems before coming to her classroom demonstrated some obvious leadership abilities. He could be described as culturally competent in his

> language and interaction styles and demonstrated pride in himself and his cultural heritage. Rather than attempt to minimize his influence, the teacher encouraged him to run for sixth-grade president and mobilized the entire class to organize and help run his campaign... This same teacher made a point of encouraging the African-American males in her classroom to assume the role of academic leaders. Their academic leadership allowed their cultural values and styles to be appreciated and affirmed. (p.476)

Evidence supporting the importance of understanding, affirming, and integrating students' home cultures into academic learning has been well documented. Lee (1995) found that when classroom instruction made explicit the commonalities between the skills African American adolescents use to interpret passages within signifying dialogue and the skills required for literary analysis, students showed statistically significant gains on standardized tests. Rosebery, Warren, and Conant (1992) found that students were able to appropriate scientific discourse when provided with the opportunity to investigate real problems of significant concern within their own community. In their study of education among U.S.-Mexican households, Moll, Vélez-Ibáñez, and Greenberg (1989) found that literacy skills improved significantly when schools honored the "funds of knowledge" from within the local community. In particular, they point to a sixth grade class which investigated construction not only through library research, but also by inviting parents and other community members to share their knowledge about building. The researchers noted that this study incorporated knowledge of physics, mathematics, and literacy, while simultaneously validating the skills and experiences of students' parents, even though most parents did not have high levels of formal education.

Although the concept of engaging students in academic learning through the use of culturally relevant pedagogy is widely believed to have merit, there are those who

question whether all teachers are capable of engaging in such practices. Delpit (1995) and Foster (1993), in particular, assert that to be truly effective in teaching students from non-majority backgrounds, teachers need to be "culturally similar" (Delpit, 1995). These researchers found that effective African-American teachers teaching African-American students, for example, have inside knowledge of the norms of the community and the position of the community within the larger society that can explain much of their success with students (Foster, 1993). Teachers from culturally similar backgrounds are able to help students negotiate the relationships between their home communities and the dominant society by providing explicit instruction in the linguistic and behavioral "codes of power" of the dominant culture (Delpit, 1995). Although teachers from other cultural and social backgrounds may attempt to fulfill a similar role, these researchers question whether it is possible for such teachers to be truly effective in teaching "other people's children" (Delpit, 1995).

An alternative approach to connecting students to the classroom derives from those who study "caring." This research focuses on the requisite existence of caring teacher-student relationships in order for students to achieve. Noddings (1984, 1992), the foremost voice in this field, argues that the desire to be cared for is a basic human need that must be met before learning can flourish. She explains that teachers and schools must not simply "care about" students' learning, but, to be successful, they must actively "care for" students as individual human beings in order to create an environment in which students can achieve academically.

Within the context of urban schools, research by Valenzuela (1999) and Ogbu (2002) has found that such caring relationships are even more important. In her research

on the education of Mexican American immigrant youth, Valenzuela (1999) found that a major concern among these students was the perceived lack of caring on the part of teachers. Because most American teachers did not visit homes and develop relationships outside of class with their students in the manner that was commonplace in their home communities in Mexico, most of the students in Valenzuela's study did not believe that the teachers cared about them. This perceived lack of caring resulted in students' putting less effort into the classroom and treating teachers with less respect, which in turn led to increased friction between students and teachers and reduced student achievement.

In his work investigating the achievement gap among African-American students, Ogbu (2002) found that because African-Americans had historically been discriminated against, they did not have a pragmatic trust of the educational system that Asian or white students did. He found that African-American students were much more concerned than their white and Asian counterparts about how they were treated by their teachers and that perceptions of whether or not teachers cared about them mattered more to African-American students than teacher expertise in their content.

Researchers who study culturally compatible pedagogy, culturally relevant pedagogy, and caring disagree as to how best to connect students, particularly urban students, to the classroom. Advocates of culturally compatible pedagogy, including Au and Jordan (1981) and Mohatt and Erickson (1981), encourage teachers to bridge the cultural differences between home and school by incorporating home culture and language into the classroom. Ladson-Billings (1995), Delpit (1995) and other advocates of culturally relevant pedagogy take a more critical view. They argue that to be effective teachers must find ways for students to achieve academically while maintaining cultural

integrity, and that teachers need to explicitly instruct students on how to understand and critique the existing social order. Caring theorists, such as Noddings (1984, 1992) and Valenzuela (1999) are less concerned about the manner in which content is presented in the classroom and more concerned about the development of caring relationships between teachers and students, finding that students who believe that teachers care about their success are more likely to achieve academically. While very different in approach, all of these perspectives share the common belief that to be effective, teachers of urban students need to find ways to connect those students to the academic environment of the classroom.

Socio-Political Consciousness and Critique

Effective urban teachers have also been found to have a socio-political consciousness and a desire to effect change on behalf of their students. In their review of the literature, Oakes, Franke, Quartz, and Rogers (2002), argue that in addition to meeting the generic teacher competencies outlined in the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS, 1989), effective urban teachers must have an understanding of urban culture and the cultural communities of their students, know how to negotiate the school and community support networks, have skills to develop literacy skills across content areas, promote college access among their students, and build alliances with like-minded teachers. This list, while incorporating the elements discussed above, has a decidedly more political tone. Oakes et al. (2002) explain,

> We have come to see competent urban teachers simultaneously as skilled classroom practitioners and as public intellectuals who work for educational equity and access through multiple forms of democratic

> participation... An effective urban teacher cannot be skilled in the classroom but lack skills and commitment to equity, access, and democratic participation. Likewise, if one is to be a teacher, a deep caring and democratic commitment must be accompanied by highly developed subject matter and pedagogical skills. Such teachers are agents of fundamental change. (p. 229)

Some argue that for teachers to act as change agents, it is necessary to incorporate this socio-political consciousness into the classroom, helping students to understand the present social order and empowering them to critique and change that social order if they believe there are areas of injustice (Freire, 1974; Giroux & Simon, 1989). In this critical theory approach to teaching, education becomes a vehicle for liberation. Robinson (1993) illustrates classroom implementation of such a critical approach by describing the work of a class of African-American middle school students in Dallas. Students determined that too many liquor stores were located near their school. Investigations into the city zoning regulations revealed that some areas of the city were dry while others were wet, and that these zones corresponded to the more affluent and less affluent communities of the city, accordingly. Using mathematics, literacy, social and political skills students developed a strategy to expose and correct this student-identified injustice. This example illustrates the use of community circumstances as official knowledge (Apple, 1993) and demonstrates how students' learning can become a form of cultural critique.

Summary of Characteristics of Effective Urban Teachers

In summary, the three major areas that researchers have identified as characteristics of effective teachers are deep knowledge of content and pedagogy and an

ability to adapt style and approach to best meet the needs of students, an understanding of students' communities and cultures and an ability to meaningfully integrate students' "funds of knowledge" (Moll, 1992) into the classroom, and an awareness of the socio-political structures upon which the school and community are built and an ability to work within the system as well as to work to change the system where inequities exist. Underpinning all of these characteristics is a belief system that values the students in their classrooms and believes that they are capable of achieving. In her work on retention of strong teachers in urban schools, Nieto (2003) explains that it is this "fundamental belief" that keeps teachers coming back in spite of challenging circumstances.

> Their "fundamental belief" in students is, for all, the primary motivation. This means having faith in young people and in their capacity and intelligence, in spite of conventional images and messages to the contrary. Affirming students' identities and lives and forming caring relationships with them are some of the manifestations of this deep faith. Every day, exceptional teachers in schools throughout the nation tackle difficult circumstances in heroic but quiet ways. They do so by refusing to give in to the negative expectations that others may have of urban schools or the children who study there. (Nieto, 2003, p. 52)

When considered in light of the research objective of this study, the above characteristics, while exciting, are also daunting. They require a deep knowledge of content, students, and community that extends far beyond what is taught in most teacher education or professional development programs. How do teachers develop such knowledge? Although few studies exist that document the development of urban teachers, extensive research has been done on teacher development in general. A summary of that work may be found below.

Before moving on from this section, a caution— Much of the work that has been done to understand the characteristics of effective urban teachers has utilized a "wisdom of practice" approach (Shulman, 1987). In this approach, researchers study the practices and beliefs of practitioners who are identified by colleagues, students, administrators, parents, test scores, or other measures as strong teachers. Although this approach has proven extremely useful in helping to unpack the complexity of teaching in general and urban teaching in particular, the results of this research should not be seen as a prescription for preparing teachers nor a checklist with which one can determine if a practitioner is "strong". Shulman warns,

> The results of research on effective teaching, while valuable, are not the sole source of evidence on which to base a definition of the knowledge base of teaching. Those sources should be understood to be far richer and more extensive. Indeed, properly understood, the actual and potential sources for a knowledge base are so plentiful that our question should not be, Is there really much one needs to know in order to teach? Rather, it should express our wonder at how the extensive knowledge of teaching can be learned at all during the period allotted to teacher preparation. (Shulman, 1987, p. 7)

Teacher Development and Teacher Change

As the above discussion indicates, being a teacher is incredibly complex. And, as such, *becoming* a teacher is also remarkably complex. Individuals who elect to join the teaching profession must move from the status of learner to that of teacher. They must transition "from being able to comprehend subject matter for themselves to becoming able to elucidate subject matter in new ways, reorganize and partition it, clothe it in activities and emotions in metaphors and exercises, and in examples and demonstrations, so that it can be grasped by students" (Shulman, 1987, p. 12-13). This section examines

the movement from learner to teacher exploring what we know (and don't know) about the stages of teacher development and the reasons why teachers change over time.

Stages of Teacher Development

In an effort to further the dialogue on developing a continuum of appropriate teacher education and professional development opportunities, Feiman-Nemser (2001) reviewed the literature on the early stages of teacher development. Responding to both research findings and the structures and opportunities imposed by current university and school district policies, she identifies three major phases of teacher learning, each of which involves distinct "central tasks" (p. 1014). It should be noted that her work is oriented around a reform-oriented vision of teaching and learning that calls for content-rich, learner-centered teaching that emphasizes conceptual learning and critical thinking in K-12 classrooms.

In the first stage of Feiman-Nemser's continuum, preservice preparation, the central tasks facing prospective teachers involve developing subject matter knowledge, developing understandings of learners and learning, and developing a beginning teaching "repertoire" (Wasley, Hampel, & Clark, 1997). Essential to this stage, according to Feiman-Nemser, is the opportunity to analyze beliefs about teaching. For many teachers entering the profession, teaching is viewed as an opportunity to pass on knowledge, while learning is viewed as absorbing and memorizing knowledge (Ball & McDiarmid, 1990; Calderhead & Robson, 1991). Ball (1988) asserts that the majority of pre-service teachers imagine themselves standing in front of a group of attentive students presenting information, going over problems, and giving explanations. This image is quite different

from the reality that teachers face in most classrooms today, particularly urban classrooms. Nias (1989) found that if teachers' self-concept did not evolve to match their perceived reality, teachers were unlikely to remain in the profession.

The second stage identified by Feiman-Nemser is the induction phase. Induction, the first one to two years of full-time teaching, is a particularly challenging stage for most teachers since they must demonstrate skills they do not yet have but can only attain by beginning to do what they do not yet understand (Schön, 1987). This stage involves gaining local knowledge of students, curriculum, and school context. In addition, new teachers must attempt to design responsive curriculum and instruction and work to create a classroom community. This time of transition often causes significant strains in new teachers' self concept and their developing professional identify. Feiman-Nemser comments:

> Often beginning teachers struggle to reconcile competing images of their role, for example, the need to be an authority person in areas of discipline and classroom management with the desire to be perceived as a friendly person, the need to prepare students for the "real world" with the desire to be a nurturing caregiver who is responsive to individual differences (Bullough & Knowles, 1991; Ryan, 1970). Constructing a professional identify is a complex, ongoing process. Beginning teachers form a coherent sense of themselves as professionals by combining parts of their past, including their own experiences in school and in teacher preparation, with pieces of the present in their current school context with images of the kind of teacher and colleague they want to become and the kind of classroom they way to create (Featherstone, 1993)." (Feiman-Nemser, 2001, pp. 1029-1030)

The third stage identified by Feiman-Nemser is the early professional development phase. This is a stage of mastery and stabilization (Berliner, 1986; Huberman, 1989; Watts, 1980). Whereas in the first years of teaching, most new

teachers are preoccupied with acquiring routines, more experienced teachers are ready to consider theory and ask questions about practice (Hollingsworth, 1989; Russell, 1988). In this stage, teachers deepen their knowledge of subject matter, extend and refine their pedagogy, and expand their responsibilities for leadership development. "First year teachers are still learning to work within the [existing school and societal] context; post-induction teachers can learn to work with colleagues to improve that context" (Feiman-Nemser, 2001, p. 1040). An important attitude shift at this stage involves having enough confidence in one's teaching abilities, to seriously question, study, and improve one's teaching both independently and with colleagues. Munby and Russell (1994) term this concept the "authority of experience," which they define as "listening to one's self in relation to students' experiences of one's teaching... It requires a willingness and an ability to listen to one's own experiences as one also listens to the wisdom of those with more experience and those who have explored educational issues analytically and empirically." (Russell, 1995, p. 100)

It is interesting to note that several of the models upon which Feiman-Nemser draws in developing her continuum (Berliner, 1986; Huberman, 1989; Watts, 1980) address traditional teaching in suburban settings. Yet these studies indicate that it takes five to seven years for most teachers to achieve a level of stabilization in which they have solid instructional routines, know what to expect from students, and can settle into the patterns of teaching with confidence. If it takes five to seven years to reach this level of competence in a suburban setting, it is worth questioning how much longer and more intensive the developmental process might be for those who wish to pursue more ambitious, student-centered forms of teaching in urban settings?

Other teacher development studies that are important to reference here include Francis Fuller's classic work (1969; Fuller & Brown, 1975) on stages of concern. It is the foundation upon which many subsequent studies rest and sets a sequence that is sequential, relatively invariant, and certainly hierarchical. Drawing on an extensive survey as well as numerous interviews, Fuller and colleagues identified four stages of concerns that individuals at different stages of becoming a teacher express: Pre-teaching concerns, concerns about survival, teaching situation concerns, and finally, concerns about students.

Huberman's (1989) career development study extends beyond the oft-studied beginning teacher years, following teacher development throughout the career. Drawing on extensive interviews with one hundred sixty Swiss secondary school teachers, Huberman identifies five stages of teacher development. Interestingly, these phases, particularly at the latter stages, are not all signs of progress. They are survival and discovery, stabilization, experimentation and activism, taking stock, which may include serenity, self doubt, or consternation, and, finally, disengagement. Although sequential, Huberman found that there was significant variation regarding the timing of when the phases occurred, with some disengaging, for example, significantly before retirement, while others struggling to disengage well after formal retirement had taken place. One of the most intriguing findings of Huberman's work, particularly for those interested in reform programs, was the following conclusion:

> Teachers who steered clear of reforms or other multiple-classroom innovations but who invested consistently in classroom-level experiments—what they called "tinkering" with new materials... were more likely to be satisfied later on in their careers than their peers who had

> been heavily involved in school-wise or district-wide projects (Huberman, 1989, p. 50).

Teacher Change in Response to Interventions

The above studies investigated voluntary or "naturalistic" (Richardson & Placier, 2001) change, those changes that occur either consciously or unconsciously as teachers move through their careers. Other researchers have investigated teacher change in response to interventions, reform efforts led or imposed by others. Notable among this work is a four-stage model developed by Mevarech (1995). In response to an innovation introduced from someone outside, Mevarech found that teachers went through the following learning phases: First, survival during which experienced teachers became novices, temporarily, and revert back to survival strategies. Second, exploration and bridging, wherein teachers begin to experiment with the innovation in their classrooms and make connections to prior experience. Next adaptation, when teachers move from applying the innovation in a technical, step-by-step manner, to more reflective and adaptive implementation. And finally, conceptual change where teachers re-conceptualize their understanding of teaching and learning in response to the innovation.

Schifter (1995) illustrates these stages in her work with mathematics teachers deliberately attempting to move toward a more constructivist approach to teaching. She describes teachers' actions and attitudes during each of the stages as follows: During the survival stage teachers collect "an ad hoc accumulation of facts, definitions, and computational routines." This stage is followed by exploration and bridging during which teachers try out "student-centered activity, but with little or no systematic inquiry

into issues of mathematical structure and validity." Adaptation is next; it involves "student-centered activity directed toward systematic inquiry into issues of mathematical structure and validity." Finally, teachers move toward conceptual change and pursue "systematic mathematical inquiry organized around investigation of "big" mathematical ideas" (Schifter, 1995, p. 18). This process of growth parallels the stages of professional growth outlined in the previous section. Although the time frame is shorter, teachers, when undergoing change in response to an intervention must work through periods of awkwardness and adjustment before they are able to master the use of new information or pedagogical strategies.

Causes of Teacher Change

Although many of the models of teacher development appear to be sequential, not all teachers move through the stages at the same rates or for the same reasons. Further, not all teachers progress through all of the stages, some "remain fixed" at particular levels (Richardson & Placier, 2001, p. 911). Berliner (1994) found that quite a few teachers got stuck at what he termed the advanced beginner level, a level where they had moved beyond the discomfort associated with novice teaching but were not able to take the responsibility for their actions and student learning that would have been required to progress to the competent level.

What is it that prompts some teachers to change significantly over time, making changes that Cuban (1988) terms "second-order" because they entail different ways of thinking, teaching and learning, while other teachers stagnate in their growth? Just as

teaching and teacher development are complex, the answer to this question is complex as well.

When considering naturalistic change, it is necessary to consider the relationship between teacher biography and change in teaching practice. Butt, Raymond, McCue, and Yamagishi (1992) found that numerous influences can prompt change, including teachers' experiences as children and parents; their experiences within a particular cultural background; and professional experiences ranging from formal professional growth opportunities to informal interactions with students. Bullough and Baughman (1997) characterize teacher change as "happen[ing] in the course of living a life, aging, and selectively responding to dynamic and unpredictable situations at home and at work" (p. 95). Similarly, Kelchtermans and Vandenberghe (1994) found that teachers grow in response to "critical incidents" which have significant personal meaning, though they may not have meaning for others, and prompt reflection and questioning of current practice.

Although there is significant individual variation, research has also found that some factors are more likely to promote meaningful growth than others. For example, according to Bush (1983) conditions in the first few years of teaching, including the level of support for new teachers and the match between teacher goals and site expectations, are a strong predictor of teachers' ability to achieve and grow throughout the course of a career. Similarly, teachers' cognitive abilities, as measured by pre-service admissions assessments such as the Graduate Record Examination, correlate strongly with the tendency to learn from experience once in the field (Munby & Russell, 1992; Sprinthall, Reiman, & Thies-Sprinthall, 1996). Individuals who score well on standardized

assessments designed to measure cognitive ability, tend to be more effective in their ability to reframe the puzzles of practice and refine their abilities as teachers (Sprinthall, Reiman, & Thies-Sprinthall, 1996).

Within the context of teaching interventions, professional development opportunities designed to change teachers' beliefs and practices, the match between teachers' beliefs and the beliefs guiding the intervention appears to be the primary factor mediating the success, or failure, of the planned change (Marks & Gersten, 1998). The failure to address teacher beliefs when attempting school reform and re-structuring, is one of the primary reasons why such efforts often fail (Lipman, 1993). In her research on professional growth programs in reading instruction, Richardson (1994) found that it was only once beliefs changed that practice began to change. Guskey's (1986) work argues the opposite. He has found that classroom success based on changing practice in response to external demands can lead to changes in teacher beliefs regarding student abilities and pedagogical approaches. Regardless of the direction of the change, both Guskey and Richardson agree that changing beliefs is remarkably difficult. Louden (1991) referred to teachers' beliefs as "sedimented meaning structures" (p.189) that rarely change. Beliefs about teaching, the teachers' role, learning, and the students' role are formed early, often before teachers even enter the teaching profession, and often "serve as barriers to change by limiting the ideas that teacher education students are able and willing to entertain" (Feiman-Nemser, 2001, p. 1016).

Within the context of urban schools, the intractability of teachers' belief structures is particularly critical. If teachers in these schools approach teaching with a strong, unshakable belief in the academic potential of their students, intractability is of great

benefit, since these teachers will then take it upon themselves to seek out solutions to potential problems. However, if teachers' beliefs about "these" students are only confirmed by the problems they encounter in urban classrooms, intractable beliefs will serve only perpetuate the "pedagogy of poverty" (Haberman, 1991).

Teacher Education and Professional Development for Urban Educators

An Assessment of General Trends

In general, educational researchers are pessimistic when assessing the state of teacher education and professional development (Darling-Hammond, 1999; NCTAF, 1996; National Research Council [NRC], 2000), and this pessimism only deepens when discussing preparation for urban schools in particular. In a comprehensive review of teacher preparation programs, the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (1996) identified several, consistently occurring problems. These problems include:

- Inadequate time: 4 year undergraduate and 5th year masters programs do not allow adequate time for students to learn both subject matter and about the nature of learners and learning.
- Fragmentation: The traditional program arrangement offers disconnected courses that novices must then attempt to pull together into a meaningful, coherent whole.
- Uninspired teaching methods: Although teachers are supposed to excite students about learning, methods courses are often lectures and recitation. These courses do not model hands-on and "minds-on" instructional approaches.

- Superficial curriculum: Inadequate time and competing needs to fulfill degree and credential requirements lead to programs that have little depth in subject matter or in educational studies.

The National Research Council (2000) points out that these difficulties not only limit pre-service teacher learning opportunities, but also impede lifelong learning in at least two ways.

> First a message is sent to prospective teachers that research in education, whether on teaching or learning, has little to do with schooling and, therefore, that they do not need to learn about the findings from research. Second, the importance of viewing themselves as subject-matter experts is not emphasized to teachers—especially teachers in the early and middle grades; they fall into believing the old saw that "those who can, do; those who can't teach." Teachers are not encouraged to seek the knowledge and understanding that would allow them to teach academically rigorous curricula. (NRC, 2000, pp. 202-203)

This pessimism extends to traditional in-service teacher learning opportunities as well. The traditional training model has largely been shown to be ineffective (Hargreaves, 1995; Joyce, 1981). This model has operated on the transmission theory of learning, the assumption that teachers are vessels that can be filled up with new knowledge. According to Oakes, Franke, Quartz, and Rogers (2002), this model "ignore[s] the social, dynamic, and generative quality of learning that can support the development of competencies needed in urban schools" (p.229).

Promising Innovations

In response to the disconnect between the needs of urban teachers and the state of most teacher development programs, researchers, policy makers, and practitioners have

set out in recent years to design innovative teacher education and professional development programs focused on urban schooling. Many of these programs may be considered design-experiments, as they draw on solid research foundations and aim to produce benefits not just for those directly participating, but also by contributing to our general knowledge of teacher development in urban schools (Cobb, Confrey, diSessa, Lehrer, & Schauble, 2003). Although most of these efforts are still in the early stages, my review of the literature describing and analyzing these programs reveals the following common characteristics. Innovative design-experiments focused on improving teacher learning for urban settings:

- **Take a long-term view toward learning.** Many of the design experiments take a long-term view toward learning. Instead of trying to cram all that teachers need to know (or are believed to need to know) into a single year of a teacher education program, these programs emphasize knowledge that is developmentally appropriate while simultaneously equipping participants with the skills and reflective stances needed to acquire further knowledge as they progress through their careers. Instead of focusing on a single teaching strategy in a single workshop, professional development work in these programs focuses on gradual change over time, seeing short-term learning experiences as an important but limited component in the longer-term process of teacher development (Ammon & Kroll, 2002).

  One example of a program with an urban emphasis that exhibits this longer-term view toward learning is UCLA's Center X. Intentionally designed around the concept of teacher education as a "process of learning" (Oakes,

Franke, Quartz, & Rogers, 2002), Center X integrates opportunities for pre-service and in-service teacher education. The teacher education program for pre-service teachers is extended beyond the traditional single year timeframe, allowing one year for student teaching and coursework and a second for an internship assignment. This second year allows for a supported transition into the role of full-time teacher. After graduation from the program support continues both formally and informally. Center X offers its graduates on-going learning opportunities through monthly inquiry group meetings, a teacher-created online journal as well as the California Subject Matter Projects and National Board of Professional Teaching Standards certification programs.

- **Are grounded in urban classrooms and communities.** Although many teacher education programs now include a multi-cultural component, too often, these are add-on parts that are not perceived by prospective teachers as meaningful. King (1991) argues that such an approach has many shortcomings,

> Merely presenting factual information about societal inequity (and human diversity) does not necessarily enable pre-service teachers to examine the beliefs and assumptions that may influence the way they interpret these facts. Moreover, with few exceptions, available multicultural resources for teachers presume a value commitment and readiness for multicultural teaching and anti-racist education, which many students may lack initially (p. 142).

Rather than adding on a multi-cultural component to their existing programs, design-experiments intended to prepare and support teachers in urban schools ground their work in urban classrooms and urban communities, requiring participants to actively involve themselves in these settings and encouraging them

to recognize and build upon the resources offered by these settings. Pre-service teachers in the Teach for Diversity program at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, for example, are required to participate in service learning internships within the communities where they will conduct their student teaching, before the student teaching begins. These internships allow prospective teachers the opportunity to begin to mesh theory with practice within the context of an urban community, while simultaneously helping them to develop community-based knowledge that can be applied in their classrooms once the school year begins (Ladson-Billings, 2001). In-service teachers who participate in the Cheche Konnen Project in Cambridge, Massachusetts, ground much of their work in "doing science" within the community context. Rather than seeing science as something fixed that must be learned out of a textbook, these teachers are encouraged to find scientific learning opportunities relevant to students' lived experiences (Rosebery & Puttick, 1998; Warren & Rosebery, 1995).

- **Are built around communities of practice.** These programs also build on research that emphasizes the importance of learning within the context of a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). Thus, much of the work emphasizes collaboration and conversation with colleagues. Participants in the teacher education programs at Center X and the Teach for Diversity programs, for example, are organized into cohort groups. These cohorts take classes together and are often placed together at school sites. Thanks to a serious teacher shortage in Los Angeles Unified, graduates of Center X are often

hired to work in the same school or cluster of schools together. The cohort structure of these programs allows for individuals going through similar learning experiences to construct meaning together as they compare notes, ask questions, and solve problems with colleagues (Ladson-Billings, 2001; Oakes, et al., 2002).

Many professional development programs for in-service teachers have similarly organized their work around collegial and collaborative communities (Fullan, 1990; McLaughlin, 1994). One interesting example of such a program is the New Teacher Support Network in Milwaukee Public Schools (Schlager, Crawford, Phillips, & Fusco, 2004). Designed in an effort to decrease high rates of teacher turnover, this program offers a variety of face-to-face and on-line supports for new teachers. Since new teacher mentors cannot be all things to all new teachers, a critical component of this program is the on-line component. Message boards and on-line chat rooms are organized around a variety of topics ranging from classroom survival skills through instruction and assessment. This range of opportunity allows new teachers, and their more experienced mentors, to connect with others who have similar concerns, and work together the address the needs of teachers and their students.

- **Emphasize an inquiry-based approach.** Many of the programs draw on a constructivist foundation in their work with pre- and in-service teachers. Constructivism argues that learners need the opportunity to engage with materials and ideas in order to construct their own understanding of a concept (Vygotsky, 1978). Within the context of teacher learning, a constructivist approach engages

teachers in exploring their own processes of content learning, encourages teachers to review and critique classroom practice, and asks teachers to critically assess student work for evidence of learning (Ball, 1996; Ball & Cohen, 1999; Driver, 1995; Franke, Carpenter, Levi, & Fennema, 1998). Although such an approach is useful in all teacher education contexts, it is particularly critical in an urban context, where students' needs may not easily match the expectations of available curricular materials. Teachers, therefore, must take a critical approach in determining what the students' needs are and in designing learning opportunities that respond to these needs. Programs that model and support inquiry-based learning prepare teachers to respond in this manner.

Ball (2000) provides an example of one such program. In her work with pre-service and beginning teachers in urban settings she focused on teachers' understanding of literacy. She engaged teachers in writing reflective essays about their own literacy experiences, encouraged them to conduct case studies on students' literacy experiences, assigned texts by Vygotsky (1978) and Wertsch (1985) for reading and discussion, and required extensive analysis of student writing and opportunities for writing both in and out of the classroom. Through this work Ball found that teachers came to develop a more meaningful understanding of literacy, both in their own lives and in the lives of their students. Further, the change in the perception of what literacy means, from textbook definition to constructed understanding, led teachers to develop stronger opportunities for literacy in the classroom.

- **Address teachers' belief structures.** Recognizing the enormous impact of teachers' belief structures on practices in the classroom (Lipman, 1993; Marks & Gersten, 1998), teacher education and professional development programs specifically targeting individuals who teach in urban settings have addressed participants' beliefs head-on. Although discussion of beliefs and the role of beliefs in shaping practice are on-going components that last through the duration of many of these programs, it is in the recruitment and admission phase where, arguably, beliefs play the most prominent role. These programs aim to attract and support teachers who want to work in urban settings and who believe that students in urban settings can achieve. In her description of the Teach for Diversity program, Ladson-Billings (2001) explains that, given pressures by university and school district administrators, the decision to admit a candidate into a teacher education program is almost a guarantee of eventual certification, thus it is of utmost importance to admit candidates with an appropriate belief structure as well as the persistence, maturity, and life experience that will prepare them for the challenge of urban teaching.

Although the designs of these innovative programs appear promising, insufficient data, at this stage, are available to evaluate their success. Much of the information currently available is based on participant self-reporting. Some data are available on teacher retention as a result of this work. A survey from Spring 2001, for example, revealed that 90% of UCLA's Center X's graduates from the first five years of the program had remained in teaching, most in urban schools (Oakes, et al., 2002).

Although the positive results of this and similar reports are encouraging, it is ultimately practices in the classroom that matter. At present, anecdotal reports do suggest that graduates of these programs are more likely to prove to be effective in urban classrooms, however additional research needs to be conducted in this area. Finally, it is interesting to consider whether the individuals who choose to participate in these programs are able to become effective urban teachers because of the program itself, or whether the programs selected individuals who already possessed many of the qualities needed to be effective urban educators. Untangling the intricacies of this cause-effect relationship would provide many insights into teacher recruitment and teacher education for urban schools.

Summary

In summary, previous research has recognized that being effective in the urban classroom requires a unique set of skills, practices, and beliefs. Some pre-service teacher education and in-service professional development programs have attempted to support urban practitioners to develop these skills, practices, and beliefs. Program evaluation studies have revealed that these programs have had varying degrees of success. However, up to this point little has been done to analyze effectiveness across programs or to consider the importance of these programs relative to other factors that play a role in the development of effective educators. Rather than simply evaluate particular programs, this study looks back at the life-long development of effective urban teachers, to determine the critical growth experiences that shaped their development.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

Research Design and Methodological Approaches

Most studies that investigate questions of teacher learning examine particular programs or reform efforts (for example, Ball & Cohen, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 2001; Oakes, Franke, Quartz & Rogers, 2002; Warren & Rosebery, 1995). Although these studies are useful in examining short-term change they typically do not assess the impact of teacher change on student learning, nor do they consider the long-term impact of a particular reform on a teacher's long-term learning. This study takes a different approach. Rather than selecting a program to examine, this study selects teachers already effective in their classroom practices, and, using a series of biographical interviews, examines the experiences that supported their professional growth.

The primary research methodology used to capture and understand the experiences of effective teachers was that of narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In this approach, informants are asked to share narratives of their own experiences of meaningful events. In the case of this study, narrative accounts of incidents meaningful to teachers' professional growth were elicited from subjects who had previously been identified as effective urban teachers through a process of "community nomination" (Foster, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 1995). The accounts elicited from teachers included narratives of experiences prior to, during, and parallel with their teaching careers. In eliciting accounts from teachers themselves, this study sought to learn from the "wisdom of practice" (Shulman, 1987) of teachers' experiences. This study also responds to Collins (1991) finding that individuals who have lived through

experiences about which they claim to be experts have valid and credible expertise on the subject.

Of course, self-reporting may not lead to an accurate re-telling of particular events (Denzin, 1989; Elbaz, 1987). However, it is not the events themselves that this study sought to explore. Rather it was the individual's experience of those events. This study was less concerned with in the particular teacher education program that had been attended or the professional development approach used, than it was in understanding the individual's experience of such programs, events, or approaches and the subsequent impact on his/her teaching. Narrative inquiry provides an ideal method for gathering this kind of data from study participants. Decades of research by sociologists, anthropologists, and linguists reveal that narrative accounts are nearly always accurate representations of an individual's experience of events (Gee, 1991; Labov, 1972, 1997). Indeed, Gee (1991) found that narrative is the primary means by which the individuals who have lived through particular events make sense of their own experiences,

> One of the primary ways—probably *the* primary way—human beings make sense of their experience is by casting it in a narrative form... No human, under normal conditions fails to make sense when narrativizing his or her experience. (Gee, 1991, p. 79)

When communicating narratives of personal experiences to others, Labov (1972) found that participants in his study seemed to undergo a partial reliving of events that thereby rendered the speaker, "no longer free to monitor his own speech" (Labov, 1972, p. 355). The essential role that narrative plays in both making sense of and communicating the experiences of individuals made the use of narrative of critical importance in this study.

In organizing elicitation of teacher professional growth narratives, the decision was made to focus on narratives connected with particular events in teachers' lives. Organizing the inquiry around particular events is responsive to Derrida's (1972) theory that individuals shape their lives in response to key, turning-point moments. The events represented by these moments may or may not be of great significance in and of themselves, but the experience of living through a particular event has meaning and significance unique to the individual and serves to shape his/her views and actions. Kelchtermans and Vandenberghe's (1994) study of elementary school teachers had similar findings with regard to teacher professional growth. Kelchtermans and Vandenberghe's analysis of teacher biographies found that growth typically occurs around "critical incidents" that are unique to each teacher. It was these "critical incidents" or "turning-point moments" that this study sought out in an effort to better understand the trajectory of professional growth for effective urban teachers.

Participants

The selection of study participants was accomplished using a community nomination approach (Foster, 1991; Ladsen-Billings, 1994), in which a selection of administrators and students were asked to nominate effective teachers from their own schools. These two groups were selected as nominators because both have direct experience observing a range of teachers at the school. Further, they bring valuable differing perspectives to the nomination process. Students have lived experience as recipients of classroom instruction; they personally experienced the helpfulness, clarity, and inter-personal skills of the instructors at the school. Administrators have not only

observed teachers in the classroom, but also have access to data, including student grades and test scores, which reflect the efficacy of teachers' instructional approaches. Independently each perspective offers valuable information regarding the success of individual teachers at the school. Taken together, the two perspectives ensure that teachers nominated to participate in the study are indeed effective at meeting the needs of their urban high school students.

Although much of this process was borrowed from the work of Foster (1991) and Ladson-Billings (1994) and their studies of effective teachers of low-income African American children, a significant change was made in choosing to use students, rather than parents, as nominators. Foster and Ladson-Billings both studied elementary school teachers. In the elementary setting, parents, particularly parents with multiple children who have gone through the schools, are more likely to have a broad knowledge of a range of teachers in the schools than their children, who typically only interact with one teacher during the school year. However, in the high school setting, students interact with multiple teachers in a given year and across years. Additionally, parents tend to be less involved with the high school students' day-to-day experiences and are unlikely to have, for example volunteered directly in the classroom. For these reasons, it was determined that when studying effective high school teachers, nominations from high school students would be more informative.

I decided not to solicit nominations for study participants from among high school teachers themselves. Teachers tend to have little first-hand knowledge of the instructional practices of their colleagues. Teachers rarely observe one another in the process of planning lessons, teaching in the classroom, or assessing student work. The

typical teacher labors on his/her own to decide "what instruction works, what standard of student work is good enough, and what additional knowledge, skill, or insights would best serve them and their students," (Little, 1999, p. 234). Although there have been some significant calls for reform in response to findings that this scenario limits professional growth (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Huberman, 1995; Peterson, McCarthy & Elmore, 1996); at this time, the norm continues to be individual teacher working in isolation in his/her classroom. Certainly teachers form opinions about one another, but these are often based on hearsay from students, other teachers, and administrators, and tend to lack specific supportive evidence, particularly at the secondary school level. It is for this reasons that I decided not to use teachers as informants in the nominating process.[1]

School Selection

Teachers were nominated from a selection of six urban high schools throughout one county in Southern California. The schools were chosen based on the following considerations—

[1] In the process of collecting nominations at a particular school in the study, one name that was put forward by the principal was an individual who had previously been named as teacher of the year for the state. The students, however, did not nominate this individual during their group interview. In fact, his name was left out of the discussion entirely until one of the students asked me about my next steps. I explained that I would ask their principal for nominations and interview the teachers who were nominated by both the students and the principals. In response, a student stated, "Oh well, the principal will probably nominate ___ because they were teacher of the year. But I don't think ___ should be on your list. [S/he] is a nice person and [s/he] really does a lot of stuff outside the classroom. But most students don't think ___ challenges us very much. The class is boring and I didn't learn anything." This proclamation was greeted with significant head-nodding and universal agreement from the other students participating in the conversation.

- **Type of school:** This study investigates comprehensive senior high schools. For purposes of this study, senior high schools include grades nine through 12 or ten through 12. Comprehensive high schools are schools that serve a wide range of students. These schools may be traditional comprehensive high schools, charter schools, or school complexes that house multiple small schools. Continuation schools, juvenile court community schools, and alternative schools were not included in this study.
- **Level of poverty:** One of the criteria used by the U.S. Department of Education to define urban schools is a high concentrations of poverty (National Center for Education Statistics, 2004). The percentage of students receiving free and reduced lunch (FRL) is typically used to determine levels of poverty, with the U.S. Department of Education defining high poverty schools as those in which 40% or more of the students enrolled are eligible for FRL. A review of the FRL percentages among the forty four schools in the county in which this study took place revealed a distinct line of demarcation between those in which fewer than half of the students received FRL (36 schools) and those in which more than two thirds received FRL (8 schools) according to data for the 2003-04 school year compiled by the California Department of Education (California Department of Education, 2004). The six schools selected for review all fell above this demarcation line, with greater than two-third of their students receiving FRL.
- **Location within a metropolitan area:** The second criteria used by the U.S. Department of Education to determine an urban school is location in a central city within a metropolitan statistical area. All of the eight schools that were

appropriate for this study based on levels of poverty were also considered to be in metropolitan areas according to the 2000 census.

- **Diversity of districts and/or schools:** In order to avoid overemphasis on a particular reform program or school restructuring, I made an effort to include schools of more than one type (small school complex vs. comprehensive high schools) and from more than one district.

In the end, six high schools best fit the criteria as sites from which to gather teacher nominations. These six schools represented two different districts, both traditional schools and educational complexes of small schools, some of the oldest and the newest schools in the county, award-winning schools and schools that had been labeled by the state and federal governments as failing to meet the needs of their students.

Nomination of Teachers

Within each of these six schools, administrators and students were asked to nominate effective teachers to participate in this study. These nominations were made independently of one another; principals did not know whom students had nominated and students were not made aware of nominations made by their principals. There were only two criteria that limited the nominations. For logistical purposes, students and administrators were asked to nominate only those teachers currently teaching at the school. Secondly, students and administrators were asked to nominate teachers of academic content areas including math, science, English, history /social science, and foreign language. The rationale behind this decision was based on the desire to produce findings that would have the greatest potential for generalizability. Core content teachers

are found in all high schools. Further, core content teachers have had to go through common licensing and professional growth requirements. Although I did not wish to limit this study to a particular field such as English or math, limiting it to core content area teachers provided a way to increase the probability that the participants would have had meaningful professional growth experiences and that the findings might have applicability to a significant number of schools and/or teachers.

Nomination by Administrators

The principals from each of the six schools were interviewed individually in their offices at their respective school sites. I provided each principal with a brief description of the goals and methodology of the study and then asked them to nominate teachers they believed to be effective educators at their schools. At the educational complexes (campuses which house several "small schools"), the complex principals (rather than the small school principals) were interviewed as they had a longer-term, more global perspective on their schools and the school staff. All of the nominating principals had been at their school sites for a minimum of two years, a time period that allowed them to have knowledge of the effectiveness of the teachers at their schools. To avoid biasing principals' responses, all interviews were conducted without other individuals present.

During principal interviews, each was asked to respond to the following two questions. What are the characteristics of an effective teacher? And, who are the effective teachers at this school? When nominating teachers, principals supported their nominations with comments such as, "She clearly lets the kids know that she cares about them," "She is very dedicated to this school and these students," "He is respected by all

of his peers," "She has amazing knowledge of content and really gets students to care about science," "He's able to work with a range of students and adapts to meet their needs while still holding high expectations for them all," and "He's helped to develop a school-wide culture of academic achievement." Principals consistently listed content expertise, commitment to the school and the students, the maintenance of high expectations for themselves and their students, and the ability to connect with students as key criteria used when identifying effective teachers on their campuses. Each principal nominated between five and 12 teachers from their school site.

Nomination by Students

Students from each of the six schools participated in group discussions to nominate effective teachers at their schools. Groups included anywhere from 12 to 34 students. Significant efforts were made to ensure that participating students provided a representative sample of the grade range, ethnicities, genders, academic achievement levels, and interests of each school's student body. Student groups were drawn from classes and activities in which heterogeneous groups of students were present. At four schools, student nomination groups were drawn from advisory classes already operating within the schools. These classes had been intentionally designed by the schools to include representative mixes of students based on grade levels, achievement levels, interests, ethnicities, and gender. At each of these four schools, the principal put me in touch with advisory teachers they believed would be receptive to my request. Once given permission by the advisory teachers, I met with the students, explained my study, and invited the entire advisory class to participate in the nominating process. All students

from these classes who returned signed permission forms participated in the study. Pizza and donuts were used as inducements.

Two of schools did not offer advisory classes. At these schools alternative opportunities were sought which would have a similar representative range of students. At one school, Southeast High, students enrolled in an elective computer class were invited to participate. This class was a non-tracked course that included an ethnically diverse and gender-balanced group of students with a range of achievement levels and interests. At the other school, Vista Del Mar, students who were already participating in an after-school advisory committee were invited to participate. This committee had been established several weeks by teachers and administrators interested in getting student response to school reform proposals. The teachers and administrators who had designed the council had intentionally sought to involve a representative group of students and had sought out participants from a diverse range of grade levels, ethnic, interest, and achievement backgrounds. At both Southeast and Vista Del Mar, the same procedures were followed as at the schools with advisory classes. Once the target class or activity group was identified, the study was explained, all were invited to participate, inducements were offered for returning permission forms, and all who returned the forms then participated in the actual nomination process.

Group interviews took place during the regular meeting times of the class or committee and in the regular meeting location. To enhance conversation and encourage honest student response, classroom teachers or club advisors were not present during the interviews. After a brief introduction to the project, students were asked to respond to the same two questions that had been put to administrators. What are the characteristics of

an effective teacher? Who are the effective teachers at this school? In response to these questions, students offered characteristics and names of effective teachers. When nominating teachers, they provided not only names but also reasons as to why they believed a particular nominee to be an effective teacher. As students responded, I wrote down their comments. After several names had been suggested, I stopped the discussion and re-read my notes to the class. I asked students if they agreed with the characteristics or supported the nomination of the teachers who had been named by their peers. Nominations were accepted only if there was consensus among students in support of that nomination.

Discussion amongst students varied at the six school sites. At some sites, multiple names were put forward and significant discussion of those names ensued. At others, fewer teachers were nominated and consensus around those nominations was arrived at more quickly. Explanations for nominating particular teachers included comments such as, "She helps everybody," "He makes the class relevant to life," "She helps motivate you to do your best," "She believes in us," and "He's always available to help." Students consistently agreed that to be effective, teachers needed to be caring, knowledgeable, and "strict but fair." During consensus building discussions, reasons given for rejecting teachers who had been nominated by others included, "He's cool, but I didn't really learn anything in that class," "She has favorites and doesn't connect to all students," "She is too eager to please students and doesn't push you hard enough," and "He is disrespectful to some students." Students consistently rejected teachers who they believed didn't adequately challenge them or engage them in the content, or who they perceived as not treating everyone in the class with respect. At the end of the consensus

process, the number of teachers nominated by students at each site ranged from two to 15, with most student groups nominating seven or eight teachers at their site.

Teacher Selection

In accordance with the community nomination process, teachers who were nominated by both administrators and by consensus among the students were selected to be included in the second phase of this study. In all, 52 teachers were nominated by students and 52 teachers were nominated by principals. However, only 12 teachers were nominated by *both* students and principals. These 12 teachers were invited to participate the second phased of the study. All agreed to do so.

The participating teachers represented a range of schools, content areas, genders, ethnicities, and levels of experience. Participants were selected from all six of the schools that had been part of the nominating process; the maximum from a single school was five, two schools had two teachers selected, and three schools had a single teacher nominated by both students and administrators. A similar distribution could be found in content area; five English teachers, three history/social science teachers; two math, one science, and one foreign language teacher were selected to participate. The participants included five men and seven women. Although most participants were white, participants also included a teacher who self-identified as Filipino and two teachers who identified themselves as Latino. Participants ranged in classroom teaching experience from five to 32 years.

Over 400 teachers work at the six schools that were involved this study. Only 12 were identified as effective based on the community nomination process. It is likely that

there are other effective teachers at these schools. However, the concern of this portion of this study was not to definitively determine all of the effective teachers on campus, but rather to ensure that those teachers who would be participating in the subsequent phases of the study were truly effective urban teachers. The thoughtful participation of students and administrators in the nomination process, their combined knowledge of teachers' practices based on direct observations, and their differing perspectives ensured that those teachers who were selected to participate were effective teachers in urban high school classrooms.

Measures and Procedures

Nominated teachers participated in one-on-one biographical interviews designed to elicit narratives connected to their professional growth experiences. The data collected during these interviews were then analyzed to look for patterns in teachers' experiences.

Biographical Interviews

I conducted teacher interviews during the spring of 2005 at a time and location convenient to the teacher. Most interviews took place in teachers' classrooms, although one took place at a teacher's home, and two took place in coffee shops selected by the teacher that were outside the school campus. Most interviews were conducted after the school day when significant, uninterrupted time could be dedicated to the interview (teachers were asked to select a time when they had at least two hours available). For those teachers unable to meet with me after school, other arrangements were made. One

teacher was interviewed very early in the morning, two were interviewed after school got out for the summer, and two were interviewed during extended prep periods.

All interviews were conducted in one-on-one settings during which students, colleagues, and administrators were not present. The privacy of the setting was designed to elicit the most honest responses possible, without concern over influence from others or self-editing on the part of participants. All portions of all interviews were recorded using a digital tape recorder.

Building on Kelchtermans and Vandenberghe's (1994) findings that teacher growth occurs in response to "critical incidents" unique to individual teachers, the interview questions posed to participants in this study were built around common events in teachers' lives. Key questions included: Why did you become a teacher? Describe your own K-12 educational experiences. Describe your pre-service teacher education program. What were the first few years of teaching like? When did you really start to feel successful as a teacher? Describe the professional development experiences that you have been involved with. Have there been particular students or events that have helped to shape your thinking as a teacher? (Please see Appendix for a more complete list of interview questions.) These questions were designed to elicit narratives connected to teachers' experiences of important events in their professional lives.

Although the interview questions were pre-planned and provided a general guideline for all interviews, few interviews moved mechanically from one question to the next. Most interviews followed a conversational pattern in which I was able to push teachers to further explain or provide more details that would flesh out individual responses and teachers were able to highlight experiences of importance to them and/or

introduce new topics or experiences that I had not anticipated. The intimacy of the setting, the natural flow of the interview, and the knowledge that the interviewer was both a researcher and a professional colleague prompted many teachers to share in great detail. After the interview many participants expressed appreciation for the opportunity to share their stories and reflect on their experiences.

Interview Analysis

Interview data were analyzed using an analytic induction approach (Becker, 1998). According to this approach, each data set was treated as a particular case study and analyzed independently. After full analysis of a case study has been completed findings from that case study analysis are compared with findings from other case study analyses. By treating each case independently this approach is designed to avoid biasing findings across cases. Beginning with the first interview conducted, I created a rough transcription from the audio tape and attempted to draw multiple meanings from the narrative. Once initial findings had been extracted from the first interview, I moved onto the second, initially treating that interview as an independent entity and then comparing findings from the second interview to those from the first. This process continued through all 12 of the cases, with findings becoming more refined over time. Analyzing the data in this manner allowed for triangulation of the research since multiple perspectives on the same life experiences were examined (Denzin, 1989).

To test the validity of these initial findings, close analysis of transcripts of selected interviews was performed. For each finding, I selected three or four interviews to examine. Selected interviews included both representative samples and apparent

deviations. I then coded relevant sections of the transcripts from these interviews to extract information that confirmed or refuted the initial findings. Coding schemes were developed based on the early findings from the first portion of the data analysis.

During the analysis phase, findings were regularly discussed with my advisor who had access to the full transcripts of the interviews.

Positionality

Although I approached the present study as an educational researcher, my other roles as classroom teacher, instructional coach, and educational consultant did have some influence on my research design and data collection. I believe that much of this influence was positive. Introducing myself as a teacher allowed me to gain access to districts, schools and classrooms that might have been resistant to granting access to someone who was perceived as more of an outside evaluator. Engaging in interviews as a fellow teacher created a comfort level for the teachers that allowed them to respond with openness and honesty; during interviews many revealed many intimate details of their lives and their teaching careers. The questions I asked and the manner in which I chose to ask them were informed, in part, by my experience working in classrooms and personal reflection on my own growth and development.

In several cases I had interacted directly in my other professional roles with administrators, students, and teachers involved in this case study. I had worked alongside two of the principals as a peer coach, had a handful of students in classes in which I had worked, and, most significantly, acted as an instructional coach with two of the teachers. Additionally, several of the teachers in the study had read or were familiar with a

professional text that I wrote (Lattimer, 2003), which highlights case studies of effective teaching in English/Language Arts classrooms. In all of these cases, previously existing relationships were seen by both the teachers and me as positive and professional. Participants understood the objectives of the present study, as distinct from my goals in my other professional roles, and were given the option to exclude themselves or to refuse to respond to particular queries if they felt uncomfortable in anyway; this option was never taken. When pre-existing relationships did have an impact, that impact was generally positive, with students, administrators, and teachers being more willing to share their opinions and personal experiences because of previous positive interactions.

Prior knowledge of the teachers, schools, and districts also played a role in influencing my data analysis. Most often this influence came in the form of knowing what particular acronyms stood for or understanding the stated goals of particular reform efforts. I attempted to prevent biasing my data analysis with my previous knowledge by regularly presenting samples of data to research colleagues and my dissertation advisor and then comparing their observations with my analysis. Further, the study design included two different school districts and although my general knowledge of teaching and teacher learning was relevant to both districts, I had no direct knowledge of one of the districts, a district from which half of the teachers in my study sample were drawn. Therefore, findings, which were drawn from across the two districts, are unlikely to have been influenced by my previous interactions with particular participants in this study.

CHAPTER 4: TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL GROWTH NARRATIVES

Introduction

In an effort to better understand how effective teachers come into being, this study identified 12 such teachers. Each was nominated by their principal and a heterogeneous group of students from their school. Each agreed to sit down and share their experiences through one-on-one tape-recorded interviews. They discussed a range of influences that positively and negatively impacted their professional growth, including their decision to teach, their own K-12 education, their college years, pre-service education, induction, professional development, and professional relationships with students, colleagues, and administrators. Their descriptions were rich with detail and filled with thoughtful reflection. A synopsis of each participant's professional story is included in this chapter. These descriptions are certainly not complete, but are designed to provide the reader with some of the highlights of each individual's experience, and to demonstrate the range of backgrounds and experiences that existed among the study participants.

Table 1 – Summary of Study Participants[2]

Name	Ethnicity & Gender	School	District	Subject	Years of experience
Ms. Sullivan	White female	Central	District A	English	8
Mr. Evert	White male	Mesa		Social Studies	9
Mr. Perez	Latino male			Social Studies	8
Mr. Mason	White male	Mission		Mathematics	5
Ms. Woods	White female			English	5
Mr. Lindt	White male	Southeast		Mathematics	5
Ms. Krause	White female	Cabrillo	District B	Science	20
Mr. Baldia	Filipino male	Vista Del Mar		Social Studies	14
Ms. Hernandez	Latina female			Spanish	21
Ms. Patterson	White female			English	24
Ms. Potter	White female			English	24
Ms. Zankovich	White female			English	23

Participant Growth Narratives

Ms. Sullivan

Ms. Sullivan has always loved school. At a very young age she saw herself becoming a teacher, but somewhere in the midst of high school and college, years that were not all that pleasant socially, the vision of herself as a teacher was put aside. Ms. Sullivan spent her college years initially pursuing a career in marine biology, though that ended when she discovered she really wasn't all that strong in advanced math and science classes. She switched to literature, but still resisted the possibility of teaching. It wasn't until she volunteered to help tutor students at her former high school that she began to think seriously about teaching. She found that she really loved being around high school

[2] The names of all teachers and schools have been changed to protect the privacy of the participants.

kids; she appreciated their energy and sense of humor, and enjoyed the constant opportunities for new learning that came from interacting with teenagers.

Ms. Sullivan went on to obtain her teaching credential and took a job teaching night school at Central High School, the oldest and one of the largest high schools in the county. Having initially thought that teaching high school would be like "Dead Poets Society... You know great literature discussions where everybody read the book and did the homework," teaching night school at Central came as quite a shock. She was working with students who had failed courses and needed to pick up credits in order to graduate from high school. Most worked or attended classes during the day and arrived tired and worn-down by the time they made it to her classroom. Few liked school and most had little confidence in their academic abilities. Ms. Sullivan was thrown in without texts, a curriculum, clear expectations, or even colleagues to support her. But from the beginning she was determined to make it work, and looking back she believes that teaching in that environment provided her with a wonderful education about teaching and learning. Classes at night school were small, she had few discipline problems, and there were minimal requirements placed on her instruction. This environment enabled Ms. Sullivan to really get to know her students as learners and as individuals. She listened to their concerns, learned from their responses to classroom instruction, and continually adjusted her teaching to better meet the needs of her students. She learned to connect school to their lives, to make it relevant— "It has to affect their lives, them, their lives. They have to see it, just telling them, 'You need to know this because of college' or whatever, doesn't work. It has to be personal" (Interview, June 16, 2005). She also learned to make it fun. She notes that too often teachers, herself included, fill the day

with vocabulary quizzes, textbook questions, copying definitions, and other activities that students perceive as boring and useless. But, she comments, "It's my day too, and I don't want my day to be boring... or my classroom to be boring... So I do what I can to keep them interested, and make this a fun day, so that while we are learning everybody is having a good time" (Interview, June 16, 2005).

Night school also provided Ms. Sullivan with the opportunity to get to know her students as individuals and to learn how to build relationships and communicate in the classroom. She explains that too often the best lessons in this regard came from watching the negative impact of hurtful things said by unthinking teachers. Since many of her night school students were simultaneously enrolled in classes at the regular high school, and since many were struggling in those classes, Ms. Sullivan decided to visit her students' day classes to observe so that she could later provide support. What she witnessed appalled her. She saw kids crushed by off-handed remarks. She watched students shut down after misunderstanding what was intended as a joke. While observing, she realized that "kids are fragile people, even the toughest, biggest kid in the room is fragile, a broken heart waiting to happen." Recognizing that once a student has been hurt, "you've lost them" Ms. Sullivan made even greater efforts to build community in her classroom, to reach out to her students and form relationships, to make her classroom a safe place to take the risk of learning. The efforts paid off. Participation in her night school courses increased, student achievement improved, and students began to report that they liked coming to class and felt like they were learning. Like the other teachers in this study, Ms. Sullivan notes that it was this kind of positive student feedback, much

more than praise from administrators, that let her know when she was becoming an effective teacher.

After two years at night school, Ms. Sullivan transferred to the main campus of Central High School, initially teaching English as a Second Language courses, and then later teaching mainstream English courses to tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grade students. Initially, Ms. Sullivan approached her classes at the main campus in much the same way she had approached her night school classes. She chose activities that were fun and engaging and that would teach them something along the way. Then, a few years in, she and several colleagues worked with an instructional coach who helped them to align their curricula to state standards using a backward planning approach (Wiggins & McTighe, 1998). Ms. Sullivan explains that this was "really, really helpful" because it provided her with a structured approach to connect the larger goals of her content and her teaching with her day-to-day lesson plans. She explains, "Now when I plan I have a goal in mind. Whenever I start something new I know what I want the students to learn and how I expect them to show their learning... That training was the first time when I really felt like 'OK, I get it'."

Today Ms. Sullivan is part of a smaller learning academy at Central High School, an opportunity she loves. She appreciates the smaller environment, the close collaboration with colleagues, and the support of her principal. She notes that when she first moved to the main campus, she encountered many teachers who complained regularly about their jobs and the students. The campus environment was permeated by fear of the administration and many had lowered expectations for the students and themselves. In her current academy, the attitude is very different. The administration is

supportive and empowering. Ms. Sullivan feels comfortable admitting her mistakes and learning from them. Teachers collaborate to develop innovative inter-disciplinary projects that have real-world connections. The entire faculty know the students and demand excellence from them. Ms. Sullivan feels that she is thriving in this environment, in large measure because the opportunities provided by the academy so closely align with the philosophy, goals, and approach which she has developed during her years teaching in more challenging environments.

Mr. Evert

Born and raised in a small conservative town in Southern California, Mr. Evert does not fit the stereotype of someone who would choose to teach in an urban high school. He is white, grew up with conservative parents, and was largely cloistered in a homogenous, middle class community. Looking back, he is somewhat embarrassed to admit that his early interactions with individuals from other races came when they would play "Americans vs. Mexicans" on the middle school soccer field. A good student, he attended a highly regarded public university in California, entering with no intention of studying history, which would later become his major, or becoming a teacher.

Mr. Evert explains that his desire to teach students in an urban setting came largely from his participation in a series of mission trips with his high school and college church groups. Not religious by birth, Mr. Evert got involved in the church in high school through a friend and was drawn to the service aspect of his new-found faith. He went with his high school youth group on a mission trip to inner-city Los Angeles and later to Costa Rica. During college, he participated in his campus's chapter of Inter-

Varsity Christian Fellowship and went with them on trips to inner city communities in California and to South America. It was during these trips that Mr. Evert realized that he wanted to pursue a career working in communities similar to those in which he had volunteered. He was interested in understanding more about the individuals who lived in those communities and sought to help improve their opportunities for success.

Mr. Evert admits that early on in his mission work he had a somewhat paternalistic attitude toward the individuals he was serving. He was humbled, though, during a trip to Peru when he realized the inadequacy of his understanding in relation to that of the leaders of the local partner organization. Mr. Evert also credits his wife and her family with helping to educate him on cultural diversity. Mr. Evert married a Mexican-American woman with whom he had attended college. Participating in family traditions with her family, choosing to raise their children to be bilingual, living in a very mixed-race community, and facing the prejudices of his own parents has provided Mr. Evert with a much more nuanced understanding of cultural and economic diversity than might be expected simply by looking at his outward appearance.

Mr. Evert began his teaching career at Washington High School, a school that served mostly African-American and Latino students and had a tough reputation. He describes his first years there as being mostly about survival. He taught seniors in American government and economics. Though he entered the classroom with grand plans about having high expectations and providing students with learning opportunities that would be equal to what their peers would receive in more affluent settings, Mr. Evert explains that his expectations were gradually and consistently lowered during the six years that he taught at Washington. This reduction in expectations came in part from

resistance from students to more rigorous expectations, and in part from responding to pressure from his peers. Washington had a wonderfully nurturing principal, a big bear of a man who was well loved within the community. He wanted the best for "his kids" and for him that meant getting them through high school. There was pressure from the principal, as well as fellow teachers and, especially, sports coaches, to inflate grades and pass students along in an effort to keep them in school and get them to graduate.

After Mr. Evert's sixth year at Washington, the district decided to close and re-configure the school. All teachers were reassigned to other schools in the district. Mr. Evert arrived at Mesa High School where he was under the leadership of a principal with very different priorities. Mesa's principal emphasized high expectations and academic rigor. She did not have the same love on campus, indeed she alienated a great many teachers and students, but she also cared deeply about "her kids" and believed that the best way to serve them was to prepare them to get into college and be able to succeed once enrolled. At Mesa, Mr. Evert worked with another teacher and an instructional coach to design and implement a ninth grade civics and geography course that emphasized critical literacy skills.

Now in his third year on Mesa's campus, Mr. Evert continues to teach ninth graders, a grade level that most high school teachers, particularly those who have taught seniors, try to avoid. He explains that he enjoys the ninth graders because they are more open to new learning, and he feels that he can really make a difference in preparing them to be successful in high school and beyond. He believes that his own teaching has benefited greatly from the opportunity to teach at two schools with very different leaders. From Washington he learned how to build relationships with students and to cultivate

community in the classroom. At Mesa he has learned to increase expectations and rigor in the classroom and become effective at teaching students the skills and critical thinking abilities that he believes are crucial to their success in life. He explains that when he arrived at Mesa he relied on the strength of his personality and his relationships with students to keep the classroom running, and that he was content to largely "cover" content. Working with colleagues at Mesa, he learned to build on that relationship foundation to strengthen his teaching in the classroom and increase expectations for students.

Mr. Perez

Like Mr. Evert, Mr. Perez similarly began his teaching career at Washington High School and, also like Mr. Evert, he currently teaches history at Mesa High School. Additionally, both indicate that their Christian faith plays a significant role in their reasons for teaching. However, the backgrounds of these two teachers are quite different. Mr. Perez grew up in an urban community and attended one of the other high schools in this study, Mission High School. He considers himself Latino now, but growing up his grandfather, in particular, emphasized that they were of Spanish heritage, and de-emphasized any Mexican-American connections. At that time, Mr. Perez considered himself white and middle-class, especially when comparing himself to many of his classmates. He recalled playing Pop-Warner football with mostly African-American teammates and having a reputation as the fastest white kid on the team, of course, he notes wryly, he was also the only white kid on the team.

His awareness of his own cultural differences came when he went away to college at a state school in Northern California. Newly married with a baby on the way, he realized that both in background and family situation he was different from many of his college classmates. After taking an aptitude inventory assessment at college which indicated he would excel in a service-oriented job, Mr. Perez became involved with the campus's teacher diversity program, designed to encourage minority students to pursue careers in K-12 education. He initially volunteered and later did his student teaching at suburban high schools in the San Francisco Bay Area and discovered that he really liked being around kids. He particularly enjoyed the relational aspects of teaching and was drawn toward extra-curricular and classroom experiences that would allow for teaching. Outside of the classroom, he coached football and helped organize student clubs and events. Within the classroom, Mr. Perez decided to pursue a credential in history, a subject area, he believed, that would allow for the most interesting opportunities to interact with students through discussions and debates.

After receiving his credential, Mr. Perez returned to Southern California to be near his family and his wife's family. He and his wife at that time had two children and he was eager to get started on his career. Unfortunately the timing was less than ideal and a district hiring freeze prevented Mr. Perez from receiving a permanent job offer, despite the fact that he wanted to teach in low-income schools which traditionally have staffing needs. He put his resume in with principals at urban schools in the district and soon began substituting at both middle and high schools. He credits this period of his career with helping him learn how to develop a relationship with and manage a classroom and allowing him to realize that he never wanted to teach middle school. After several

months of day-to-day substituting, Mr. Perez was hired as a leave-replacement substitute in a science classroom at Washington High School. Although science was not his area of expertise, he worked hard and impressed the principal enough to be kept on after the leave replacement contract ended, this time as a special education teacher. Mr. Perez spent the next two and one-half years working with students with mild to moderate developmental disabilities in a self-contained special education classroom. Although he was at times frustrated by the pace of learning and overwhelmed by the demands on his time (in part due to the need to prepare materials for four different subject areas and in part due to the state requirements that he take additional coursework at a local university to meet special education credential requirements), Mr. Perez credits this part of his teaching career with teaching him patience and helping him to realize that as a teacher it was his responsibility to attempt to reach and meet the needs of all the students in his classroom.

After three years at Washington, Mr. Perez was approached by his former high school English teacher. She had just been appointed as principal at Mesa High School and wanted him to come over to that school to teach history. Excited at the prospect of working with his former teacher and enthused to return to a content area in which he felt he had greater expertise, Mr. Perez agreed. Mesa's principal had had a significant impact on Mr. Perez when she was his teacher in high school. Looking back, he considers her to have been both an excellent teacher and a trusted mentor, the only teacher who really had an impact. He explains that through most of high school he "coasted" academically, putting most of his energies into sports and extra-curriculars, the

"fun stuff". His English teacher was the only one, he believes, who really challenged him.

> She held high expectations, she presented information in many different ways, she evaluated how well you did, what you learned in different ways too... She was my teacher for two years, helped me get into college and see a future for myself. She was almost like a mom on campus for me. (Interview, April 18, 2005)

Interestingly, when Mr. Perez first began teaching it was the extra-curriculars that were his first love, particularly when he was teaching out of his content area at Washington. In the midst of his early years, coaching football, organizing school dances, and helping with student clubs helped to keep him invested in the school and involved with the students. He explains that this focus was similar to much of his own experience as a high school student. It was only when he encountered his English teacher again, this time as Mesa's principal, that Mr. Perez began to focus on making his classroom meaningful and challenging academically. Working with colleagues and an instructional coach, Mr. Perez shifted the focus of his history instruction away from activities that he hoped would be "fun" and moved instead toward using essential questions (Wiggins & McTighe, 1998) to engage students in meaningful debate and discussion about historical issues. He increased the rigor in the classroom and raised expectations for students. He continues to be a teacher with a "fun" and "cool" reputation and continues to enjoy participating in student activities – He currently advises the student government on campus, hosts dances and air band contents, and sponsors the Fellowship of Christian Athletes; but he has added to that reputation and now his class is now seen by students as "tough but fair" with a "challenging but helpful" teacher. Further, Mr. Perez explains

that he now gets as much, if not more, satisfaction from what he does in the classroom as compared to all that he does outside.

Mr. Mason

When Mr. Mason hit thirty, he decided to grow up and find a real job. He'd bounced around from job to job during his twenties, more concerned about making enough money to travel than about pursuing a career. During that time he'd tried teaching English in Japan and working at a summer camp for teens, and discovered, by happenstance, that he really liked being around kids. He'd found that he had a "knack" for teaching and decided that teaching could be a rewarding career. He returned to the city where he was raised in Southern California and enrolled in a local teacher credentialing program.

As it turned out, "falling into" teaching, a career that he's come to love, was the easy part for Mr. Mason, getting started in the classroom was much more difficult. Mr. Mason had a "devastating" experience student teaching. He was constantly criticized by three master teachers who regularly gave him conflicting advice. Their final evaluation rated his "overall potential as a teacher" as zero, a score he found "crippling." He almost quit and went back to Japan, and probably would have had it not been for relationship commitments in Southern California and a casual friendship that had developed with a math teacher at the school where he did his science student teaching. Talking with and later observing the math teacher in the classroom, Mr. Mason discovered a model that he felt would work for him. The teacher emphasized skill mastery among his students and saw his roll as that of a coach, working alongside students to support their growth. This

was an approach that Mr. Mason, who had had experience working on the athletic fields as a coach, felt he could emulate. He took courses at the community college to earn enough credits to add math to his teaching credential and secured a job teaching remedial Algebra to ninth grade students at Mission High School.

Mr. Mason describes his first year at Mission, a large urban high school with a significant immigrant population, as a "disaster." Although he definitely liked teaching math more than science, he wondered, during that first year, if he was really "teaching" anything. The kids were resistant, few did the work, and behavior problems seemed to be just part of the routine. He survived thanks to a mentor that the district provided through their beginning teacher support program. The mentor informed him that everyone has trouble their first year, and that his main responsibility was just to "survive." That took the pressure off and allowed Mr. Mason to begin to focus on and learn from the good things that were happening in class. He began to notice when students were trying and to consider what motivated them to put effort into the classroom. What he discovered was that when students got a taste of success, they started working harder, that that hard work translated into greater success, and the cycle repeated itself. Talking to the students and reviewing their academic records, he learned almost every kid is his classroom had already failed algebra, and many had failed pre-algebra as well. They had been working the success cycle in reverse and so, of course they didn't want to try or put effort into the course, why take risks if there are unlikely to be any rewards.

Building on this realization, Mr. Mason began to re-design his approach to the class. He provided more opportunities for students to demonstrate their learning in more ways. He broke lessons and units into smaller, more discrete skill sets so that students

would be less likely to feel overwhelmed by new information. And, realizing that the value was in the work rather than in the product, he began to allow students to re-take tests and re-submit projects. The results of this change in approach have been "fantastic".

> Once the kids get a little taste of success and feeling good about themselves, you just can't stop them. They are coming in after school and you're here until five o'clock... They keep trying and trying because they know they can do it... For me it's a lot like coaching. (Interview, June 20, 2005)

By the end of his second or third year, Mr. Mason reports that discipline problems were almost non-existent, students were focused, grades had improved and both he and the students were really enjoying the class. However, all was not perfect. Student scores on the California Standards Test were still not nearly as high as the state, and Mr. Mason, desired. Although they were working hard in his class, learning, and gaining confidence in the short-term, his students were failing the standardized assessments that would determine their ability to progress further in their educational career.

At about this time, Mission, using state school improvement funds, brought in outside consultants to work with teams of teachers at the site to align their curricula and instruction with the state standards and standardized tests. For Mr. Mason, this was an eye-opening experience. He realized that the curricula he had been using, in accordance with district guidelines, did not match the significantly higher expectations of the state standards. In essence, he decided, "we were setting our kids up to fail [the standardized tests]." Having recognized the problem, Mr. Mason set out to fix it. He kept the "soul" of the district approach—an exploratory approach that encouraged students to come to their own understanding of concepts—but put the old textbook on the shelf. He re-wrote the curricula to teach skills and problem solving strategies more closely aligned with state

standards. He created pre-tests for each unit to help him assess student needs. He also organized an after-school math support group to help students who were struggling. Although his colleagues were involved in this effort to some degree, Mr. Mason admits that he kind of took over.

> I just thought [this approach] was superior to what I had been doing. I knew it was going to be a lot of work upfront, and would be a lot of work to implement... But I really believed in the work, and it's paid off. (June 20, 2005)

Mr. Mason proudly enumerates his student test scores, noting that they are the highest for any ninth grade algebra teacher in the school and among the highest in the district. He explains that after he began focusing on building students' confidence and increased the rigor of his curriculum, he began to feel like "my students are better off having me instead of somebody else."

The past year, in particular, has been "just phenomenal," in Mr. Mason's estimation. This is in part due to his experience in the classroom, and in part due to the fact that he is now part of a "small school" learning community at Mission High. He loves the small school principal, really enjoys the kids, and perhaps most importantly, this is the first time that he has really felt like he was part of a dedicated community of professionals. The teachers on his ninth grade team provide him with camaraderie and support and have helped renew his enthusiasm for teaching at Mission. Where before he often felt as though his classroom was an isolated oasis, now he sees his team as working together to really meet the needs of individual students and make sure that they don't fall through the cracks.

Ms. Woods

Ms. Woods comes from a family of teachers. Both parents are math teachers, her father at a prestigious parochial high school in Southern California and her mother at a middle school that feeds into the high school, Mission High, where Ms. Woods now teaches. Despite their influence, however, Ms. Woods long resisted the idea of becoming a teacher. She did not particularly enjoy school while growing up, despite being a bright and capable student. Much of her struggle with school came from not fitting in, especially in middle school and high school. Having tested as gifted, Ms. Woods left her neighborhood school to attend a nearby gifted magnet program. The middle school she attended served students from both her neighborhood elementary school and her magnet school, a situation that caused significant tension for Ms. Woods. She felt trapped between her neighborhood friends, who came from a similar economic background, and her magnet friends, most of whom were white and wealthier. The tension this created caused her to begin to rebel against school, receiving her first "F" in eighth grade. The failing grade on the report card shocked her into acquiescing to her father's suggestion that she move to his parochial school for high school, where she encountered an even whiter and wealthier student population. She notes that for her high school was not a pleasant experience, but she had good relationships with her teachers, worked hard, and gained entrance to a California public university where, finally, she did feel that she fit in.

It was one of her high school teachers who first got Ms. Woods thinking about teaching. Her twelfth grade British literature teacher made the material seem so interesting-- The discussions were rich and thoughtful, the class even went to England, and for the first time, Ms. Woods began to imagine herself in the teaching role. She

vowed however, that she would not teach anything below twelfth grade, and, once in college, that expectation was raised even higher to considering only university level teaching.

Today, Ms. Woods teaches ninth grade English at Mission High School, working mostly with students who are below and significantly below grade level. When asked how she ended up here after previously insisting she would only teach college, Ms. Woods smiles and explains that it was quite a long process, that when she started out she had no idea that teaching ninth grade would allow her such amazing independence and creativity, and that it is with this age group that she feels that she can have the greatest impact.

After college Ms. Woods happened into a job working with severely developmentally disabled students. She describes it as providing her with the variety and purpose that she was looking for at the time, but explains that she knew it wouldn't work long term because it was so physically demanding. She returned to school to get her credential certificate and, when looking for jobs, decided to come to Mission because she knew several of the teachers and administrators there and, having been in her mom's classroom at the feeder middle school, had some understanding of the student population she would encounter. Having now worked at Mission for five years and acquired tenure she chooses to stay at Mission because she is committed to the kids, appreciates her colleagues, and is dedicated to the school. Also, having heard her father's stories, she realizes that the grass isn't necessarily greener in other, more affluent settings.

When she talks about her teaching, Ms. Woods describes the year just completed in glowing terms and speaks enthusiastically about plans she and her colleagues have

made for the year ahead. Her first years at the school, however, weren't always so wonderful. She arrived at Mission High in the midst of a district reform plan. She was assigned to a three hour literacy block, provided with lots of lessons in strategy instruction, and given seventeen students who were reading at an average of a third grade reading level. Ms. Woods describes this as the easiest and least satisfying year of her teaching experience. She had a few new teacher struggles, but for the most part received regular praise from her principal for her charts and room organization. She followed the district's expectations to the letter and quickly came to be seen as a rising star. Ms. Woods appreciated the praise (though not the rancor it created with some of her colleagues), and liked her relatively low workload, but in the back of her mind felt that something was amiss. She was uneasy about the low expectations that seemed to permeate the school and the lack of rigor in her classes.

Things began to change when a new literacy administrator arrived who challenged the staff to really consider its beliefs—Did they really think all students could succeed? What were they doing to make that happen? Inspired by the vision of the literacy administrator, Ms. Woods began to seek out ways to challenge her students. She introduced longer reading texts into their classes, began to demand more writing, and made greater use of assessments. In collaboration with like-minded colleagues, she worked to backward map (Wiggins & McTighe, 1998) the 9th through 12th grade courses to better prepare students to meet college entry requirements and align the coursework at Mission with the state standards, work she describes as time-consuming but "empowering". Simultaneously, Ms. Woods furthered her own education by pursuing a master's degree as a reading specialist, a focus she chose in order to help her to

understand the complexity of the act of reading and to better serve the needs of her students.

During the past two years, Ms. Woods, like Mr. Mason, has been part of a team that formed a small school learning community within what has now come to be called the Mission Educational Complex. Part of another district reform, this one aimed at struggling high schools, it is anticipated that breaking larger urban schools up into smaller learning communities will help to personalize instruction and lead to improvement in student academic performance (Darling-Hammond, 2002; School Redesign Network at Stanford, 2003). Ms. Woods describes this process as being the most time-consuming and most rewarding of her career thus far. She loves her ninth grade team and appreciates their dedication to making instruction meaningful for students and ensuring student success. She greatly appreciates the principal of their small school, feeling more respected and empowered by him than any previous administrator. She puts in a great deal of extra time working with students in book clubs and tutoring activities, but feels that she is not alone, knowing that many of her colleagues are also putting in extra hours. She notes that there is more pressure than ever before since your colleagues "know your business" through student talk and common assessments. But believes that this intimacy has helped her to be a better, more creative and dedicated teacher because she sees that what she does has a direct impact on the students she is responsible for.

Mr. Lindt

Mr. Lindt decided to become a teacher after determining that money does not buy happiness and that "you should use the talents you were given" (Interview, June 14,

2005). His realization about money came after watching his mother, who spent most of his childhood raising him and his brother as a single parent struggling to make ends meet, re-marry and achieve financial stability. He thought she would be much happier once she had money, but she explained that some of the best years of her life were raising her boys when they were little, even if it meant all three of them in a one-bedroom apartment. After reflecting that he, too, had been happy growing up, despite not having a lot of resources, Mr. Lindt began looking at career possibilities which would use his talents and provide him with daily satisfaction. He decided to pursue teaching because "I like kids...

> I think I still am a kid... I thought maybe [teaching] would be fun and keep me young... I majored in mathematics so I could have gone anywhere... The navy was offering me six figures to design weapons systems... But I really didn't see that as being fulfilling. (Interview, June 14, 2005)

The decision to teach came significantly before the decision to teach math for Mr. Lindt. He originally wanted to major in literature and teach English, but a college counselor steered him toward math after looking at his test scores. Mr. Lindt jokingly refers to his natural math aptitude as a "math curse" and explains that he never really liked math courses in school. He does, however, enjoy teaching the subject and recognizes now that his dislike of math probably had more to do with the style of teaching than the subject itself.

Southeast High School, where Mr. Lindt now teaches, is a long way from the Atlanta suburb where he grew up. He didn't intend to teach at Southeast, a tough urban school in the middle of gang territory, nor did he seek out urban schools in general. He just decided to pack up and drive West after finishing college and to start his career in a new state. He originally hoped to teach in more of a middle class school (he had

experienced an upper-class teaching environment during his years of student teaching and greatly disliked the parent pressure), but by the time he finished clearing his credential with the state of California and pushing his paperwork through the district, few teaching jobs were available. He took the job at Southeast without high expectations, but came to really love the kids. He feels needed at Southeast, a small school with a largely African-American and Latino population located in the heart of one of the most violent neighborhoods in the county, and though he initially saw the job as transitional, now, he says, he's leaning toward staying forever. He feels that the school has changed him, made him more aware of societal injustice and a better, more compassionate person. He sees Southeast as an oasis and feels a responsibility toward the staff, students, and community to stay, a feeling that he says baffles his family back home in Georgia who continue to believe the stereotypes they see in gang movies and regularly plead with him to find a new job.

Among the 12 teachers in this study, Mr. Lindt was the most enthusiastic about his pre-service teacher education program. In his view, the courses were well designed, mostly relevant, and academically challenging. He particularly appreciated his methods course which was taught by the former president of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics. But, he notes, "no one is really prepared to enter the classroom." He describes his first year teaching at Southeast as a "nightmare... I was the sixth substitute they had had... So for the first half of the year it was just horrible. And the rest of the year wasn't any better." Despite the challenges, he stayed, because, he explains " I was determined that I could do better." Mr. Lindt's phrasing here is important. He didn't blame the students for the frustrations and failings of his first year at Southeast, he bore

that responsibility himself. Thinking back, he comments, "If I had to look back on myself now, I would probably throw up looking at what I was doing."

Determined to do better, Mr. Lindt set out to improve his practice. He credits his students and his colleagues with being his best teachers. His students taught him the importance of respect. By watching his students and reflecting on his interactions with them, Mr. Lindt came to understand that he needed to earn their trust by consistently treating them with respect, never shaming them in front of classmates, and wherever possible, reaching out to form relationships with them both in and outside of the classroom. Though he struggled to connect with student that first year, Mr. Lindt is now proud of the close bonds that he has developed with students and feels liked and respected on campus. He believes that these bonds allow him to be a much more effective teacher. He is able to focus on instruction rather than management and to better tailor his instruction to meet students' needs.

> Part of it is getting them to trust me and to believe that I don't think they are stupid. Once they know that I think they are capable, then they'll tell me when they don't understand and I can really help them. I've taught several kids to do long division this year, tenth and eleventh graders. They have to know that I'm not going to laugh at them if they come and ask for help. (Interview, June 14, 2005)

From his colleagues, Mr. Lindt has learned how to make content meaningful and accessible to students. Though he was provided with a new teacher mentor and a math administrator through district induction and reform programs, Mr. Lindt found both of them fairly useless. Similarly, he has found that district and regional professional development opportunities aren't particularly helpful or relevant, explaining, "I always felt like the farther I get away from the core people that I work with, students and

teachers, the less useful it is." What he has found to be extremely helpful are collaborations with colleagues in his department at Southeast. At first those collaborations were informal, conversations in the teacher's workroom that grew into regular planning meetings. The principal added structure to the collaboration when he decided to require all staff members to participate in lesson study based on the Japanese model (see, for example, Lewis, 2002; Lewis & Tsuchida, 1998). Through this model the teachers planned a particular lesson together from start to finish, observed one another as they implemented the lesson, and then de-briefed to reflect on their struggles and successes. Mr. Lindt believes that participation in lesson study with his colleagues has been the "best professional development I've ever had."

A final factor that has been significant in Mr. Lindt's growth has been the opportunity to spend time crafting his curriculum. A self-described perfectionist, Mr. Lindt has never found a text or instructional program that satisfies his needs. Consequently he has spent a great deal of time re-working the content of the courses he teaches to meet his instructional approach and the needs of his students. This effort has not only produced materials that he finds useful in the classroom, it has also allowed Mr. Lindt to interact with the content of the course and to take ownership of both his subject and his pedagogy. Confident in his content and his approach to classroom instruction in general, Mr. Lindt is now able to "tweak" his teaching to try to meet the needs of individual students.

> You know, it's like you get higher and higher in your expectations for yourself and the kids. At first you're happy just to get them to do the basic problems. Then you really want to see them to try the more difficult problems. Now I'm not happy unless I feel like every student in the room is challenged and learning to the highest of their potential. This is the first

> year where I've really had kids say, "Mr. Lindt, you're making me think too much," or "My brain hurts." That's the best thing to hear because it tells me that I've really pushed them. It makes me really happy. (Interview, June 14, 2005)

Ms. Krause

Ms. Krause was born and raised in a small, homogeneous mid-Western town. The youngest child and the only girl, she was sent to Catholic school while her brothers attended the local public school, a disparity she deeply disliked. Although she was a good student and excelled easily in school, she resented the rigidity of her Catholic school upbringing and saw herself as a rebel. Looking back now she believes that she received an excellent education from the nuns, but at the time she couldn't wait to get out of school. Pregnant at 17, Ms. Krause dropped out during her senior year, passed the high school equivalency test, and went to work as a licensed vocational nurse to support herself and her daughter.

After her daughter reached school age, Ms. Krause decided to continue her education and enrolled at a nearby university. She initially took nursing classes in order to obtain her registered nursing degree. However, her aptitude and hard work got her noticed by a physiology professor who pushed her academically and encouraged her to consider a career in teaching. She credits that professor with significantly changing the trajectory of her career and with providing her with confidence to see possibilities she had never imagined for herself before.

> I was at a college where it was mainly kids, you know, privileged kids who had come to the university... So I probably stood out like a sore thumb because you know I was a single mother and he knew that and I worked in the lab after school to pick up extra money... He knew my story

> and her really pushed me academically. I wasn't really confident but he really did see something in me that I didn't and I just will never forget that. (Interview, June 1, 2005)

Ms. Krause notes that her interaction with this professor has shaped her vision of the role she tries to play with her students—Someone who seeks out those who most need support and challenges them to believe in themselves and their future.

After completing both her nursing degree and teaching degree, Ms. Krause began teaching in a suburban high school in the mid-West. Although that school was affluent in comparison to the school in which she now teaches, it was overcrowded and she spent the first two years teaching biology off of a cart that she moved from room to room. She credits her life experience as a nurse and a mother with providing her with confidence to believe in herself during her first few years, but notes that she really didn't feel like she knew what she was doing until around her fifth year of teaching. At about that time three experiences converged that allowed her to feel successful. First, she had her daughter as a student, an experience that forced her to re-evaluate and re-configure her instructional practices to allow more students with many different learning styles to be successful. In addition, she had become active in the regional biology teacher association and she was able to network and connect with colleagues beyond the confines of her own school building and its very traditional teachers. Finally, a local councilmember, who was a friend from growing up, helped her to start a vocational program for students interested in pursuing health careers. Ms. Krause developed and implemented a rigorous academic curriculum in the school and established relationships with local clinics and health care organizations where students could perform internships that would allow them to connect their academic learning to its practical application. Students in the program took courses

with Ms. Krause for all four years of high school, often forming strong, supportive relationships with each other and their teacher. Ms. Krause greatly appreciated this opportunity and looks back on the internship program as one of the best experiences of her teaching career. She explains that it empowered her and allowed her to really make a difference in the lives of her students.

Following the death of her parents and a bitter divorce, Ms. Krause decided to move herself and her three daughters to California. She had recently completed her administrative credential and, after spending a year as a principal in Southern California, started her own business providing consulting services to elementary schools in the West. The focus of her work was largely on character education, however she also provided support for school safety plans, teacher evaluations, and administrative organization. Ms. Krause credits this work with providing her a larger understanding of the purpose and function of a school. She came to see students and their families as clients and recognized that often schools, administrators, and teachers fail to adequately serve their clients.

Most of the schools and districts that Ms. Krause worked with during her years as a consultant were affluent and suburban. Given this history, as well as her own growing up and her early teaching experience, it is somewhat surprising that she now teaches at the poorest school in her Southern California county. Newly built and serving almost exclusively children of recent immigrants, Cabrillo High School has over 90 percent of its students on free and reduced lunch and the vast majority enter the school reading, writing and computing significantly below grade level. When asked how she ended up in the school, Ms. Krause explains that she and her second husband were looking to

relocate to the Southern part of their county. With two daughters still in school, Ms. Krause investigated public schools in the area around where they were house shopping and "fell in love with the principal's vision" at Cabrillo.

> I was so impressed... Having worked with a lot of principals in the last 20 years, I just knew that something was different here. I knew that he really got it. He was really good with students, he had a vision, and I was just so impressed. (Interview, June 1, 2005)

She decided to move her middle daughter from the much more affluent suburban school she had been attending to Cabrillo in the middle of her ninth grade year. Ms. Krause believed that the change in school would be beneficial for her daughter, and that the opportunity to interact with students from different ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds would serve to instill in her the same respect for others, ethic of service, and perseverance that Ms. Krause's father had taught her.

With her daughter there, Ms. Krause ended up, "hanging around a lot, so they decided to put me to work." Initially she did mostly administrative work in the office, but in the Fall of 2004 she was asked to return to the classroom to teach the biology classes of a teacher who had quit two months into the school year.

Despite years of classroom and administrative experience, Ms. Krause admits that that first semester at Cabrillo was remarkably challenging. The classes she took over had had a series of substitutes and had come to despise the course material and the carousel of teachers that attempted to control the class. She was threatened physically and beat down emotionally. But she refused to give up. She built relationships with the students, maintained high expectations, and tried a variety of approaches to draw students into the course and to allow them to show their knowledge. She started a medics club on campus

to reach out to those students who may not feel that they fit in, and offered to take the routinely truant students into her advisory class in order to provide a structured environment for them and increase their attendance. She explains that a year in, she is confident in her teaching in a way she never has been before. Having raised three daughters, worked in the classroom, and supported the work of administrators in a range of school settings, she believes that she "gets it" now and is able to really serve the students in her classroom.

> I've been a mom, I've been an administrator, I really get it. I get what it's all about. And I just feel like man, this is where I need to be. There are so many needy students on this campus... This is where I'm needed. I need to be here because I get it, I know what I can do and I can make a difference for these kids. (Interview, June 1, 2005)

Mr. Baldia

Mr. Baldia currently teaches at the same high school, Vista Del Mar, from which he graduated in 1989. When he was a child his family moved around a great deal. He attended schools in four different states and Canada, including three different schools in two states during seventh grade alone. Having moved around and experienced so many different schools and teachers, Mr. Baldia brings with him to the classroom strong opinions about the roles and responsibilities of schools and teachers. He explains that his education in Florida was, in his opinion, the best as far as "content and teaching styles". He felt challenged academically and believes that his academic knowledge as well as his self-confidence and image of himself as a student were "advanced" by the teachers there. From Florida his family moved to Washington State where, he believes, the teachers "just weren't very good at all," and then to Southern California. He "bounced around" to

several schools and districts in Southern California and ended up skipping eighth grade because he was limited in the courses he was able to take at the middle school. Vista Del Mar, a large school near the Mexican border that serves primarily Mexican-American and Filipino students, provided him with the most stability of his educational career and he remembers appreciating many of the teachers there, some of whom are now his colleagues. But again, he felt that the course offerings at the school were too limited at the more advanced levels. This experience significantly shaped his goals once he entered the classroom as a teacher; Mr. Baldia has steadily worked toward increasing the number and variety of advanced courses, especially Advanced Placement courses, available at the school.

Although Mr. Baldia had enjoyed considerable success in his own schooling, he did not immediately decide to become a teacher. After graduating from Vista Del Mar he accepted a scholarship to a small liberal arts college in the Midwest. Far from home in a community that felt both physically and emotionally cold, Mr. Baldia was unhappy. He completed his first year and then transferred back to a large public university in Southern California. There he excelled, studying journalism and preparing for a career as a reporter. After college he worked freelance for several local papers, specializing in covering high school sports teams. While at the high schools, Mr. Baldia discovered he enjoyed hanging out with the students and the teachers and began to consider the possibility of teaching. He got an emergency teaching credential and began substituting to pick up extra income and to try out the possibility of teaching. Mr. Baldia explains that he gave himself six months to try teaching out and make a decision. After six months of substituting, not usually considered the easiest or most enjoyable of teaching

roles, Mr. Baldia decided to pursue teaching as a career, a decision that was clinched when he called to cancel his interview with editors at the largest regional newspaper, an interview that he had worked for the previous two years to secure.

Once the decision was made, Mr. Baldia pursued his teaching career with the same tenacious work ethic that he had brought to his own education and his stint in journalism. He quickly obtained a teaching credential that would allow him to teach both history, his primary subject of interest, and mathematics, a secondary interest and a teaching field that was much in demand at the time. He began working at a local middle school teaching remedial math to seventh and eighth graders. Over time he developed a strong reputation and was gradually offered opportunities to teach more advanced middle school courses in both math and history, and was also able to develop an elective to teach video journalism. His primary interest, however, still lay at the high school, and when a job became available he decided, after extensive internal debate and extended conversations with former teachers (who were also soon to be colleagues), to make make the move to Vista Del Mar.

At the high school, Mr. Baldia once again found himself working primarily with struggling students. He taught algebra classes to ninth graders who had failed eighth grade algebra and a remedial history class designed to help students who had previously failed catch up on their credits. Although this type of course and this population was not the work he most wanted to pursue, Mr. Baldia nevertheless worked hard to make the instruction meaningful and was pleased with the growth of the students many of whom, he proudly notes, outscored their peers on end-of-course examinations.

> If I'm going to deliver instruction, I'm going to want to do the best that I can. I want to see what I can come up with... I worked hard to motivate those kids, I brought in lots of outside material to connect the subject with their lives. Although they complained about the workload at the time, I got lots of comments afterward that they learned a tremendous amount... I think that for many, it was the first time that anyone really showed them that they believed they could be successful in the classroom. (Interview May 23, 2005)

Mr. Baldia also notes that teaching a range of students in a variety of subjects allowed him to better understand students, their learning, their schooling experience and the techniques that he can use to support their academic achievement.

Gradually Mr. Baldia worked his way up to teaching Advanced Placement (AP) history courses, particularly AP courses in European History, Government, and Art History. He also works collaboratively with the 9th and 10th grade English teachers to offer pre-AP courses for interested students. Although he recognizes that he is privileged to have some of the best students in the school, he is quick to explain that the AP program at Vista Del Mar is open to anyone and that no AP course has pre-requisites for enrollment. He actively recruits students into his courses and is proud not just of his students' AP pass rate, over two-thirds of his 10th grade students pass the exam, but also of the expansion of the program which has grown from barely enough students to justify one class, to an enrollment that more than fills three classes.

By returning to his old high school, Mr. Baldia explains that he gains "instant credibility" among the students. He has his Vista Del Mar diploma proudly displayed on the front wall of his classroom and points out to students that he understands their struggles because he too, has been there. Like he hopes many of them will be, Mr. Baldia was the first in his family to attend college. As a Filipino who grew up with divorced

parents, he too has faced discrimination and family struggles. However, Mr. Baldia does not solely rely on his own experiences in order to connect with his students. He actively reaches out to participate in their lives both inside and outside of the classroom. In the past he has coached sports, run a film club, and been involved with student government. He currently coaches the Academic League team, a team comprised almost exclusively of first generation immigrants that beat out every other team in the county last year. Many of the students on this team are also students in his AP classes and getting to know them in a different context, Mr. Baldia believes, enhances his ability to connect with them and push them to achieve in the classroom. Mr. Baldia's favorite event of the year is the annual Academic League Christmas party that he hosts at his home, he explains that the students "descend on my house and eat me out of house and home," and all the while he is moving around engaging in conversations, getting to know and appreciate the students as individuals outside of the school environment.

When asked about his own professional growth, Mr. Baldia explains that he is very confident in the classroom now and believes that he does a very effective job "serving my clientele." However, he admits that he struggled in the early years. He explains that he would spend many hours every day writing lessons, writing reflections on lessons, and reading professional literature in an effort to improve his practice. He attended workshops and learned strategies designed to support student learning and study skills. He believes that all of this work, as well as just the experience of teaching, supported his growth, but notes that it was not until his second year of AP teaching that he really believed he was at the top of his game. A self-described results-oriented person, Mr. Baldia appreciated the clear expectations of the AP program and notes that attending

AP workshops allowed him to re-think his content and its goals and provided him with a better understanding of how the various elements of instruction could build upon one other. Seeing students succeed on the exam, particularly when he had to fight against administrator and teacher doubts to get the course started, confirmed Mr. Baldia's self-image as an effective teacher in his urban school setting.

Ms. Hernandez

Ms. Hernandez knew from a very early age that she would become a teacher. She was five when her sister was born and quickly became her sister's first teacher. She taught her to read, write, multiply and divide before her sister entered kindergarten. She describes teaching not so much as a career, but a calling.

Ms. Hernandez's own schooling experience was not always positive. She spent the early years of her life in Mexico and then moved to Southern California after her father passed away. Her mother believed that there were better opportunities for the family in the United States. However the benefits of those opportunities were not always readily apparent to Ms. Hernandez. She vividly recalls her early years of American elementary school where she was not allowed to speak Spanish and, since she was not yet proficient in English, spent much of the school day without a voice of her own. That experience led her to doubt her own abilities and for many years she didn't think of herself as capable. However, thanks to the intervention of a high school teacher who believed in her potential, as well as her mother's unflagging support, Ms. Hernandez graduated from high school with honors and was accepted into a prestigious local university.

At college, Ms. Hernandez became active in the Mexican-American student movement on campus. She attended workshops, sit-ins, and protest rallies. She double majored in Spanish literature and Chicano studies, earning academic honors and reclaiming the cultural and linguistic heritage that her K-12 schooling had largely eradicated—"It was horrible! By 10th grade I was stuttering in Spanish. I vowed, this will not happen again!" Throughout her college years, she continued to see herself becoming a teacher, but rarely talked about it with her professors or peers, among whom teaching was not always seen as a respected profession. But Ms. Hernandez persevered, believing that through education she could continue maintain an activist stance by working to improve educational opportunities for students from backgrounds similar to her own.

After earning her bachelor's degree and teaching credential, Ms. Hernandez secured her first teaching job at a middle school in a middle-class community, an experience she describes as "my purgatory." She explains that people there weren't comfortable with her brown skin, the holes in her ears, or the way she dressed. The administration refused to allow her to start a dance program or cultural club for the few Latino students on campus and she was reprimanded for choosing to eat lunch in the cafeteria with the students rather than in the teachers' lounge. Her evaluation was very negative and an administrator who hired her to work in her present district later confessed, "Had I not known you and gone just by what that letter said, there's no way you would have gotten another job."

Moving to Vista Del Mar was like "coming home," according to Ms. Hernandez. Although she hadn't attended Vista Del Mar itself, she had attended its predecessor school, grown up in the community, and knew the kids and their cultural traditions. She

initially started teaching social studies classes at Vista Del Mar, but after ten years gradually moved into teaching Spanish language, particularly AP Spanish courses for Spanish speakers. She believes that these courses offer opportunities for success for students who previously may not have had those opportunities and considers the opportunity to teach those classes "what I was sent to do... by the Big Power." A spiritual person, she explains that "teaching, particularly teaching "these kids... is who I am." Ms. Hernandez lives in the community and freely gives out her phone number and address to students who need extra help or support. She runs the Folklorico program on campus and sponsors the campus chapter of MEChA, the Chicano student organization.

Ms. Hernandez also actively provides leadership for her peers. She leads district workshops on cultural diversity and the language needs of second language learners, teaches courses to credential candidates at a local university, and serves on numerous school committees. She has obtained her Masters Degree and administrative credentials largely because she wanted to strengthen her own voice in the larger professional community and believed that these degrees would provide her with additional credibility. Although she believes that she was an effective and successful teacher right from the beginning, Ms. Hernandez sees her participation in these various professional growth opportunities as providing her with an increasing number of skills and strategies to improve her instruction. Leading workshops and classes, in particular, has forced her to re-evaluate and re-think her own instructional practices so that she can provide appropriate guidance and suggestions to others. She emphasizes, however, that the feedback and guidance that has best supported her growth comes from informal interactions with her students and with a small community of trusted colleagues who

have grown and learned together during her two decades teaching and learning at Vista Del Mar.

Ms. Patterson

Ms. Patterson chose to become a teacher for the hours. She was a mother of young children in a shaky marriage trying to hold down a job with long hours and it just wasn't working. She decided to try teaching because she would have "afternoons and summers off" to be with her two young sons. But as soon as she first began teaching, she reports, she discovered "it was my calling, my passion... [I am] extremely blessed that I love it" (Interview, June 14, 2005).

Although she had found her calling in teaching, finding a permanent job was more of a challenge. At the time, districts weren't hiring, and Ms. Patterson ended up moving around the district quite a bit filling in as a leave replacement teacher and working on temporary contracts. She taught high school English in a working class school, middle school honors English in an affluent suburban school, English as a Second Language, and even independent study English at the continuation school. Though frustrated by the lack of stability at the time, looking back Ms. Patterson judges the experience, particularly the opportunity to observe the work of students and teachers in such varied environments, as helpful in supporting her growth as an educator.

Ms. Patterson eventually found a home at Vista Del Mar High School. As an urban school serving predominantly low-income, minority students, Vista Del Mar was not a school that Ms. Patterson would have sought out based solely on demographics. But once there she appreciated the philosophy of the school, the respectful and

appreciative attitude of the students, the dedication of the parents in supporting their children's education, and the professionalism of her colleagues. The principal at the time was determined that the school prepare its students for college, a challenge that Ms. Patterson embraced. Looking back, however, Ms. Patterson now realizes that at the time she didn't necessarily believe that all of Vista Del Mar's students really could go to college. Perhaps it was a remnant of her parents' racist beliefs, perhaps influenced by media portrayals of gang members, but when a student walked into class during Ms. Patterson's first year at Vista Del Mar with the tattoos and attire of a gang member and a bandana half covering his face, she immediately assigned him to sit in the back of the room at the desk closest to the door. She figured that in that seat he could be the last one in and the first one out and would be less likely to cause trouble; essentially, she admits, "I wrote him off." She was shocked, therefore, when the first batch of student essays arrived on her desk. Reading through the responses, she saw that most students had parroted her lectures in class, but the student with the bandana had read, listened, thought, and developed a sophisticated analysis that, while not expressed in the most grammatically correct prose, showed a depth of understanding far beyond anything she could have predicted. Reading that student's paper "was an epiphany." It caused Ms. Patterson to take a hard look at her beliefs about and expectations for students and to evaluate the messages, both verbal and non-verbal, that she communicated to students.

> That's when I really started to understand what [the principal] meant when she talked about preparing these students for college. She said, 'Don't look at them and say he'll never make it. You give them the tools, let them make the decision.' I think that experience really heightened those messages to me. Don't look at them and judge them; that they can or can't do something. They deserve equal opportunity. (Interview, June 14, 2005)

Looking at the differences between the students' papers also caused Ms. Patterson to re-think her instructional practices. After reading the paper of the student with the bandana, she returned to the other students' papers, the ones of students who had behaved beautifully, taken copious notes, and parroted back exactly what Ms. Patterson had said. Re-reading those papers, Ms. Patterson had a second epiphany, "I did all the thinking in the classroom, I wasn't asking the students to do any thinking." This realization started Ms. Patterson down a career-long path of professional development and growth. She saw that the stand-and-deliver methods of her own education and her pre-service teacher credentialing program were inadequate and began to seek out learning opportunities to improve her practice. She attended after-school workshops and summer teaching institutes, always finding something to take away and apply to her classroom. Though this work took her away from her own family, she explains that she saw her participation as part of her professional responsibility.

> If you are going to do something, do it right or don't do it at all. That is what I was taught. And so to spend time in professional development and take away time from my children was just part of the sacrifice that everybody was going to have to make because this is my profession. Mothering is my profession, and I also have a second profession, and that is teaching. And I owe it to these students to give them as much as I give my own children. (Interview, June 14, 2005)

Professional development is best, according to Ms. Patterson, when she is engaged as an active participant. Her most valued professional learning came when she worked with colleagues at Vista Del Mar to develop unit plans in collaboration with local university professors. Reviewing the standards, listening to the professors talk about the

strengths and weaknesses they saw in Vista Del Mar's graduates, and then crafting units that would really challenge students and prepare them for college was a "wonderful learning opportunity." The fact that the units were developed "in-house" allowed Vista Del Mar's teachers to develop units that would hook students into the materials, to capture their attention and entice them to learn. Ms. Patterson strongly believed in that work, as well as the teacher led strategy workshops and focus walks that accompanied implementation of the units. She saw tremendous growth in student performance as a result of this work and firmly believes it made her a better, more fulfilled teacher. In contrast, Ms. Patterson is very unhappy about the current administration's reform agenda which largely involves the required use of a particular textbook and its teacher guides, a resource that Ms. Patterson believes is disconnected from students' experiences and inadequate in its expectations, a theme echoed by all of the teachers from Vista Del Mar who participated in this study.

Despite her frustration with the current administration, Ms. Patterson continues to try hard to cultivate a classroom of high expectations and respect. She believes that she is able to push students to achieve at higher levels because they know that she cares about them. Having her own vivid memories of being shamed by teachers as a child and still smarting from the ridicule it prompted from her classmates, Ms. Patterson is careful to show respect to her students. She tries to be fair to all, to never embarrass students by calling on them when they don't know the answer, and to respect students' intelligence and ideas by welcoming their contributions to classroom discussion. Though her passion for teaching was present from the first day she stepped into the classroom, Ms. Patterson believes that her philosophy and approach have evolved over time, and continue to

evolve, in response to input from colleagues and administrators and in response to her own observations of what works and what is meaningful for her students.

Ms. Potter

Teaching is Ms. Potter's second career. Her first was working in South America for Amnesty International. But that work, while extremely rewarding, carried with it a high degree of physical danger. After her son was born, Ms. Potter began looking for a job that would allow her to continue doing human rights work while simultaneously providing a safe environment for her child. She began teaching in her native Canada, working with adult second language learners. Given her experience in South America, her interest in linguistics, and her fluency in both Spanish and Portuguese, this seemed like a perfect fit. After two years working with adults, she moved into the high school and, a few years later came to Southern California and began work at Vista Del Mar High School.

Although superficial demographics would suggest that Ms. Potter has little in common with her mostly Mexican-American and Filipino students, her life story is actually closer to theirs than might be expected. Ms. Potter spent the early years of her life living as an illegal immigrant from Canada living in Massachusetts. She recalls being very aware of the tensions of her family's illegal status as well as the instability and secrecy of their lives and the resulting struggles in her primary schooling. For her secondary education, Ms. Potter was sent to Anglican boarding schools in England and later Canada. Coming from a very poor socio-economic background, she felt very out of place in these environments and regularly acted out. It wasn't until high school when a

teacher saw through her misbehavior to the intelligence and insecurity and provided her with books and friendship that Ms. Potter began to realize that she wasn't alone in her feeling of being "strange." Ms. Potter believes that these life experiences help her to connect with her students, many of whom also feel the impact of cultural and economic differences with mainstream society and who similarly feel out of place and disconnected. Her experience being raised in the Anglican church and her work in South America further helps her to connect through language, religious and cultural traditions.

Looking back, Ms. Potter is somewhat embarrassed to admit that when she first began teaching she taught "straight out of the textbook." She felt completely unprepared by her pre-service teacher education program and was simply following instructions. It wasn't until she had been in the classroom for several years that she began to look at the textbook and really question whether it was meeting the needs of her students. She decided she could do better and spent an entire summer writing, re-writing, and re-writing lesson plans in an effort to teach herself how to organize and teach an effective and engaging lesson.

This work helped, but Ms. Potter believes that her greatest learning has come from observing and collaborating with colleagues. She explains that now she regularly solicits feedback from her peers as well as her students in an effort to improve, but confesses that it wasn't always easy to do so. In her early years of teaching, Ms. Potter worked mostly in isolation. Collaboration was forced upon her when she arrived at Vista Del Mar and was offered the opportunity to teach an honors class. She was thrilled and spent the summer devising lots of creative projects with which she hoped to engage the students. But several months into the course, her students went to another teacher to

report that they weren't really learning and that their teacher "doesn't know what she's doing." Although crushed by this news, Ms. Potter knew that if she wanted to keep the class she would need to work hard to improve and part of that involved opening herself up to critique.

> I immediately started reading everything I could find, looking at everything, going to every workshop... I went anywhere I had to go, watching people, listening to people, and learning from them what the difference was between what I thought I was doing, which I thought was so great, and what changes I would have to make to really be effective in that role... As I worked through it, I began to see that if I were to improve my own skills that I needed to learn from others and that I needed to do that on a consistent basis, but just from workshops at the beginning of the school year. (Interview, June 2, 2005).

Ms. Potter explains that it isn't always easy when her colleagues criticize her, but she believes that listening to feedback from her peers and collaborating with them to develop curriculum maps, interdisciplinary units, and portfolio assessments has helped her to dramatically improve as a teacher.

Ms. Potter believes that her students are another important source of feedback. She explains that they often bring important knowledge to the classroom that is unique and valuable and that listening to their insights enriches the class. Further, listening to students allows her to cultivate a respectful environment in the classroom. She explains that kids, especially the kids at Vista Del Mar, crave respect and "if you show them respect, they will do whatever you need." She emphasizes that often people don't expect much from Vista Del Mar's students; they see the low socio-economic status and the skin color and write students off. But Ms. Potter has found that the talent and abilities of her students consistently impress her.

> The level of ability is astonishing and astounding and always is... I have many stories that go with this, but it always amazes me every year that I walk into the classroom and meet yet another young person from a so-called deprived background who is on his or her way to Stanford or Berkeley. (Interview, June 2, 2005)

As a teacher, Ms. Potter feels responsible for nurturing those bright and capable students by "opening the door for them bit by bit" and allowing them to pursue, if they choose, higher education and better career opportunities. She notes teachers in the gritty slums of Northern England helped her father and uncle to escape from poverty and believes that it is her responsibility to pass along similar opportunities to her students. It is a responsibility that, at times, "scares me to death" because "it really matters to me whether these students have a chance in life or not." She notes that it is not always easy to push students, particularly when many face significant obstacles in their own lives.

> But what is the option? If you don't push, and you don't encourage somebody in that situation to push, they are left with no options. Poverty and all its attendant problems aren't going to just go away, it's not going to magically get better. Therefore the only option is to go for the sky, to get as near to the sky as you can get. That's your choice. (Interview, June 2, 2005)

Ms. Potter models her high expectations for students by pushing herself to continue to excel and achieve. After 23 years of teaching, she continues to take on new challenges and responsibilities. Most recently she has agreed to write new curricula for a twelfth grade rhetoric class and will soon become an instructional coach for the eleventh and twelfth grade English teachers at Vista Del Mar. Additionally, she is seeking certification from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, working with regional chapter of Future Educators of America, and even taking courses in Arabic. She

explains that these opportunities provide her with new ideas for her classroom, new insights about teaching and learning, and push her to reconsider her actions in light of her goals.

> It forces me to think about what I am doing and why... Not just about the minutiae of lessons, I am way past that... But what my ultimate goals are for my students and myself. And then I have to evaluate my effectiveness in reaching those goals. I've done a lot of thinking about that. (Interview, June 2, 2005)

Ms. Zankovich

Ms. Zankovich describes teaching as the "family biz". Her mother was an elementary teacher for thirty years, her father was an instructor in the Navy, and today even her husband has changed careers, moving from sales into teaching at a middle school in a neighboring district. Growing up at a time when job options for women were limited, Ms. Zankovich had little doubt that she would become a teacher. She decided to teach secondary English largely because of the influence of a particularly strong seventh grade English teacher who impressed Ms. Zankovich because "she loved her kids, but she also loved her subject... she expected the best from you." Looking back, Ms. Zankovich believes that this teacher played a significant role in shaping her image of an effective teacher.

> She showed me that kids like teachers who have expectations... Of course, they like easy teachers, but they don't respect them. They know that in order to succeed they have to have skills, and they know that they bottom line is I'm here to teach them. I am not here to be their friend. (Interview, May 25, 2006)

After spending her early years as a Navy "brat" who moved from town to town, Ms. Zankovich moved to Southern California after her father's retirement. She initially

attended school in an affluent white suburb, but later transferred to one of the urban schools that is a part of this study, Central High School. As one of only a few white students on campus, Ms. Zankovich reports that the environment was somewhat intimidating at first, but she learned that "people are people," and soon developed strong friendships that crossed racial lines. She also notes that at the time Central had a very poor reputation in the larger community, both academically and due to concerns about racial tensions and violence, a reputation similar, and similarly undeserved, to the one that Vista Del Mar has today. However, as Ms. Zankovich remembers it, the same kids who led the fights after football games with rival schools were the leaders of school clubs and student government. She notes with pride that one of her classmates was the part of the first class at Yale that included women.

Ms. Zankovich went on to attend a local university where she initially received her English degree and later her teaching credential. After she described an incident in an African-American literature class I asked her how she happened to be taking such a class. Was it a requirement? Was it because she planned to teach in an urban setting? No, she replied, "I just thought it was part of being a good teacher period... I thought that I needed to be aware of other literature and that was a weakness in my studies." Ms. Zankovich's credentialing program was short, only six months—an experiment that was discontinued by the university after only one cadre of students completed the program. Ms. Zankovich explains that she was grateful for the short program since she was ready to "get on with it... I thought I was prepared... I thought I was hot stuff!"

This last statement is made in a wry tone of voice and with a roll of her eyes. Once she was in her own classroom, Ms. Zankovich quickly realized that nothing could

fully prepare her for standing in front of "forty hormonally imbalanced" students. During her first years in the classroom, Ms. Zankovich taught middle school English and home economics. She credits her survival to her own stubborn determination and to a group of young colleagues at the middle school who would get together to plan units and discuss how they were impacting their students' lives.

She moved to Vista Del Mar high school when a reading position opened up and has been there for nearly twenty years. She has taught everything from ninth through twelfth grade English, remedial to college prep to AP, study support skill courses, and home economics. The variety of courses, she reports, gives her a "perspective on the continuum of classes and... a better perspective on what classes support students," and it also keeps her active and engaged in the courses themselves.

During her time at Vista Del Mar, Ms. Zankovich has participated in many workshops and in-services, served as an instructional coach and mentor teacher, and taught credentialing classes at a local university. She explains that while some opportunities were more valuable than others, each contributed to steady, incremental growth in her teaching practice. She believes that participation in professional growth opportunities is part of her role as a professional.

> I am here to work and that's my job. If I were a lawyer, I would want to know the precedents and the cases. If I were a doctor I would want to know all the latest medical advances. What's so different about teaching? I want to be good. And I want my kids to take the best education possible away from my class. (Interview, May 25, 2006)

When asked to highlight a particularly meaningful teacher professional development opportunities, Ms. Zankovich recalls the work of the faculty when they

were under the leadership of a visionary principal. He had high expectations and demanded that students receive excellent instruction and meet rigorous standards. He pushed the faculty to prepare all students for college level coursework, expanding the number of advanced courses and requiring teachers to use data to strengthen areas of weakness in their content areas. This vision resonated with Ms. Zankovich's teaching objectives and inspired her to improve her practice, further challenge her students, and strengthen collaboration with her colleagues to ensure that students received high quality education from ninth through twelfth grades. Ms. Zankovich contrasts this reform with a current textbook driven reform program that, in her estimation, diminishes expectations for all students and dismantles the most rigorous courses at the school.

Ms. Zankovich further notes that having children of her own had a profound impact on her understanding of her role as a teacher.

> Before I think I was like a little Adolf [Zankovich]... These kids will do what I say! They will sit! They will listen!... Once I had kids, I softened. They're not little robots. My attitude changed entirely and I think I am much more understanding. (Zankovich, May 25, 2005)

When talking about her students Ms. Zankovich often sounds like a mother, concerned about them working too many hours at after-school jobs, watching their faces for signs of fatigue, knowing when to apply pressure to study harder and when to back off and be there to support them as young adults. She also views her own teaching through the lens of a parent, routinely asking herself, "Would I want my child in my class?" and recognizing that if the answer is no then it is up to her to make changes.

And when former students return to her classroom to thank her for all that she did as their teacher, she seems as proud as a parent to be basking in their success. In fact she

describes the first student she encouraged to apply to an Ivy League college, the one she nurtured along through application worries and self-doubts who eventually went off to Harvard, as "my baby." And like any parent, Ms. Zankovich judges her own success by her students' success. She explains that she knew she was an effective teacher when students started to return to let her know, "I really hated you, but I see what you did for me," or "You failed me, but it's a good thing because I learned."

> That's when I started feeling that I really knew what I was doing, when the students recognized that I wasn't there just to teach a subject area, I was there to teach kids. (Interview, May 25, 2005)

Summary

The professional narratives of teachers who participated in this study make it clear that these individuals are thoughtful in their practice and dedicated to their students. What is not always clear are patterns in their narratives that reveal how they came to be effective. Their life and career trajectories are very varied. Each is fascinating to understand on its own, but, independently, is unlikely to provide specific insights into how teacher education, placement, professional development, and support might be improved. It is only by looking for patterns across the group that it is possible to gain insights into how to support the growth of more teachers who can be as dedicated and effective as those profiled in this chapter. The next chapter describes patterns that, through analysis, were revealed by the data collected from these teachers.

CHAPTER 5: AN EXAMINATION OF COMMON GROWTH EXPERIENCES

Introduction

As characterized in in the previous chapter, the teachers who participated in this study are not easily categorized. All were identified as effective teachers by their principals and students, but their other demographic features represent more diversity than similarity. They teach in many academic disciplines—five teach English, three teach social studies, two teach math, and one each teach science and Spanish. Four teach mostly honors and advanced placement classes, five teach mostly heterogeneous, regular-education classes, and three have chosen to work primarily with struggling students. Five of the teachers in the study are male; seven are female. They range in experience from five to more than twenty four years as teachers. Four attended urban schools themselves as students, eight did not. Nine of the teachers in the study are white, two are Latino, one identifies as Filipino. Five worked in other fields prior to beginning their teaching careers, seven entered teaching right out of college. Seven chose to teach in urban settings, five ended up in urban schools by happenstance. They attended a variety of colleges and pre-service teacher education programs and have participated in a wide range of professional development experiences. Some teach in large, comprehensive high schools that have been around for many years, others teach in small, recently established learning communities.

On the surface there appear to be few commonalities across these study participants. Certainly there are no easy answers that come from reviewing their histories, nothing that would lead one to determine, "Ah ha, if teachers attended this

particular program then they would automatically become an effective teacher." Or "If only teachers in urban schools fit this demographic then they would certainly be successful in reaching these students."

However, closer review of the interviews with these subjects, in dialogue with the relevant research literature, does reveal common experiences that supported the growth of these teachers. For purposes of this chapter, findings have been grouped into the same categories that were discussed in the literature review. Within each category general findings are discussed, connections are made to the literature, and sample teacher experiences are discussed to provide representative illustrations of the findings.

Developing the Characteristics of Effective Urban Teachers

Research examining teaching practices in urban schools indicates that there are three characteristics that effective teachers exhibit. These teachers have knowledge of content and an ability to make content meaningful for students (Shulman, 1987), they possess an understanding of students' cultures and are able to integrate language, knowledge, and traditions from the home culture into the classroom (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Lee, 1995; Rosebery, Warren, & Conant, 1992), and they have a commitment to working for social justice both within and outside the classroom (Freire, 1974; Giroux & Simon, 1989; Oakes, Franke, Quartz, & Rogers, 2002).

Participants in this study were not directly chosen based on these criteria. Students and administrators were simply asked to nominate teachers who they believed to be effective; they were not given specific guidelines to direct their nominations. Nevertheless, it can be inferred from comments made by students and administrators

during the nomination process and in data collected from interviews with the teachers that each of the 12 teachers who participated in the study had expertise in each of the areas outlined above. This section of the findings chapter examines the processes by which the teachers in this study developed these characteristics.

Before beginning this examination, it should be noted that these findings are not the result of asking direct questions about the characteristics, such as "How did you develop your socio-political consciousness?" Rather, as discussed in the methods chapter and outlined in greater detail in Figure 1, participants were asked to share their professional narratives, prompted, in part, by a series of questions related to common experiences in the lives of teacher. For example, teachers were asked to, "Talk about students who have been particularly memorable," or "Tell me about your own K-12 education." Teachers responses to these more open-ended prompts were far from uniform, and certainly it cannot be said that there were direct correlations between particular prompts and a particular effective characteristic. Nevertheless, in analyzing transcripts of teacher responses, patterns in the development of effective teacher characteristics do emerge.

Pedagogical Content Knowledge

During the nomination process, when principals were asked to describe why they had chosen to nominate a particular individual, they nearly always described the teacher as a "knowledgeable in their content," or an "expert in their subject." Administrators also noted that the nominated teachers were "able to work effectively with students to get the desired results," that they used "effective instructional strategies," and that they were

able to meaningfully "engage students in the content." For their part, students noted that the teachers they nominated, "know what they are talking about," "really help you to understand the material," were able to "make hard subjects make sense," and "make you care about the material." They nominated teachers they felt had both the knowledge and the pedagogy to make their subjects interesting and accessible, and to push their students to achieve. Although the scope of this study did not provide direct opportunities to evaluate participating teachers' pedagogical content knowledge, it is evident from the comments of both administrators and students as well as from the interviews with the teachers themselves, that these teachers did in fact possess pedagogical content knowledge, the ability to transform their understanding of content and make it accessible for the students in their classrooms (Shulman, 1987).

When considering how these teachers came to acquire pedagogical content knowledge, two primary findings come to light. The first is that the teachers in this study did not choose to teach based on a deep love of content. Rather, as one teacher explained, "I chose to teach students, and then just kind of fell into the subject that made the most sense" (Interview, June 2, 2005). Although, on the surface, this may not appear to have a direct effect on the development of pedagogical content knowledge, it is noteworthy that this tendency runs counter to the general expectation upon which teacher education and credentialing programs are built. It is expected that teachers at the secondary level arrive with content expertise and then develop pedagogical knowledge. These teachers arrived with a desire to teach students and then, simultaneously in some cases, pursued the content knowledge and the pedagogical knowledge to support that goal. The second finding that is noteworthy in relation to the development of teachers'

pedagogical content knowledge is the role which student cues had in motivating the desire and shaping the direction of growth in both content and pedagogy. Perhaps because these teachers began their teaching careers with the initial goal of teaching students, they were willing to respond to both negative and positive cues from students to work to improve their practice.

Choosing To Teach Kids, Not Content

The teachers who participated in this study chose to become teachers first, and teachers of content second. In other words, their decision to become teachers of students preceded their decision to become teachers of a particular subject area.

This commonality ran across all 12 of the participating teachers in this study, however it runs counter to conventional wisdom as to the process by which secondary teachers enter the profession. Since secondary teachers are called upon to be content experts, the traditional thinking is that individuals study a subject, decide they love the subject and want to impart knowledge of this subject to younger students, and therefore decide to go into teaching. Most secondary teacher certification programs are built upon this premise; they require applicants to have obtained, or be in the process of obtaining, a bachelor's degree in a particular subject prior to entering the credentialing program. Few secondary credential programs provide coursework in content, choosing instead to emphasize pedagogical methods which teachers, in theory, will be able to use to impart content knowledge to middle and high school students. Current national policy similarly emphasizes the primacy of content knowledge. Regulations within the No Child Left Behind legislation and expectations in President Bush's American Competitiveness

Initiative (United States Department of Education [USDOE], 2002, 2006) require districts and schools to employ teachers who have obtained undergraduate degrees within their teaching field, but contain few requirements specifically related to pedagogical content knowledge.

Many of the teachers in this study did possess bachelor's degrees in the field which matched their teaching subject. However, the choice to become a teacher preceded their selection of content specialization. Mr. Perez is a case in point. Now a history teacher at Mesa High School, Mr. Perez explained that he was still in the process of choosing a major when he made the decision to become a teacher. Married with a young child, he was under pressure to finish college and secure a job. Originally he looked primarily at jobs that he thought would be more likely to bring in money. But after taking several different career inventories and seeing "educator" "pop up" on each one, he began to consider that option. He became part of a volunteer program at his college called the "Teacher Diversity Program" and had the opportunity to pursue short-term internships at various nearby schools. He describes the experience of working with high school students as "awesome" and states that right from the beginning he was hooked by the energy and enthusiasm of the kids.

It was only after he'd made the decision to become a teacher and invested time and energy in exploring teaching as a career that Mr. Perez selected his college major. He had considered other majors, including math and English, which he personally found interesting, but was concerned that he wouldn't be able to engage students in those content areas.

> I did good (sic) in math, I got like A's throughout my high school, I did good in college in math but I can't teach it. How engaging can that be, you know? And don't get me wrong, I'm sure there's math teachers that are engaging, they do a great job. I just didn't think that I could do that. (Interview, April 18, 2005)

In the end, Mr. Perez chose history not only because he liked the subject himself, but also because he believed that history was the content area that would allow him to most meaningfully engage with his students. Mr. Perez explained that his goal as a teacher is to help students to think critically about the world around them, to reflect critically on their own attitudes and actions, and to become thoughtful participants in their communities. He selected history because it was the content area that would most readily allow him to pursue these goals.

Selecting content area based on the match between teaching goals and perceived content possibilities was a common theme that ran across all of the subjects in this study. This selection criteria was true for the seven teachers, like Mr. Perez, who knew that they wanted to pursue teaching before graduating from college and therefore selected a major based on what they believed would best enable them to meet their goals. And it was true for the other five teachers in the study who didn't decide to pursue teaching until after they had completed their college degrees, but still managed to adapt their content area to fit their teaching goals. An example from this second category of teachers is Mr. Mason.

Mr. Mason graduated from college with a bio-science degree and went to work for a laboratory in the Bay Area. He stayed with that job for about a year but explained that the main thing he learned while working there was that he "didn't really want to be working in a laboratory" (Interview, June 25, 2005). He then spent time working at children's summer camps, went overseas to teach English in Japan, and basically spent

his twenties "making money to travel" (Interview, June 25, 2005). Approaching 30, Mr. Mason felt that he needed to figure out what he wanted to do as a career. Borrowing ideas from a self-help book, Mr. Mason developed the following two criteria to guide his career selection:

> A: If you can find a giving back to the community, or just giving in general, is something that seems to be universally felt as a rewarding experience, and B: Doing what your natural gifts seem to be directing you to, if you can find a crossroads where your gifts meet your best opportunity to give back. People who were able to do that, were able to find a lot of satisfaction in what they were doing with their lives. So teaching seemed to be a good match for me. (Interview, June 25, 2005)

Given that his undergraduate degree was in bio-science, Mr. Mason initially pursued a biology credential, but quickly became frustrated by a very negative student-teaching experience and the mis-match between his goals for teaching and his perception of the requirements of the content. Mr. Mason perceived high school biology as requiring significant amounts of memorization of content and concluded that this requirement, combined with limited class time and pressure for coverage, led to high levels of student failure. His student teaching experience in high school biology classrooms was "miserable," and he strongly considered giving up teaching altogether. However, in the midst of student teaching he had the opportunity to observe a gifted math teacher at work. In the math content, Mr. Mason found a much closer match between his goals for teaching and the possibilities allowed by the content.

> ...What I like about math is that it's something that you can practice and get good at. And my whole philosophy on teaching revolves around the idea of giving kids confidence in themselves and self esteem. Not giving them self esteem by telling them all the time "Oh you're so good, you're so good," but by challenging them, but at the same time supporting them, so they can actually meet those challenges and be successful and earn that

> sense of self esteem and self worth that comes from doing something that's hard... For me, math really works a lot better than biology, (Interview, June 20, 2005)

Discussion

Mr. Mason, Mr. Perez, and the other ten teachers in this study, chose to teach because they really liked working with students. They then selected to teach an academic subject that would, in their understanding, allow for the most meaningful interactions with those students. They chose to teach students first and then selected content areas that would best support their goals as educators of adolescents. This process of selection appears to run counter to what is commonly understood to be the decision making process for most individuals who are interested in becoming secondary teachers. Such a path is typically thought of as being characteristic of elementary school teachers who are seen as more child-centered, where secondary school teachers are seen as more content-centered (Book & Freeman, 1986; Brookhart & Freeman, 1992).

The high school teachers in this study emphasize the primacy of their role as teachers rather than their status as content experts. However, it should be emphasized that all of these teachers are content experts. All have invested in their own continuing education in their subject areas through university coursework and independent study. All have significant knowledge of their content and value the role that their own content knowledge plays in supporting the learning of their students. The finding that the teachers in this study chose to become teachers before they chose to become teachers of a particular content does not de-value the importance of content knowledge. Rather it recognizes the importance of content knowledge that can be purposefully used in the

classroom to support student learning. It supports Shulman's concept of pedagogical content knowledge as a unique understanding that represents more than simply a combined knowledge of content and pedagogy. Shulman (1987) writes:

> Comprehended ideas must be transformed in some manner if they are to be taught. To reason one's way through an act of teaching is to think one's way from the subject matter as understood by the teacher into the minds and motivations of the learners. (p.17)

The teachers in this study selected their field of study and chose to acquire a deep understanding of that field, not simply for their own edification, but so that in their classrooms they could transform subject-specific information and ideas into meaningful learning opportunities for their students. Having chosen to teach first prioritized the importance of student learning in their approach to classroom instruction and may be an important factor in allowing for the success of these teachers in their urban high school settings.

Adapting Pedagogy in Response to Student Cues

Perhaps because these teachers chose to go into teaching in order to teach students, as opposed to choosing to teach in order to focus on their subject area, they were particularly receptive to growing their pedagogy in response to student cues. Certainly there were other factors that played a role in influencing teacher growth, and several of these will be discussed later in this chapter, but one strong commonality that ran across teachers was the willingness to change practice in response to direct and indirect cues from students. Teachers in this study sought to improve, and often sought out professional development resources, when they recognized a weakness in their own

content and pedagogical knowledge based on observation of student behaviors and needs and when they received direct feedback from students.

An example of a teacher who made a significant change in her pedagogy in response to observation of student behaviors and needs comes from Ms. Patterson. When she began her teacher career twenty-five years ago, she taught the way she had been taught. As the teacher, she gave lectures about the literature and assigned essays; the students wrote the essays, parroting the teacher's interpretation of the text. This worked for Ms. Patterson during her first few years of teaching, but shortly after moving to Vista Del Mar, the school where she presently teaches, she encountered a young man who dressed in baggy clothes, sported gang tattoos, and covered his forehead in a bandanna. Initially she wrote him off, assigning him a seat near the door so that he could be the "last in, first out," and not bothering to call home regarding his frequent absences. Ms. Patterson was quite surprised, therefore, when she received the first round of student essays. While the other students had struggled to approximate her lectures, the young man with the bandanna, who wasn't there half of the time, had clearly read the text, understood it, analyzed it independently and written, admittedly using poor grammar and sloppy penmanship, an impressive analysis of the character and the themes in the text. Reading his essay and comparing it to the beautifully written but vacuous texts of the more pliant students in the class, Ms. Patterson had what she described as an "epiphany." She recognized that she needed to change both her prejudices about who would and would not be successful in the classroom, and also her teaching approach—"I realized I was doing all the thinking... I wasn't asking them to think" (Interview, June 14, 2005). Following her epiphany, Ms. Parson's began seek out university courses, teacher

workshops and professional learning opportunities with the aim of re-structuring her practice to better engage students in the construction of their own understanding through text analysis, the use of open-ended questions, and Socratic dialogue.

Ms. Patterson's example is not unique. Mr. Mason and Mr. Lindt both adjusted their approach to mathematics instruction after observing successful students and questioning them about what motivated them to do the work. Recognizing the value of success building success, they redesigned their teaching to emphasize mastery and began to offer more opportunities for students to show their expertise. Ms. Sullivan, Mr. Zankovich, and Ms. Krause all had opportunities to observe students in multiple settings and realized that students needed multiple entry points into their subject areas and began to offer students more creative opportunities to engage with the material. Mr. Baldia, Mr. Perez, and Ms. Patterson all spent time getting to know their students in outside-of-the-classroom interactions and recognized the need to more directly tie the content to their students' lives. In their own way, each teacher in this study adjusted their pedagogical approach and built up their content knowledge in order to respond to cues from students and improve their practice. When asked what caused them to take ownership of these cues and adjust their own practice in response, the typical response was, "Why wouldn't I? I'm a professional, I'm here to do a job and my job is to serve these students to the best of my ability. Of course I should listen to what they have to say" (Interview, June 2, 2005).

It should further be noted that, according to teachers' self reports, each relied far more on feedback from students than on feedback from colleagues or administrators when assessing their own practice. Certainly they appreciated ideas from colleagues and

administrators and learned from their peers, but when it came to judging their own success, teachers relied on both direct and indirect feedback from students. Over and over again, when asked to explain when they felt they had gotten to the point at which they were truly effective in the classroom, teachers explained that they knew they were doing well when students came in and told them so. They described the notes from students at the end of the year, the letters from graduates who had gone off to college, and the visits from those who had passed through their classrooms and moved on to new teachers' classrooms as being significant indicators of their own success. Most noted that this positive feedback usually came later-- "When they're in the class, it's hard, and I push, and they don't always like that, but deep down, they know that I'm doing it because I care, and when they leave my room they appreciate it" (Interview, May 25, 2005).

Discussion

Although it may seen obvious that teachers would seek to increase their pedagogical content knowledge and improve their practice in response to cues from students, it is often the case that teachers, particularly teachers in urban schools, will blame students for misbehavior or poor academic performance rather than take the responsibility on themselves. This was a concern that was referenced repeatedly by teachers in this study. All commented about the negative attitudes that some of their colleagues had toward students and the challenges this negativity posed for them, particularly in their early years of teaching. They reported that some colleagues regularly complain that "these students can't learn," labeling students as "idiots" or "troublemakers" (Interviews, June 14, June 16, and July 1, 2005). Most participating

teachers stated that they avoid the teachers' lounge and the teachers' lunchroom because these tend to be places where such negativity flourishes. And, according to these teachers, there are "way too many of the negative kind" at their schools (Interview, June 16, 2005).

Previous research bears out this anecdotal evidence. Studies of urban teaching practices and beliefs by Haberman (1991), Ladson-Billings (1997), and Metz (1998), among others, have found that the majority of teachers working in urban settings have a deficit view of the students in urban schools, tending to blame students for their failings, assuming that they cannot achieve at high levels, and adopting instructional techniques which emphasize low-level tasks to the exclusion of almost everything else. Within this context, it seems all the more remarkable that the 12 teachers in this study were willing to respond to student cues by reconsidering their own practice. This willingness to reflect on content and pedagogy in response to student cues may play a significant role in support their development into effective, urban high school teachers.

Relational Knowledge

In addition to pedagogical content knowledge, researchers who have studied the practices of effective teachers in urban settings indicate that teachers also need relational knowledge to connect the students to the classroom. There are differing views as to how such relational knowledge is best achieved. Some argue that teachers can best support students from non-majority backgrounds by integrating home culture and language into the classroom (Au & Jordan, 1981; Erickson & Mohatt, 1981). Others extend this approach, encouraging a more critical stance in which teachers work to develop students

who can understand, navigate, and critique the existing social order (Delpit, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1995). A very different approach is advocated by caring theorists such as Nodding (1984, 1992) and Valenzuela (1999). These researchers argue that for students, especially urban students, to succeed academically, teachers must cultivate relationships in which they demonstrate sincere concern for students All of these perspectives share the same goal of connecting students to the classroom; all insist that the teacher in an urban setting must play an active role in helping to connect students to the classroom. However, the approach to making those connections varies significantly, with some focused more on inclusion of content, others on critical pedagogy, and a third perspective focused on the use of relationships.

Within the scope of the present study, I did not observe teachers' practices in their classroom and therefore, I cannot definitively speak to their use of culturally relevant pedagogy. Interviews with teachers, however, reveal that these teachers are very much aware of the cultural and linguistic differences between their students' home culture and the expectations of the academic world of the school. These interviews further reveal that participating teachers make significant efforts to connect their students to the classroom. Their primary means of doing so, however, does not appear to be through the integration of ethnically-based cultural and linguistic materials into the classroom, but rather through the development of significant relationships with their students.

Evidence from the present study supports Noddings (1984, 1992), Valenzuela (1999), and Ogbu's (2002) assertions that the existence of caring relationships between students and teachers plays a critical role in determining the perceived effectiveness of a classroom teacher. Indeed, when students were participating in the nominating process

for teachers, the most common rationale given when explaining why teachers were nominated was simply, "They care." Students also discussed the importance of knowing their subject, being fair, creating a safe environment in the classroom, making the material interesting, challenging them to do better, and holding high expectations. However, if all of these criteria were in place and the teacher was not perceived as caring, the consensus among nominating groups of students was that that teacher should be removed from the nomination list.

It is clear from their interviews that the teachers in this study care a great deal about their students and believe that the efforts that they have undertaken to develop relationships with the students has had a powerful impact on their students success in the classroom. This is true in a general sense, and also as it relates to specific cases. Each teacher was able to describe at least one student for whom they have had a direct role in supporting their academic achievement whether that was by spending time after school to help them pass a particular class, intervening to keep them in school long enough to graduate, or helping them craft an admissions essay to get into an Ivy League university.

This section of the findings chapter, although addressing the underlying objectives of culturally relevant pedagogy, focuses on teachers' development and use of relationships to connect students to the classroom. Building on Erickson's work (1975, 2004), I argue that language and culture are but two dimensions of caring. Building relationships is a larger, more encompassing concept than culturally relevant pedagogy. Building relationships with students on the basis of their language and culture is important, to be sure, but caring relationships between teachers and students can be built,

as the teachers in this study illustrate, on the basis of other commonalities, such as shared activities, interests, and experiences.

Connecting with Students

Teachers in this study chose to develop relationships with students because they believed, as Ms. Patterson explained, that "it helps me to be a better teacher." Teachers explained that knowing their students allowed them to draw students into the classroom, to know how to motivate effectively, how to connect students to the content of the class, and how to address areas of concern, both behavioral and academic. Mr. Lindt was representative of many teachers when he explained that it wasn't until he was able to form relationships with his students that he was able to gain control of the classroom and motivate students to achieve academically. He describes his first year as a "nightmare" during which the students really disliked him and he wasn't too fond of them either. But gradually he began to connect with students by attending a student's baseball game, playing a pick-up game of basketball after-school, and hanging out with the students to play cards at lunch. These interactions, he says, "made all the difference, for the rest of the year, these kids would do anything I asked" (Interview, June 14, 2005). His interactions with students outside of class allowed the students to trust him. They began to admit when they really didn't understand and Mr. Lindt was able to provide help, both inside and outside the classroom, to fill in some of the gaps in students' basic math skills. At the same time, the interactions also helped Mr. Lindt to grow. From his interactions with small numbers of students outside the class, he learned how to best communicate with his students in the classroom. He recognized the high value students placed on

feeling respected and learned the most appropriate ways in which to demonstrate respect. Forming relationships with students has connected the students to his classroom and allowed Mr. Lindt to focus on supporting students' academic achievement.

Approaches to forming relationships varied. Some teachers were able to draw upon common language and cultural backgrounds. For Ms. Hernandez and Mr. Baldia, for example, returning to teach at Vista Del Mar, a school which Mr. Baldia attended located in a neighborhood where Ms. Hernandez grew up, was like coming "home." They share common cultural, familial, and linguistic ties with their students and they build on these commonalities to draw their students into the classroom. Mr. Baldia, believes that his status as a graduate of Vista Del Mar gives him "instant credibility" in the classroom because the students "know that I've been where they are now" (Interview, May 23, 2005). Teachers who are not from the same cultural background as their students but have cultural or linguistic knowledge similarly believe that this knowledge helps them to draw students into the classroom. Speaking fluent Spanish and Portuguese and having had the experience of living in South America while working for Amnesty International provides Ms. Potter, for example, with the knowledge to connect not only to many of her Spanish-speaking students, but also with their parents, an important factor, she believes in allowing her to be successful in the classroom. Mr. Evert, who also spent time in Latin America, speaks fluent Spanish and is married to a Mexican-American woman, says that students are always pleasantly surprised at the beginning of the year when they come to learn that the "skinny white teacher" at the front of the room is more than that. Students are fascinated by the photos of his wife and daughter that he keeps on his desk and Mr. Evert finds that answering curious questions about his family and

experiences before and after class helps open the doors to more personalized relationships with students.

Not all teachers build relationships with students based on ethnic and linguistic identity. For some, relationships are formed around common activities outside of the classroom. Several teachers emphasized the important role that coaching plays in facilitating relationships with students. Mr. Perez, for example has coached the football team at Mesa High for several years and really values the opportunity to connect with students outside of the classroom. He explains that members of his team, and even the kids that just "hang around" with the team or attend the games, tend to be more willing to put effort into the class and engage in discussion based on the relationship he has established with them outside of the classroom. He described one student in particular who really struggled academically and was a behavior challenge for nearly all of his teachers as well as his mother. This particular student was not an athlete, but came to all the games and practices and participated tangentially in the team by bringing water, helping with field maintenance, etc. Mr. Perez consistently encouraged the student on the field and, when he enrolled in Mr. Perez's 11th grade U.S. history class, he put in "110%" and was able to earn the highest grade of his high school career, a "C+". Teachers further emphasized that the opportunity to interact with students through coaching and other common activities not only helped to draw those who directly participated into the classroom, but also facilitated the engagement of those who were not directly involved. Mr. Mason, for example, has few of the ninth graders from his Algebra classes on the varsity soccer team that he coaches at Mission. However, his status as a soccer coach and the interest many of his students have in soccer allow for

common areas of interest around which they can connect. Further, by coaching the soccer team and developing relationships with his students, Mr. Mason has acquired knowledge of students' home and peer cultures that allows him to more easily connect with the students in the classroom.

Other teachers were able to form connections with students through the development of specialty classes or clubs. Ms. Krause, for example, found that her strongest relationships with students came when she started a health occupations program at her high school for students interested in pursuing health careers. Not only did this program allow for a long-term instructional relationship with students (students were enrolled in the program for all four years of high school), it also allowed Ms. Krause to connect with students around an instructional area about which she is passionate and the students see as directly relevant for their future careers. This common investment in the content allowed for the development of supportive relationships, relationships which are often more challenging to form in a classroom in which the teacher-student dynamic is perceived as oppositional, with the teacher determining expectations and the students competing for teacher approval. Teachers who taught advanced placement classes similarly found that when teacher and students have a common investment in student success against an outside standard of measurement it allows them to connect more readily with their students. In Mr. Baldia's AP history classes, for example, he feels that he is as much of a coach as a teacher, motivating students to pass the AP exam, and that this has a direct bearing on students' willingness to form a relationship with him. "They know I'm on their side, that I want them to pass too. This knowledge helps them to work

hard and to trust me, not just about academics, but about other concerns in their lives as well" (Interview, May 23, 2005).

Finally, teachers also expressed that sometimes the common interest around which they were able to develop relationships with students was seemingly random and inconsequential, and often involved humor. Ms. Woods, for example, had started joking with students during a nutrition unit about eating carrots. She had a bag of mini-carrots on her desk and suddenly everyone was asking for carrots and telling stories about carrots. The seemingly random event became part of the class culture, an "inside joke" that bonded together those in Ms. Woods's class and became part of their common identity. Ms. Woods bought and shared bags of mini-carrots for the rest of the year, explaining that this investment helped her to connect with her students and improve the classroom learning. "When there's a relationship there, even if it is over something as silly as carrots, it is enough to make a real difference in the classroom" (Interview, June 21, 2005).

Discussion

The finding that the teachers in the present study use relationships to connect their students to the classroom strongly supports the assertion made by Noddings (1984, 1992), Ogbu (2002), and Valenzuela (1999) that caring relationships between teachers and students support students' academic achievement. The finding is particularly noteworthy in the context of urban schooling because the conclusions reached by Ogbu and Valenzuela originated from the opposite direction. In their studies, they examined, respectively, why African-American students and Latino students were disaffected by

school and found that a significant contributing factor was the perceived absence of caring. The present study, examining teachers who have been effective according to students and administrators in the urban classroom, found the presence of caring relationships. Previous work could only point out that the absence of relationships was a factor in school failure among urban youth and posit that the presence of such relationships might support the academic achievement of these students. This study lends support to that position, finding that, among these teachers, the development of meaningful relationships with students was a significant factor in determining teacher effectiveness.

This study also lends support to the present efforts to re-design comprehensive high schools into smaller, often thematically focused high schools. The "small schools" movement emphasizes the critical role of teacher-student relationships in supporting academic achievement, particularly among students of color and from lower socio-economic backgrounds (Darling-Hammond, 2002; Levine, 2002; Meier, 1995). The belief among promoters of small schools, which is largely borne out by much of the early research (see, for example, Gladen, 1998; Lee & Smith, 1995), is that smaller structures will reduce the number of students teachers interact with and are responsible for, increase the ability of teachers to personalize instruction, better connect students to the school community, and increase academic achievement. Although not all of the teachers in the present study teach in small school settings (and the five who do have only spent the past year teaching in these settings in response to a district-initiated reform), certainly it is clear that the intent of the small school movement, to highlight the importance of relationships in supporting student achievement, is supported by the success of the

teachers in the present study, all of whom use relationships to support student achievement in their own classrooms.

The present findings also connect to the work of Erickson (1975, 2004) regarding the avenues through which school officials and students can connect. In his study of interactions between school guidance counselors and students, Erickson found that the establishment of "particularistic co-membership" between the counselor and student had a significant impact on the time, effort, and creativity put into the counseling session. Erickson notes that one entry point into "co-membership" was through race or ethnicity, but this was not the only point of entry. Other entry points included common interests in activities such as sports, church, and community involvement. If student and counselor established a high degree of co-membership, the student was more likely to receive more positive counseling, including rule bending and extra help. The present study similarly indicates that common ethnic and linguistic ties are but one means of entry into relationships between teacher and student. Teachers and students also form relationships over common interests, common activities, common goals, and common experiences. The establishment of those relationships, in turn, supports both student achievement and teacher growth as teachers learn more about how to connect with their students and how to make the content of their course relevant to their students.

Learning How to Build Relationships

Returning to the research question of the present study-- What experiences support the growth of effective urban high school teachers? – It is clear that forming relationships with students supports teacher growth both in terms of their pedagogical

content knowledge and also in their ability to make the content of their course relevant to students. However, the question remains, how do teachers know how to build relationships with students, particularly when teachers are not from backgrounds that are similar to those of their students? The answer, based on data collected from this study, appears to be that they learned by doing. Although several teachers mentioned observing the manner in which colleagues interacted with students and learning from that observation, a couple mentioned somewhat helpful multi-cultural education courses, and many discussed their own personal experiences with relationships outside of education that had prepared them in some ways to deal with cultural difference, none found that these experiences were sufficient to show them how to connect with students. It was only by working with students, often in settings outside of the traditional teacher-student classroom interaction, that they were able to learn how to form relationships with students.

Mr. Evert is a case in point. Although he is a white male from an upper-middle class community, Mr. Evert had a significant number of experiences prior to his entry into the classroom that, in theory, helped prepare him to connect with the urban students he would encounter in his early years at Washington High. He had spent time doing mission work abroad in Costa Rica and Peru. He had married a Mexican-American woman and, in doing so, had had to adapt to the cultural norms of her family and confront the latent prejudice of his own. In college he had taken cultural anthropology courses, which trained him to "look at culture and be aware of symbolism and meaning and language" albeit at a very basic level (Interview, July 1, 2005). His master teacher was masterful at developing relationships with students, as was the principal at

Washington High. However, despite the presence of mentors, his academic training, and his personal experience, Mr. Evert's first year in the classroom was "trial by fire." Students tested him every step of the way and he realized he had no idea how to connect with students.

Recognizing this weakness, Mr. Evert set out to try to find ways to interact. He attended sporting events, a major focus of student life at Washington, and made it a point to sit in the student section, rather than just interacting with the teachers. He opened his room at lunchtime to students and started playing hip hop music. These interactions got things started, but looking back Mr. Evert admits that students were more likely amused by his efforts than anything else. In the early years, he felt a significant need to prove himself, not only as a teacher, but as a teacher who cared and was cool, despite the fact that he was white. He "fought" against students and parents who resisted his overtures, crying out through his actions, "No! I care about you and you just have to let me into your life!" (Interview, July 1, 2005). It was only after he'd worked at it a few years that he became comfortable in his own skin, and began connecting to students along authentic areas of common interest rather than superficial ones. He now admits, for example, that he really doesn't like hip hop and although he played it in an effort to be seen as "cool" by the students, they saw through his efforts and this negatively impacted any relationships that may have existed.

Rather than claiming knowledge or membership based on media portrayals or superficial manifestations of culture, Mr. Evert learned that he needed to admit his own ignorance and seek to learn about students' cultures and interests in order to build relationships with them. He notes that when he arrived at Washington, a school at which

half the staff, including the principal, and approximately half the students and parents were African-American, he "had very few clues about African American culture." Somewhat intimidated, Mr. Evert, initially didn't know how to interact. But over time, as a result of developing relationships with African-American adults and students at the school, he learned, "a lot about different ways of expression, different cultural expectations—Not the erasure of cultural difference, but recognizing it and being OK with it—So that relationship building became easier" (Interview, July 1, 2005).

The use of interactions to gain knowledge of students' cultures and interests and thereby strengthen relationships was not something used exclusively by teachers who came from backgrounds that were very different from those of their students. Teachers who are from communities similar to those in which they teach acknowledged that they cannot assume that their experiences are exactly the same as those of their students and that they, too, need to continue to grow and evolve in how they relate to students. Ms. Hernandez, for example, notes that the students she has today are different in many ways from when she was a student, and they are even different from the students she had when she began teaching 21 years ago. Although, as in previous years, many are recent immigrants, the interests, knowledge, and experiences of today's students are dramatically different. Ms. Hernandez maintains involvement in MEChA and Folklorico, at least in part, to allow her to have outside-of-class opportunities to interact with students in order to better understand how to develop stronger relationships with them both inside and outside the classroom. Similarly, Mr. Baldia explains that many of his students have had academic and personal experiences very different from his own. Although he graduated from Vista Del Mar himself, he avoids "presuming that I know

everything about [the current] Vista Del Mar students" (Interview, May 23, 2005). Mr. Baldia makes regular efforts to reach out to students and interaction with them in multiple settings in order to learn their interests and concerns such that he can strengthen the teacher-student relationships. Such efforts, he believes, are important at any school, but are particularly vital in an urban school setting.

> Until you can understand what challenges these kids are dealing with, you're never going to be able to serve them properly... The only way that you can do that is to know the clientele you're dealing with. There's more to that than just looking at demographics... It's really getting to know who it is that you're dealing with... These kids can do amazing and wonderful things if A: You tell them they can and B: You don't let them off the hook. You have to understand what challenges they have to overcome in order to do that. (Interview, May 23, 2005).

Discussion

Teachers in this study gained a reciprocal benefit from their efforts to interact with their students. From these interactions they learned how to form more thoughtful relationships with their students, which, in turn, allowed them to better connect students to their classrooms and boost student academic achievement. The reciprocal nature of caring relationships has long been acknowledged in studies of young children and their caregivers. This body of literature, known as attachment theory, argues that mothers and caregivers who develop an attachment to young children learn from the cues of those children and become better, more responsive caregivers as a result of the attachment (see for example, Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978; Ainsworth, Bell, & Stayton, 1974; Howes & Ritchies, 2002). As children age, the reciprocal benefits of meaningful interactions, tend to be less recognized. However an examination of the literature on

small schools reveals that there is increasing recognition that working with students in a smaller learning environment allows for the formation of stronger relationships resulting in increased commitment to the students as measured by lower rates of staff turnover and greater involvement in extra-curricular activities (Darling-Hammond, 2002; Meier, 1995; Sizer, 1996). The findings from this study support such efforts to personalize interactions between students and teachers possible, suggesting that it is not just the students who benefit from these relationships, but the teachers as well.

Socio-Political Consciousness

In addition to pedagogical content knowledge and culturally relevant pedagogy, recast in the above discussion as relational knowledge, researchers who have studied the practices of teachers in urban settings have determined that effective teachers have a socio-political consciousness and a desire to effect change on behalf of their students (Freire, 1974; Giroux & Simon, 1989; Oakes, Franke, Quartz, & Rogers, 2002). The teachers in this study all demonstrated during their discussions a strong sense of socio-political consciousness and all saw their role as being inherently political. Teachers who taught the more advanced honors and AP classes all spoke passionately about the importance of preparing their students to compete in a rigorous college environment on an equal footing with their more affluent peers. Teachers who taught younger or lower-track courses spoke with equal passion about the importance of helping their students to be successful so that they would have the skills and the desire to continue their education despite the odds stacked against them. Teachers clearly understood the bias against their students that existed within the school, the district, and the larger political and economic

society, but saw themselves as agents of change who could empower their students to take ownership over the opportunities available to them in their educations and careers.

Developing Socio-Political Consciousness

Although all teachers in this study all exhibited socio-political consciousness, they fell into two distinct groups with regard to the development of this consciousness. Those who chose to teach in an urban setting (approximately half of the teachers in the study) came to the work already possessing a socio-political consciousness and a desire to work for change for the students they would encounter. The other teachers, those who ended up in urban settings through the vagaries of district hiring processes did not bring a strong political purpose to the work. These teachers, while not necessarily choosing to come to an urban setting, have opted to remain in an urban setting, and in their current role as urban teachers they have come to develop a socio-political consciousness as a result of the relationships they have formed with their students. For these teachers coming to know and care about their students has resulted in an increased understanding of the injustices faced by many of these students and a desire to effect change through their role as educators.

Ms. Hernandez is an example of a teacher who chose to teach in an urban setting and brought with her a well-developed socio-political consciousness. She grew up in a largely Mexican-American neighborhood near the school where she now teaches. She attended a large research university where she majored in Spanish literature and Chicano Studies and became active in MEChA, a Mexican-American student organization. Although she had always known she wanted to become a teacher, her purpose for

teaching and her desire to teach Spanish, especially Spanish language and literature for Spanish speakers, became more focused during college when she realized that her Spanish had been taken from her by English-only programs in her K-12 schooling. "I was stuttering by tenth grade in my Spanish, and I said 'This will not happen twice...' That's why I teach what I teach, because I lost my Spanish" (Interview, June 6, 2005).

Although she spent her first year teaching in a mostly white, middle-class school (an experience she describes as "purgatory"), Ms. Hernandez elected to return "home", to a school closer to the neighborhood where she grew up. From the beginning of her teaching career she saw herself as an advocate for her students and took an active stance in advocating on their behalf with parents, teachers, and administrators. She sponsors the MEChA club on campus and states that her number one goal is "promoting higher education for Mexicans." She considers herself connected to a larger Chicano power movement, but explains that her approach to advocacy has shifted over time.

> Early on in my education, I mean in my work as a teacher I focused on being out there. I did the demonstrations, and I did the walks, and I got sore feet and a sore throat. At some point I realized though, that these are the kids that have come to me. And if I can get them to question and think and to analyze, then that's effective, a lot more than the other. Some people will criticize me for that but... I promote education, I promote speaking your mind, but also I don't want you to end up not coming to school because of something... I want [the students] to be aware and to be active, but I also want them to stay in school and be educated. I want them to see education as a powerful tool. (Interview, June 6, 2005)

At present, Ms. Hernandez has a multi-pronged approach in her stance as an activist. In the classroom she holds students to high standards and encourages critical thinking. In the school community she encourages educational and cultural opportunities that value Spanish literature and language, Hispanic cultures, and Chicano history. In the larger

educational community she participates in forums to advocate on behalf of Latino students, most recently joining a statewide panel to review the appropriateness of requiring second language learners to pass a high school exit exam. Although the form of her advocacy and activism has evolved over time, Ms. Hernandez came to teaching with a well developed socio-political consciousness, a consciousness that was born out of her own experiences as a Chicana student.

Mr. Mason is an example of a teacher who developed his socio-political consciousness only after beginning to work in an urban setting. He ended up teaching at Mission High School through the "luck of the draw." He explains, "That's just what came through the pipeline. I was just looking for a job, you know? I needed a job!" (Interview, June 20, 2005). Mr. Mason's situation is certainly not unique. Many new teachers, often coming out of college and credential programs with significant debt and desperate for a job, end up teaching in urban settings because these are the locations that have the greatest need for new teachers as more experienced teachers move on to more affluent schools or out of the profession (Ladson-Billings, 2001). However unlike many of his colleagues, Mr. Mason has chosen to stay. He states,

> Having taught here for five years, I would never trade this in for a [more affluent, suburban] school. I definitely feel like the kids in this neighborhood are the ones that need me. (Interview, June 20, 2005)

Mr. Mason's sense of responsibility to his students and his desire to provide them with equitable educational opportunities was nurtured through relationships with his students. Getting to know the students in his classes and on his sports teams and coming to understand the obstacles that they faced changed this once apolitical teacher into an activist. He describes one student in particular-- an "A" student and star soccer player

who was denied access to college because of his residency status-- as having a tremendous influence on his thinking.

> I had one kid who was…I had him actually as a freshman in my math class. He was an A student, really really great kid. He was, he seemed very mature for a 9th grader. When I started coaching, he was also probably my best player as a sophomore. And he was definitely my best player as a junior the next year... He was really a man among boys and he was a tremendous soccer player and very intelligent and very positive. (Interview, June 20, 2005)

Mr. Mason saw this student as an excellent candidate for going on to the university and put significant time and energy into supporting his academic growth. Given his hopes for the student, Mr. Mason was shocked and dismayed when he started coming to school stoned, failing his classes and eventually dropped out. Mr. Mason visited the student at his work, offered to let the student stay in his own apartment, and attempted to persuade the student to return to school. None of it worked, but Mr. Mason persisted. Eventually, however, the student explained the source of his troubles. He had discovered that because he was undocumented he was ineligible to attend a state university and would be unable to attain financial aid at a private university. After working so hard in the face of so many obstacles, this student was being denied access to higher education, In frustration and anger, he gave up. Learning this, Mr. Mason was devastated for the student and angry at the system.

> He just had so much promise and it was really tragic to see that not be fulfilled. So that had a powerful impact on me... It's given me really strong feelings about trying to do whatever we can to help these kids get their Alien Registration Cards as early as possible... It's really unfair to set them up for, to get their hopes up [about going to college] if they're really not going to be able to afford it at the end of the day. (Interview, June 20, 2005)

Mr. Mason's connection to this student and other students like him contributed significantly to the development of his socio-political consciousness. He has since changed political party affiliations and actively works to effect change for his students. In the classroom, Mr. Mason provides multiple opportunities for students to meet high, college-prep expectations. He offers before school, after-school, and lunchtime tutoring support and makes regular home visits and phone calls home when he sees students' struggling to meet expectations. He also has become active in helping to organize the faculty at his school to better support students by bringing Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID), a college-prep AVID program designed especially for low-income students who will be the first in their families to attend college, to the school, encouraging community service among students, and bringing in graduates who are now attending college to partner with and support current students. He has taken as his personal mission the goal of helping students who are not legal residents to attain legal status so that they will be able to attend college after they graduate.

Mr. Mason readily admits that he didn't get into teaching thinking that he would be engaged in these types of activities, but says that teaching at an urban high school demands that teachers become advocates on behalf of their students. For Mr. Mason, and for the other teachers in this study who similarly ended up with unanticipated placements in urban settings, this socio-political consciousness was not something they brought with them to their role, but something that has developed in response to relationships with students and an understanding of the obstacles those students encounter.

Discussion

Although writers such as Freire (1974) and Giroux & Simon (1989) have passionately advocated for the need for such a consciousness among teachers, their work has been more within the realm of theory than research. Even among those who have researched the connection between effective urban teaching and socio-political consciousness, such as, Oakes, Franke, Quartz, and Rogers (2002), were largely studying teachers upon whom they had had a direct influence within the scope of their teacher education and professional development work. Given that the teachers in this study were not chosen based on having passed through a particular university or reform effort and given the tremendous variation in their backgrounds, it came as something of a surprise that all are so clearly political in their stance toward teaching. This political stance manifested itself among participating teachers in a variety of ways. Some chose to provide high achievers with college opportunities while others chose to work with struggling students to boost their academic knowledge and confidence. Some chose to teach students directly about economic and political forces in the classroom, while others chose to advocate on behalf of students within the larger system of the school, district, state, and society. Yet, regardless of how they chose to exhibit their consciousness, it is clear that an awareness of social, economic, and political influences permeated their understanding of their role and was a significant force in driving these teachers' decision-making.

It is not surprising that these teachers have an awareness of the economic and political forces that influence their students. Given the coverage of urban schools in the media, it is likely that even those with limited access to urban classrooms have some

understanding of the negative impact that poverty, violence, and instability have on the lives of many urban students. However, what is striking about the selected stance of these teachers, is that they refuse to use these influences as excuses for why their students don't succeed. Rather than give in and give up, these teachers dig their heels in and work harder to find ways to support student achievement. This approach is contrary to the response of many urban teachers who, faced with students who arrive reading and writing below grade level and are perceived as resistant and unruly, choose instead to lower expectations, dumb-down curriculum, and focus on rote learning rather than nurturing academic growth (Anyon, 1997; Darling-Hammond, 1996; Haberman, 1991; Oakes, 1990). These teachers, for the most part, are not intending to hurt their students. They simply believe that, under the circumstances, their students are not more capable of rigorous academic learning (Anyon, 1997; Haberman, 1991).

Perhaps it is not surprising that the teachers who chose to teach in urban settings fought against this tendency to reduce expectations and instead chose to actively work to support high levels of achievement from their students. After all, these teachers chose to come to these settings, several grew up and attended schools in similar settings, and all were at least somewhat aware of what they were getting into. They came with an already fairly well developed socio-political consciousness, which likely served to allow them to prevail against a system that pushes idealism out of teachers (Haberman, 1991; Oakes, 1990). What is more surprising is that the study participants who did not choose to teach in urban settings were able to develop a similar consciousness. That this consciousness developed as a result of interactions with students is particularly noteworthy. Examining teachers' accounts of their growth, it seems that the development of this consciousness

resulted from two factors: A predisposition to pay attention to and care about the students in their classrooms, and the opportunity to have meaningful interactions with students outside of the traditional teacher-student classroom model. These interactions allowed these teachers to learn about the details of students' lives and to come to understand the human toll of the social, economic, and political forces which impact urban students. Although they may have had some vague classroom-based or media-driven notion of educational inequality prior to entering the classroom, it took seeing the impact of that inequality on the lives of real individuals who they cared about to prompt the development of a socio-political consciousness which, in turn, propels them to seek to improve their instructional practice and to work to improve educational opportunities for students at their school sites.

Personal experience and relationships with students are important themes throughout the above discussion. The teachers in this study chose to become teachers because they wanted to interact with and support students. That initial impulse, combined with formative experiences from their own education, and/or close relationships with students led them to develop the attitudes and aptitudes that are characteristic of effective teachers in urban settings. Of course, having the desire to make content relevant and accessible and to provide an equitable education for students does not automatically translate into the ability to do so. The following section presents teacher growth processes with particular attention to understanding how these educators grew into their role as effective urban teachers.

Examining Teacher Development and Change

Although the teachers in this study are all currently effective in the classroom, nearly all faced significant obstacles during their first years in the profession. The vast majority struggled, especially with management, in their first few years of teaching. The support of informal networks of teaching colleagues, the presence of teaching models, trial and error, and their own stubborn persistence supported these teachers through the induction period. By the second or third year of teaching all were beginning to feel confident in their role and had experienced some success. At this point, these teachers believed they were all good teachers. It required a transformative experience in their fourth, fifth, or sixth year, however, for these teachers to progress beyond competent to effective. These transformative experiences were prompted by multiple influences including formal opportunities for curricular review, informal interactions with students, and coaching from peers or administrators. What matters in terms of teacher growth however, are not the particulars of the impetuses for reflection, but the reflection itself. Teachers moved from good to great (Collins, 2001) as a result of in-depth critical reflection into content, methods, and student learning.

Early Struggles

Teachers in this study faced multiple obstacles during the early years of their teacher careers. Several taught out of their content area, others taught on temporary contracts as substitutes or leave replacement teachers. One teacher described being physically assaulted by her autistic students, while another spent the first year of her career teaching off of a roving cart since no classroom was available. One challenge that

nearly all the teachers had in common was the ubiquitous challenge of managing a classroom. Most echoed Ms. Zankovich's comment when asked if she was prepared when she first started teaching, "Not by a long shot" (Interview, May 25, 2005). Mr. Lindt, provided a vivid description of the emotional toll of his first year of teaching when we admitted that "there were many days when I would come home crying... I was the sixth substitute they had had, so for the first half of the year it was just horrible, and the rest of the year wasn't any better" (Interview, June 14, 2005)

Given these working conditions, it would not have been surprising if Mr. Lindt and the other teachers in this study followed the pattern of so many new teachers, particularly teachers in urban schools, and left the classroom during their first few years. Fortunately for their current students, they persevered. Examining teachers' descriptions of their first few years in the classroom, it appears that there was no particular formula that kept them in the classroom. Some spoke of the opportunity to connect with informal teacher networks. Ms. Zankovich, for example, explained that in her first years of teaching she was part of a very young, but dedicated group of faculty members who got together at someone's house at least once each month to plan units, bounce lesson ideas around, and talk about how they were affecting students' lives. She believes that membership in this support group was vital to her surviving the early years in the classroom, "It was a very supportive and cohesive group. I didn't feel like I was the Lone Ranger... It was teachers helping teachers. I thought it was an outstanding situation" (Interview, May 25, 2005).

Others described supportive relationships with mentor teachers. Mr. Mason, for example, had a mentor teacher assigned to him through the state-funded, district-run

Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment program (BTSA), who not only helped him learn management strategies and classroom presentation techniques, but also helped him to keep his struggles in perspective. "He said very clearly, 'You have only one job your first year, that's to get through it,' and once I heard that, it took a lot of the pressure off... I felt like, 'It's okay to be bad your first year,' and that allowed me to just sort of keep focusing on improving and getting better a little at a time" (Interview, June 20, 2005).

The majority indicated that their own "stubborn determination" played a significant role in keeping them in the classroom. Mr. Evert, for example, explained that his first year was a daily struggle with classroom management, complemented by dispassionate amusement on the part of his colleagues, whose attitude was "we are going to watch this guy and see if he burns." It would have been easy not to come back, but, Mr. Evert explains, "I am really stubborn, or perseverant is probably the positive way to talk about it. I just hate to lose" (Interview, July 1, 2005). This pattern of discourse—"stubbornness" and "hating to lose" – was used repeatedly by many of the teachers in the study. In their memory, the first few years of teaching was a battle between themselves and the conditions that were working against them in an effort to drive them out. Although some acknowledge the presence of support structures as being helpful, many of these teachers see themselves as having "survived" the battle in large measure due to their own stubborn persistence and their refusal to give in.

It wasn't until their third or fourth years that most of the teachers in this study began to feel confident in the classroom. Observations of colleagues, interactions with students, experimentation in the classroom, and stubborn persistence had helped them to develop appropriate routines, determine effective management techniques, and establish

working relationships with their students. They began to be able to respond to student needs and to anticipate the response to various lessons in the classroom. Mr. Evert, for example, explains that during his first two years he often second-guessed himself. He was nervous approaching the classroom, sometimes to the point of nausea, and focused nearly all his energy on management and classroom control. But, like most of the other teachers in the study, by the beginning of his third year, "I had enough under my belt that there were probably not a lot of very new types of management things that were going to happen in the classroom. I started to be able to focus on student needs. I could say, 'All right, I think I know what this group's going to need,' and I was comfortable enough in the landscape that I could start to experiment to figure out how to provide it to them" (Interview, July 1, 2005).

Discussion

The teachers in this study, for the most part, spent the first years of their careers encountering situations and dilemmas fairly typical of what the literature indicates can be expected of most teachers in the induction phase. They struggled with management, attempted to negotiate between being an authority figure with high standards and a nurturing caregiver (Bullough & Knowles, 1991), and worked to construct a coherent image of themselves within their present school context (Featherstone, 1993). The fact that they survived is noteworthy, given the high levels of teacher attrition, particularly from urban schools, during the first three years of teaching (Darling-Hammond, 1998; NCTAF, 1996). However, there is no particular pattern that emerges among these teachers that would provide a particular formula for teacher retention in the early years.

Some express the critical role that teacher networks and communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998), but not all were part of such networks. Some pointed to the critical role that a mentor played in helping them along, but others indicated that participation in the Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment program (BTSA), a program designed to mentor beginning teachers, was more of a hassle than a help. What is noteworthy, however, is not so much that these teachers survived, but that they struggled. The fact that 11 out of the 12 indicated that their first years were filled with daily challenges and that they were initially not fully prepared to handle those challenges, indicates that these teachers were not so much "born" as they were "made". They grew into their current status as effective, urban high school teachers, a process which will be further explored in the following section. If these teachers can overcome initial adversity to grow into that status, it indicates that the lessons we learn from their growth process might be useful in helping others to develop into effective urban teachers as well.

Good to Great

All of the teachers in this study had at least five years of teaching experience[3]. Although all started out with some knowledge and expertise, it took time and experience

[3] During the nomination process several principals nominated less experienced teachers, typically using the phrase "great potential" to indicate that they saw the promise within that teacher to become effective rather than necessarily believing that the teacher was truly effective at that point in time. Several students also nominated less experienced teachers during through group nomination discussions. However, there was rarely consensus from the whole group regarding these teachers. Although students noted that they appreciated younger teachers' energy and enthusiasm, they questioned the effectiveness of these teachers in the classroom. My favorite comment came from a student who stated, "She is really nice and everything, but she gives in too easily. She

for them to become truly effective teachers. This section of the findings chapter argues that, in addition to time and experience, becoming effective, in the case of these teachers, required something else; it required a transformative growth experience.

Between the third and sixth years all of these teachers encountered an opportunity that caused them to critically reflect on theory, purpose, and practice connected to their content and their pedagogy. In some cases these experiences were intentionally sought out by the teacher, for others they were professional development opportunities that were part of their school or district reforms, and for others they were the result of happenstance, a chance interaction with a student or colleague. In each case, with regard to compelling critical reflection and moving teacher practice, the impetus for the growth mattered less than the experience itself. These opportunities for critical reflection represent what Kelchtermans and Vandenberghe (1994) term "critical incidents", learning opportunities that have significant personal meaning, though they may not mean much to others, and prompt reflection and questioning of current practice.

For the teachers in this study, critical reflection on practice came through one of three entry points, review of content, re-consideration of instructional methods, or assessment of student learning. An example of each of these entry points and a discussion how it prompted critical reflection for the teacher involved can be found below. It should be noted, however, that while teachers entered into reflection on teaching and learning by focusing on different particulars, the process of reflecting provided all with opportunities to re-think all of these aspects of their practice— content,

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doesn't push us hard enough because she wants us to like her" (Interview, April 20, 2005).

instructional methods, and student learning—and to re-frame their practice in response to this reflection.

Review of Content

By the end of his fourth year, Mr. Baldia knew he was good at what he did, but he wasn't fully satisfied with his teaching. Although he felt that he was "servicing" his students, he didn't believe that anything set him apart. "I felt like anybody could come in and do this stuff ... I felt like I did a good job... but I didn't have ownership over it" (Interview, May 23, 2005). His dissatisfaction led Mr. Baldia to seek out opportunities to reflect and re-think his approach. He asked lots of questions to colleagues, sought out professional development workshops, read on his own, and, at the suggestion of one of his mentors, started daily reflections in writing.

> I was frustrated with the classes I was teaching and I thought that if I'm going to deliver instruction, I want to try to do the best that I can... I [started writing] to help me to sit back and think about what it is that I've done. Do some introversion and just think, Okay what did you do today that, what do you think was good, what do you think was bad. (Interview, May 23, 2005)

Mr. Baldia believes that these reflections helped him to work out the day-to-day challenges of teaching, to improve his lesson planning, and to better anticipate and meet student learning needs, but he continued to lack a big picture understanding of student learning goals in connection to his content, history. He was teaching daily lessons that were driven by the textbook. He spent a great deal of time trying to figure out how to make the material engaging for students and delivered lectures that many students found interesting, but it was unclear what larger purpose these lessons served. This lack of

clarity continued to frustrate Mr. Baldia until the summer he participated in an advanced placement (AP) workshop. This workshop provided him with a clear set of goals not just related to the facts of history, but the thinking and communication skills that would be necessary to truly understand the content.

> The AP conferences I think were the turning point in my mind because... I'm a very results oriented person, and the AP conferences, said, 'Okay this is what they want, this what we want the kids to be able to get,' and I really could see the relationship between cause and effect, between methodology and result... I think that's where I turned the corner because AP gave me that structure ... I really felt that was the turning point in my effectiveness as a teacher. (Interview, May 23, 2005)

For Mr. Baldia, the AP workshop provided a structured opportunity to reflect on his subject matter and his instructional purpose. Sitting down with colleagues to examine timelines, learning objectives, and assessment materials allowed him to see how his day-to-day work in the classroom fit into a larger frame of a yearlong course. Having this understanding allowed Mr. Baldia to move, in his own understanding, from being a competent teacher to being a truly effective teacher.

> In the social sciences to really be effective you have to have a bigger idea of the overall picture. Going through the AP and [later] the curriculum writing [with the school district] provided me with that. I felt better about what needed to occur and what needed to happen and where we needed to go. Because, it seemed like to me, education up until that time, not always, but sometimes could seem hit or miss. Don't get me wrong, I still love teaching an elective class, but it's like the film class, I had such a great time with that because you're free from constraints, you can do a little bit more, but I think when you're talking about teaching core curriculum classes... you really, really have to consider where it is you need to be and where it is that you need to go and a definite plan on how to get there. It requires that. (Interview, May, 23, 2005)

The AP courses that Mr. Baldia teaches are founded on open enrollment principles. These are not courses exclusively for the elite of the school. Mr; Baldia recruits from all ninth grade classes when looking for students to enroll in his tenth grade AP European classes. He explains that he is less concerned about ability and more concerned about "desire and willingness". He has adapted the AP program in order to meet the needs of his students, explicitly teaching critical reading, discussion, and writing skills that might be assumed in other environments. For him, the AP workshop was not about receiving a curriculum that he could plug into the classroom, nor was the move to teach AP classes simply a way to escape the struggles of lower achieving students. Rather the AP workshop represented a turning point because it allowed him to critically reflect on the ideas and goals of his content, a process that he believes benefits him in all the courses he teaches, not just the courses for advanced students.

> For instance, I took on a government class the next year, and even though it was my first year doing it... Okay, so maybe I didn't really feel as confident about the subject matter yet, but I felt good about how I was researching and preparing for class... I knew how to plan out the course, set goals, plan units, measure student achievement, and then make adjustments. (Interview, May 23, 2005)

Mr. Baldia was able to take the planning process he had learned through his work with AP European History and apply it to a government course, a course with very different content objectives, but similar critical analysis and communication objectives. What he took away from the AP workshop experiences was not simply an enhanced understanding of one course, but rather a more global perspective on the larger purposes of teaching and learning in the social sciences and the planning, analytical, and assessment tools to help

him prepare for and teach the course in a manner that would ensure that students would meet his learning objectives.

Re-consideration of Instructional Methods

Opportunities to re-consider instructional practice provided an entry point to critical reflection between their third and sixth year for some teachers in this study. Mr. Evert was one of those teachers. After teaching for several years at Washington High School, an urban school that was closed by the district in 2003, Mr. Evert moved to Mesa High, a school that served a similar population of students. At Mesa, Mr. Evert was asked to help design a new social studies course for ninth graders that would introduce them to principles of history and geography while also developing their content area literacy skills. To support this work, Mesa's principal provided him with access to an instructional coach who had a background in literacy and history. Mr. Evert recalls the coach's first visit to his classroom.

> I think that the first ever observation of my class was "Hey that looks pretty good, but you look exhausted... Are you sure you are going to be able to do that all day let alone all year?" and that was really significant because that year was also the year where I literally physically got so sick I shut down. I think that caused me to re-think a lot about planning, stress levels, and one of the main things was "What's my job? What do I put as the responsibility of the student? And what do I really want them to learn?" (Interview, July 1, 2005)

Up until that point, Mr. Evert had been, in his own description, a "control freak." Like many new teachers, he attempted to micro-manage everything that happened in the room. Concerned that students, most of whom came to him reading and writing significantly below grade level, would not be able to understand a particular text, he re-wrote it for

them. Concerned that they wouldn't complete assignments, he completed portions of the assignments for them. His desire to ensure students' success meant that he had taken on all the work himself and left his students with little ownership and limited learning.

Prompted by questions from the instructional coach and his own illness, Mr. Evert began to re-think his approach to instruction. Although he had always wanted students to "dig in" to history, and indeed had selected to teach history in large measure because he saw it as a content area in which students could analyze issues, form opinions, and engage in debate, the constant pressure of coverage that he had encountered in his first years of teaching, combined with the desire to help low achieving students "make it through" high school, had pushed aside any attempts to get students to dig deeper into the subject matter. He had approached planning by asking primarily, "What can I do to help these students learn this material?" As a teacher of an elective course freed from the requirements of a state-mandated curriculum, Mr. Evert was now being asked to consider a different set of questions when planning— "What critical literacy and analysis skills do they need to learn?" "How will their learning be assessed?" and "How can the subject-specific materials best be used to support their growth?" This shift was a challenge for Mr. Evert both intellectually and emotionally. It required him to re-focus his goals for students and revise his understanding of his role in the classroom. To do so he needed to critically reflect on his practice and be willing to admit to his own shortcomings, a process that was emotionally charged given that his early years in the classroom were very difficult and that his existing instructional knowledge was hard won. However, it also allowed him an opportunity to re-visit the foundational goals with which he entered teaching and to more closely align his instructional practice with his educational

objectives, "I think what it did for me was connect what I had always wanted [to do] but was really never helped in figuring out how to implement it in my planning and in the classroom" (Interview, July 1, 2005).

Mr. Evert's re-thinking of his approach to instruction has resulted in significantly increased attention to student learning. He now plans units around essential questions, teaches students the skills they need to engage in thoughtful analysis and debate, and then releases responsibility to them to take ownership of their work. The result, according to Mr. Evert, has been significant growth in students' academic achievement and engagement in their learning. Seeing students' growth has, in turn, increased Mr. Evert's personal satisfaction in his role as a teacher. He is enthusiastic about the work he is doing and motivated by the accomplishments of his students. He firmly believes that the opportunity to critically reflect on his practice has had a profound impact on his teaching effectiveness.

> I think if I had stayed at Washington I would have been known as a good teacher, or maybe a great teacher in that setting, almost on the strength of my charisma and effort. My whole goal was to try and get kids to have a reaction, but in terms of really thinking through and building skills and developing, I don't think I ever would have become as good as I am getting at that even after just a couple of years at Mesa, which has been great. (Interview, July 1, 2005)

Assessment of Student Learning

A third entry for critical reflection came through the assessment of student learning. For several teachers in this study, critical reflection resulted from more formal opportunities to assess student learning, using external evaluation measures such as the Independent Reading Inventory or the California Standards Test. For others, including

Ms. Krause, critical reflection was prompted by less formal assessments of student learning.

By her fifth year of teaching Ms. Krause had grown comfortable in the classroom. After two years of teaching off of a cart, she had finally received a classroom to call her own and had developed a reputation as a tough but fair teacher. She worked hard, often arriving long before and staying long after many of her colleagues and felt mostly satisfied with the curriculum she delivered to her students. Certainly, she believed, her instruction might benefit from a bit of "tweaking" here and there, but for the most part, she believed she was a good teacher.

In her fifth year, however, Ms. Krause had her own daughter as a student in her class. Watching her own child, who she knew to be bright, thoughtful, and capable, struggle with the material caused Ms. Krause to seriously re-think her content and her teaching. "It was like an epiphany... I really had to look at my teaching. If I wasn't meeting her needs, I knew there were other kids in the class I was missing too. That's where I had my breakthrough" (Interview, June 1, 2005). Watching her daughter struggle, and reflecting on the discrepancy between her daughter's needs and her own instructional methods, Ms. Krause's perspective on her role as a teacher shifted. She stopped focusing on her own performance and began to focus on students' understanding as a measure of her effectiveness in the classroom. Teaching stopped being all about the teacher's delivery of information and started being about student learning.

Recognizing that part of her daughter's struggle came from the course's reliance on textbook based learning and written responses, Ms. Krause began to seek out resources that would allow students to receive input and express understanding in

multiple ways. Frustrated by the lack of answers on her own campus, she sought out resources from professional organizations, attended conferences and workshops, and looked for professional texts that would provide her with ideas. Using ideas gleaned from these sources, she worked with a colleague to redesign her teaching to allow students multiple entry points into the content and to allow them multiple ways to express their understanding. She began noticing and trying to reach the students in the back of the room with their hoods over their eyes and made regular assessments of all students' progress in order to better understand their growth. Although she believes that she was always a good teacher, she describes this experience as her "breakthrough." It provided an opportunity to critically reflect on her beliefs about teaching and learning and to re-evaluate her role in the classroom. It caused her to stop measuring success based on her own performance, and to instead focus on student learning and her responsibility to differentiate instruction to ensure that all students in her classroom had opportunities to grow.

Discussion

All of the teachers in this study reported experiencing significant growth in their teaching practice as a result of critical reflection on content, pedagogy, and student learning. For all of these teachers, this growth took place after they had taught for at least three but nor more than six years. Feiman-Nemser (2001) refers to this time in a teachers' career as the "early professional development" phase. The literature notes that this is a stage of mastery and stabilization (Berliner, 1986; Huberman, 1989; Watts, 1980). It is at this time that teachers, having acquired routines and settled into the day-to-

day work of the classroom, are ready to consider theory and ask questions about practice (Hollingsworth, 1989; Russell, 1988). However, saying that teachers are ready to consider theory and ask questions is quite different from saying that they actively do so. Not all teachers grow as a result of engaging in such work. Although there have been multiple models of teacher growth that have been developed by researchers (see Berliner, 1994; Fuller, 1969; Huberman, 1989) research has found that not all teachers move through the various stages (Richardson & Placier, 2001). In particular, many teachers get "stuck" at what Berliner termed the "advanced beginner" stage, a point at which they have moved beyond the discomfort associated with novice teaching, but are not reflective about their practice and the connection between their teaching and student learning (Berliner, 1994).

Berliner's description of the "advanced beginner" stage is appropriate to describe the practices and understandings of most of the teachers in this study as they came out of the induction phase of their careers. They'd become comfortable in their role in the classroom, but weren't yet feeling fully successful in their ability to guide students toward academic success. It would have been easy for many to remain in this role, especially given the urban school setting. Reasons abound for student failure in urban schools and it would have been quite understandable for these teachers to rest on their relative success, put in their time, or move on to schools where high test scores are more readily guaranteed. But they didn't. Each of these teachers went through an experience that caused them to reflect critically on theory, purpose, and practice connected to their content and their pedagogy and resulted in a transformation of teaching practice.

The fact that all of these teachers went through such a transformative experience is noteworthy in two ways, in the fact that they occurred, and in the manner in which they occurred. As to the first point, the fact that all teachers did have opportunity and means to reflect on content, pedagogy, and student achievement once they had reached a stage of mastery and stabilization (Berliner, 1986; Huberman, 1989; Watts, 1980) serves to confirm the validity of the developmental continuums envisioned by researchers such as Berliner (1986), Feiman-Nemser (2001), and Huberman (1989) as they apply to secondary teachers in urban settings. The time frame during which participating teachers' transformations took place and the questions considered during the process of reflection very much fit the expectations of these researchers' more generalized educational continuums. It also is noteworthy that *all* of the teachers in the study experienced such an opportunity for critical reflection. Although a comparison sample of less effective teachers was not studied in the present research, it is reasonable to question whether similar uniformity of experience would be found if all teachers in participating schools had taken part in this study.

Anecdotal evidence gleaned from personal experience in urban high school settings and research of teacher growth patterns more broadly (Berliner, 2001; Richardson & Placier, 2001), indicate that teachers do not progress evenly along the developmental continuum and many do not advance beyond the comfort level associated with having made it through the first few years of teaching. Within the scope of this study, it is not possible to determine whether this stalled progress is due to lack of opportunity or the failure to take advantage of opportunities that were presented. What has been found within this study is that the participating teachers all had the opportunity

to critically reflect on practice and all took advantage of that opportunity. It is unclear if this was a decisive factor in supporting their development into teachers who are judged by both students and administrators as effective, but the teachers' themselves described these experiences as "epiphanies," "turning points," "transformations," and believe that they had a profound impact on supporting their professional growth.

As to the second point, the manner in which these experiences occurred, it is noteworthy that there were multiple entry points into the reflection, but great similarity in the nature of the reflection itself. Although teachers all grappled with issues of content, pedagogy, and student achievement, the manner in which they came to grapple with these issues varied from teacher to teacher. Some began to reflect after attending a workshop, others as a result of working with a colleague or a coach, still others in response to an interaction with a student. This finding fits with research by those who study naturalistic teacher change who argue that numerous incidents can prompt teacher growth and that teachers respond selectively to "critical incidents" which may have significant personal meaning but may not have meaning for others (Bullough & Baughman, 1997; Butt, et al, 1992, Kelchtermans & Vandenberghe, 1994).

Despite the variety of experiences that prompted reflection, the actual reflections themselves, including the questions considered and the concerns addressed, were remarkably similar. All fit what Van Manen (1977) envisioned as the most sophisticated level of change, critical reflection, and all resulted in what Cuban (1988) defined as second-order change—Change in ways of thinking, teaching and learning. In their reflections, teachers were not just tinkering around the edges of their practice (Cuban, 1988), rather, they were questioning the nature and worth of the knowledge taught in

their courses (Van Manen, 1977), the means by which knowledge is learned, and the implications for student academic achievement and life-long opportunity. According to these teachers, opportunities to critically reflect on the nexus between content, practice, and student achievement, had a powerful impact on transforming their practices and were a critical component of their professional growth. Teachers explained that although they had felt competent before these experiences, it was only after they had had these opportunities to critically reflect that they began to feel confident that their teaching truly served the needs and interests of the students in their classrooms.

Considering Teacher Education and Professional Development

The third lens through which this analysis views the data collected from teacher interviews is by considering teachers' experiences in relation to the literature on teacher education and professional development. During their careers, all of the teachers who participated in this study had attended university-based teacher education programs and engaged in multiple professional development and school reform activities. These experiences included everything from the standard one-shot university or district sponsored workshops to workshops and conferences sponsored by professional teaching organizations to sustained participation in school-based instructional reform. As might be expected, teachers described both positive and negative responses to teacher education and professional development (TPD) activities.

Teacher Education

In general, teachers in the present study indicated that they gained few benefits from their pre-service teacher education programs. Most were dissatisfied with the university coursework, finding the courses— particularly courses related to multi-cultural education, special education inclusion, and second language acquisition—too theoretical or vague to be helpful in preparing them for the classroom. There was some appreciation for the student teaching experience; most teachers valued the opportunity to get into the classroom with "real kids," and some were fortunate to have master teachers who were provided helpful feedback and strong models. But a positive student teaching experience was by no means universal; several teachers spoke of being thrown in to "cover" a classroom in which the regular teacher had quit and others recalled being caught in the middle of conflicts between the expectations of the university and their master teachers. In this regard, Mr. Mason's experience was the most vivid. He ended up having three master teachers all of whom disagreed with each other. In attempting to satisfy all of them, he satisfied none and ended up failing his student teacher evaluation, an assessment that nearly drove him out of the profession.

Perhaps the most telling indicator of the negligible impact that pre-service teacher education programs had on the teachers who participated in this study, at least in their perceptions of their professional growth, comes from the lack of information they were able to provide about their programs. With the exception of Mr. Mason-- who had vivid memories of the debilitating effect of his student teaching experience, these teachers, even the ones who were relatively recent graduates of their teacher education programs, had very little to say about their programs. Of all the questions that were asked of

participating teachers, this question generated the least amount of talk. Most teachers indicated that these programs were little more than a necessary hurdle to pass over in order to gain entry into the classroom. Ms. Zankovich, for example, expressed that the best thing about her teacher education program was that it lasted only six months. At the time she felt she was "hot stuff," she'd volunteered in a classroom for a few weeks and thought she was prepared to assume the role of teacher. Looking back, she laughs ruefully at this early characterization of her readiness, but at the time this confidence made her impatient to get into the classroom, and frustrated by the seemingly irrelevant nature of the pre-service courses. Even the teacher who expressed the most satisfaction with his teacher education program, Mr. Lindt, believes that the program ultimately had little impact on the teacher he has become. He explained that he had consistently strong professors (including the former president of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics as his methods instructor) and thoughtfully designed coursework in his teacher education program, but that nearly all of what he does in the classroom today is the result of his learning since leaving the program.

Discussion

The dissatisfaction that these teachers expressed with their pre-service teacher education programs is consistent with more comprehensive studies of teacher education programs which generally find that they are too short, too fragmented, and too superficial to adequately prepare new teachers for the classroom (NCTAF, 1996; NRC, 2000). Nevertheless, given that these 12 teachers attended six different teacher education programs in three states and two countries, it is very discouraging that all found their pre-

service education to be inadequate in preparing them to enter the classroom and ineffective in providing them with a framework for long-term growth.

Traditional Professional Development Workshops

Teachers who participated in this study indicated that they appreciated the opportunity to participate in traditional professional development workshops. Certainly they had mixed levels of connection to these workshops, however most indicated that they were able to get "something out of almost any workshop" (Interview, June 14, 2005). Workshops were particularly useful when they were sought out by the teacher in response to a perceived weakness in their own content or pedagogical knowledge. Ms. Zankovich, for example, explains that she sought out workshops to help her with writing instruction. "I thought I was a terrible writing instructor and I felt that was a weakness in my teaching skills, so I went to every writing workshop known to man... I was there. I could write naturally, but I didn't know how to put it across to the kids" (Interview, May 25, 2006). A 25 year veteran, Zankovich notes that attending such workshops does not bring about radical change in her teaching, but rather small alterations that may gradually enhance teaching and learning.

> When I go to a workshop I try to see how I could use something like that in the classroom... I'm saying, 'How can I adapt this in my classroom?' And sometimes it's just one or two things and then it may or may not work and I'll try it again and it may or may not work and at that point I have to decide—use or toss. (Interview, May 25, 2005).

Most teachers in the study echoed Zankovich's response to traditional workshops. Teachers valued the opportunity to hear from experts and gather information and ideas

outside of their school, particularly if they were able to self-select the workshops to attend. They sought out ideas that could be adapted to their classrooms; approaches that would mesh with already established classroom routines and practices. And then they utilized relevant ideas and information to make incremental changes in their teaching practices.

Participation in traditional workshops and conference-style activities also provided an important opportunity for teachers in this study to develop a sense of professional identity and connectedness. Several teachers stated that one of the best parts of attending workshops and conferences was the opportunity to network with colleagues from other schools and districts. Ms. Krause explained that she initially got involved with National Biology Teachers as a way to escape from the classroom for a few days, but explains that attending the conference yielded significant personal and professional benefits.

> Early on in my teaching career I must have got a flyer or something from National Biology Teachers. The teacher next door and I were on the same page and we said, 'Let's go to this conference and get away from it all. We did. We had fun and learned so much. We brought back lots of free stuff and new ideas. And I got hooked in to a great organization that I continue to find helpful and inspiring. (Interview, June 1, 2005)

Several of the more veteran teachers in this study have taken on leadership roles within professional organizations.[4] Most indicated that these roles did little to improve

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[4] When asked to discuss professional development and professional networks, none of the teachers in this study directly discussed teacher unions, with one significant exception. Several days after interviewing Ms. Krause, I received an e-mail from her which stated the following:

> Heather-- Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you . I hope I was helpful. After reflecting on our conversation last night, I thought of one

their classroom practice (and in some cases they felt that time constraints caused these roles to interfere with their practice), but all felt that such leadership roles enhanced their role as a education professional. Ms. Potter, for example, explained that her leadership within and connection to the state and national levels of Future Educators of America enhanced her ability to inform parents and students of scholarship opportunities for higher education and rights guaranteed to them under state and federal law. Ms. Hernandez indicated that her connection to bilingual teacher organizations allowed her to not only inform parents and students of their rights, but also allowed her the opportunity to have a voice in informing state decision making. Through her professional organization, she was invited to participate in a state level panel on expectations for second language students taking the high school exit exam. Although she disagreed with the final decision that was made by the state, she explained that the opportunity to participate was "very influential" in shaping her view of herself as a professional.

Discussion

On the surface the finding that teachers in this study did benefit from traditional professional development workshops appears to counter to studies which indicate that these models are too fragmented, too superficial, and too limited in time to yield positive gains in teacher growth (Hargraeves, 1995; Joyce, 1981; NCTAF, 1996; NRC, 2000).

> major area that influences teachers and is not ever broached in college--- the teacher's union. Regardless of your personal stance, I do believe that it can negatively impact teachers to some degree. I would be happy to discuss this further if you feel my input would be valuable, by email or phone if you prefer. (Personal communication, June 2, 2005)

But it is appropriate to question what expectations are surrounding this style of TPD. If the expectation is for radical change, then clearly the teachers in this study, consistent with the teachers studied by NCTAF, NRC, and others, do not meet that expectation. However, if this form of TPD aims to provide teachers with information and ideas to gradually expand their understanding and incrementally enhance their practice, then, it could be argued based on the present study, traditional workshops achieve this goal if teachers are already thoughtful, reflective teachers. Furthermore, the present study indicates that traditional workshops and conferences can have a significant impact on teachers' sense of professional identity and connectedness. Although this may not be the stated purpose of such traditional TPD opportunities, it is nevertheless an important function and is likely to support the long-term growth and retention of teachers (Nieto, 2003, Quartz, et al, 2004).

Site-based Instructional Reforms

In addition to attending teacher education programs and traditional TPD workshops, all of the teachers in this study had participated in professional development and reform efforts at the school sites. Given that these teachers all work at urban sites, sites under increasing pressure to improve student achievement, it is not surprising that all had been engaged in such reform work. Indeed, a survey of urban school leaders in 1994 found that 96% of their districts were presently engaged in reform efforts and that the great majority of these efforts had at least some component which focused on teacher professional development (Council of Great City Schools, 1994); if anything, the advent of additional of federal school reforms such as No Child Left Behind (USDOE, 2002) in

the years since then have likely led to an increase in the number and intensity of reforms in urban districts. The approach to TPD within these reforms varies tremendously, and, as might be predicted, the response among the teachers participating in the present study was similarly varied. Some efforts were praised as supportive of teachers and students, while others were vilified as harmful to professional growth and student achievement. The structure, perceived purpose, and perceived connection to student needs mattered greatly in determining the perceived impact of site-based TPD efforts. Efforts that were seen to value teachers as expert professionals, responded to the needs of students in their classrooms, and, usually, supported the development of a community of practice within the school were valued by the teachers in this study. They reported that such efforts led them to reflect on their practice and to make meaningful changes in their own classroom and, in collaboration with others, across the school. Conversely, TPD reform efforts which were perceived as administrative mandates, which de-valued teacher expertise, and which was not seen as serving the needs of students in their classrooms led to significant frustration among these teachers. They resisted these reform efforts through a range of methods including disengaging from the teacher community at the site and retreating into their classrooms, passively following the reform while reducing the amount of time spent in planning and reflection, and actively fighting against the reforms at the site and district offices.

For purposes of this discussion, two sets of site-based TPD reform efforts will be highlighted. The first set of these reforms took place at Vista Del Mar High School. A successful reform effort at Vista Del Mar, according to the five teachers who work there and were part of this study, occurred under the leadership of former principal Joe

Fletcher[5]. Baldia, Hernandez, Patterson, Potter, and Zankovich spoke of Principal Fletcher's leadership in almost reverential tones. All credited Principal Fletcher with creating a campus climate that held high expectations for teachers and students. Each believed that they grew professionally under his leadership and each held tremendous respect of him, even though he pushed them to confront "sometimes uncomfortable" truths. Ms. Zankovich recalls his Principal Fletcher's entry into the school as follows:

> He basically said, "Whatever you're doing isn't working, but let's figure out how to improve it." He brought us in as the experts and then he would say "Let's refine it, 'and then he brought the liaison from [a local university] to say "This is where your kids are not meeting the mark as entry level freshmen." How do we do that from ninth grade through twelfth grade to get them ready? And that's the visionary we needed... In no uncertain terms he would say, "It's not working," or "Come up with something better." So he knew it was in you, and he wouldn't let us fail. (Interview, May 25, 2006)

Under Principal Fletcher's leadership, teachers at Vista Del Mar participated in study groups to analyze student achievement data, developed site-based curriculum maps and unit plans, participated in and led site workshops for their colleagues, went on "focus walks" to investigate evidence of student learning, and observed classrooms of their peers. Although they worked longer hours and exerted significantly more intellectual and emotional energy while participating in reform efforts under Principal Fletcher, teachers all described this time as the time of their greatest professional satisfaction, in large part due to the positive changes they witnessed in student achievement.

The reform under Principal Fletcher contrasts sharply with more recent, textbook driven reform efforts at Vista Del Mar. Starting in the 2004-05 school year, teachers

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[5] The name Joe Fletcher, like all of the names used in this paper, is a pseudonym used to protect the identity of the individual described.

throughout the district in which Vista Del Mar is located have been required to follow a publisher's outline in all 7th through 12th grade English classes. Although ostensibly designed to support teacher professional growth by providing resources and structured pedagogical guidance, teachers in the present study viewed this reform effort as heavy-handed and insulting.

A second set of site-based TPD reforms has taken place in the district in which Central, Mesa, Mission, and Southeast High Schools are located. Within this district the first reform, in terms of chronology, caused the greatest amount of dissatisfaction among teachers. This reform focused on instructional approaches in literacy and mathematics. It provided significant amounts of professional development, typically taking teachers out of their classrooms to be "trained" by district leaders or outside consultants. Instructional coaches, or in some cases, content administrators, were also placed at school sites to "support" teachers' implementation of the instructional methods. Teachers in this study were very upset by these reforms. They vividly described the fear that permeated classrooms and campuses over concerns that teachers would be "punished" if they failed to implement the approaches correctly. Teachers also were frustrated by the low expectations these reforms had for student academic achievement.

More recent reforms at Central, Mesa, and Mission High Schools have been received much more positively by the teachers participating in this study. In response to a district-led, privately-funded initiative, these large comprehensive high schools have been re-designed into a collection of small, theme-based high schools. Although not ostensibly about teacher professional development, this reform has had a significant positive impact on the way in which teachers view their role within the schools,

empowered them to take greater responsibility for their instruction, and increased levels of satisfaction.

It is convenient that there are two sets of reforms, with two very different responses from teachers that are available to analyze within the context of this study. The fact that teachers were receptive to some reforms and the same teachers were frustrated by other reforms indicates that it is not the existence of a reform which matters, but the nature of that reform. The following discussion analyzes four aspects of those reforms which contributed significantly to the perceived success or failure, as judged by the teachers participating in this study, of the site based teacher professional development reforms at their schools.

Respect for Teacher Knowledge

Those reforms characterized by participating teachers as successful showed respect for teacher knowledge. Under Principal Fletcher's leadership, for example, teachers at Vista Del Mar believed that their experience was acknowledged and their expertise was valued. Although he pushed for continued growth and held out ever-higher expectations, he did so in a manner that recognized the professional knowledge and the critical importance of teachers. Zankovich explains,

> Joe was someone who had a clear understanding of what the teacher does in the classroom, and how important that teacher is, not only to the students but to other teachers. He gave us permission and encouragement to grow and we saw then that teachers are a force to be reckoned with. (Interview, May 25, 2006)

Outside experts were brought in to support reforms, but these experts were seen as consultants, resources for the teachers at the site to use when they needed additional

information in order to determine the best course of action for their students. Similarly, at the re-designed high schools, Central, Mesa, and Mission, teachers helped to lead the change process. They too participated in trainings with outside consultants, but, again, it was the teachers, in collaboration with the small school principal, who ultimately made the decisions as to the direction of the school and the expectations for students and teachers. Teachers described this process as "empowering," noting that it allowed them to take ownership over both their classroom instruction and the overall success (or failure) of the school and its students.

Conversely, reforms perceived as being unsuccessful failed to respect teacher knowledge. Although these reforms paid lip service to teacher professional development and offered professional growth workshops, teachers saw these unsuccessful reforms as attempts to teacher-proof the curricula.

> I understand the philosophy behind it, to standardize the teaching, but that's not teaching... When it's "This is what I will tell you to do, this is what you will do," then the creativity, the enthusiasm is gone... That's not teaching, that's just a robot. (Interview, May 25, 2005)

Classroom coaching and administrative classroom visits, though ostensibly intended to be supportive, were often perceived as heavy-handed enforcement tactics. Teachers described significant fear and insecurity that permeated their experiences during these reforms. Comments included: "It was very cold, very scary, driving to work everyday I would have a pit in my stomach" (Interview, June 16, 2005); "You're basically scared to do anything" (Interview, May 25, 2006); and "It was like always having someone looking over my shoulder ready to pounce" (Interview, June 14, 2005). Such comments clearly show evidence of a lack of perceived respect for teacher knowledge and expertise among

teachers who are, as determined by both students and administrators, the most effective teachers at their sites.

Development of Teacher Community

Successful reform efforts not only respected teacher knowledge, they also supported the development of a community of practice among the teachers at the school site. When he enlisted the teachers at Vista Del Mar in reform efforts, Principal Fletcher asked them to come together to find ways to increase student achievement. He built opportunities for dialogue through study groups, classroom visitation, and curriculum planning and the result was the creation of a working community. Teachers engaged in thoughtful conversations about instruction that moved beyond surface level teacher talk about schedules and book orders and into meaningful dialogue about pedagogy and student achievement. In listening to teachers' accounts of these conversations, it was clear that at times the dialogue was challenging. However, as Ms. Zankovich explains, such dialogue was necessary to make a significant difference for students.

> If a student isn't getting the education then I am going to go to the teacher. I am not going to go around behind their back. I just go right to the source and say, "Why don't these kids know it?" They may be offended, but my bottom line is these kids aren't getting what they need. (Interview, May 25, 2005)

Bringing concerns about student achievement and instructional practice to light and working through them strengthened teacher community. During successful TPD reform efforts, teachers reported being closer to their colleagues, more willing to reach out and ask questions or share concerns and having a greater sense of ownership over the success of the school as a whole.

On the other hand, unsuccessful TPD reforms negatively impacted on teacher community. Vista Del Mar's teachers reported that since the textbook driven reform began in 2003 they have had fewer professional conversations, that meetings tend to be more procedural, and that they are much less likely to visit their colleagues' classrooms. Fearing administrative sanction if they veered off the mandated curriculum, teachers retreated into the relative privacy of their classrooms to salvage what they could of their autonomy—"I'll just go into my little hole, and I'll see you in June" (Interview, May 25, 2005).

At Mission High School, the district-driven instructional reform also caused teachers to retreat to their classrooms, and actively served to break down whatever teacher community had previously existed. Teachers who were believed to be on-board were seen as the darlings of the administration. Other teachers regarded the favored few with a mixture of rancor and jealousy. Ms. Woods explains the experience from her perspective,

> It was very clearly set up that myself and two or three other teachers were the darlings of the department... We were the ones that everybody always went into their classrooms and watched them, everybody always asked us questions, and there was this group of people who were berating themselves constantly... The administration definitely set up "These are the good ones and these are the bad ones." It was really a negative environment to be in. (Interview, June 21, 2005)

The creation of "good" and "bad" groups of teachers had a polarizing impact on the campus, creating a great deal of tension among teachers and making all teachers, including the "good" ones, uncomfortable and unhappy. Ms. Woods, who was a "good" teacher, explained that she was unable to reach out to others during this time period, that she often was afraid to admit her own concerns, and that she didn't really grow. She

describes this time period as her "easiest" teaching, due to the fact that she was just following along with what other people were telling her to do, but laments that she wasn't really preparing her students-- "I try not to feel guilty about those days... That's what they wanted us to do." Further, Ms. Woods is still trying to build trusting relationships with colleagues who continue to perceive her as a puppet of the administration, even though that administration is no longer part of the school. The breakdown of community caused by the unsuccessful TPD reform has had a long lasting impact at this school.

Connection to Student Needs

Reform efforts that were perceived as successful by the teachers in this study were those which where closely tied to what they believed to be the needs of the students in their classrooms. Principal Fletcher's TPD reform efforts, for example, relied directly on student data from that school. Teachers responded to the reforms because they believed that their efforts would have a direct impact on their students in their classrooms. Teachers at the school spoke with great pride of the curriculum they developed that was intended to meet rigorous college preparation standards.

> [Our units] were site-based with the assistance of experts to assist us in our curriculum writing. In the first year there were flaws, and then the next summer we spent revising, and adding, and deleting and just had rich, rich materials that really met the needs of our students. (Interview, June 14, 2005)

Although these reforms required a great deal of work above and beyond what had previously been expected, teachers in this study were willing to support the work because they believed the reforms to be in the best interests of their students.

On the other hand, reforms perceived as unsuccessful were seen by teachers in this study as failing to serve the interests of their students. These reforms typically originated away from the school site, either in a district office or in a publishing company, and teachers, who were closest to the students, saw significant gaps between the design of the reform and the needs of their students. Teachers at Vista Del Mar, for example, were particularly upset by the lack of perceived rigor in the textbook-driven reform. They described the program as "lacking depth," "dumbing down expectations," and "racist" (Interviews, May 25 & June 14, 2005). They saw this reform as taking away the rigorous, engaging units they had designed that were responsive to student needs and replacing them with something that lacked both rigor and engagement, and would fail to prepare their students to life beyond high school. Teachers questioned the motives of administrators for implementing this reform in a low-income school with a significant immigrant population, wondering aloud if the administrators believed that these students weren't capable of high levels of achievement. Although teachers expressed many frustrations with regard to this reform, their primary concern was that it would lower student academic expectations and could lead to reducing the number of opportunities available to students in high school and beyond.

Opportunities for Critical Reflection

Reform efforts that were perceived by teachers in this study as successful often began from an inquiry stance—"What can we do to improve student achievement at this school?" This stance led to discussion and dialogue about school structures and expectations, as well as critical reflection on teaching practices. Teachers reported

learning a great deal during these reforms because they were forced to think about their practice more critically. Ms. Zankovich explained that because she knew her colleagues would regularly stop by to observe and ask questions, she was encouraged to re-think and improve her practice.

> I'm so much more aware of what I'm doing. It forces me to really think through the reasons behind what I do in the classroom. I have grown so much, it's incredible. (Interview, May 25, 2005)

Unsuccessful reforms tended to have just the opposite impact on teacher reflection. Because these reforms were seen as attempts to install ready-made solutions, teachers tended to reject the reforms, unthinkingly follow the mandates, or attempt to split the difference and retain some of their previous teaching approaches while following enough of the new mandates to satisfy their administrators. During these reforms, teachers reported that they spent little time reflecting on their practice, largely because they felt little ownership over their practice.

> They told us what to do and when to do it. We didn't have to think. We used to say we could just have an automaton in there, "Read lesson, read aloud" (in robot voice)... It was brainless. It took away all of the joy and the creativity. It wasn't teaching. (Interview, June 16, 2005)

Discussion

Although coming to the work from different perspectives, both the present investigation of teacher professional growth and the review of the research on reform experiments indicate that successful TPD reform efforts are grounded in urban schools and classrooms (Ladson-Billings, 2001; Rosebery & Puttick, 1998; Warren & Puttick, 1995), take an inquiry-based approach (Ball, 1996; Ball & Cohen, 1999; Driver, 1995;

Franke et al, 1998), and are built around communities of practice (Ladson-Billings, 2001; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Oakes, et al, 2002; Wenger, 1998). The present research further emphasizes that successful TPD reforms acknowledge and build upon teacher expertise, a stipulation which may be implicit in previously stated norms, but which this study indicates needs to be called out explicitly. However, the contribution of the present study rests less in the semantics of categorization of the elements of successful TPD and more in recognizing the impact, both positive and negative, that site-based TPD reforms have on the engagement and growth of effective teachers. The teachers in this study, all of whom were identified by administrators and students as effective, believed that site-based reforms that respected their knowledge, supported the development of a community of practice, were designed to meet the needs of their students, and were inquiry driven made them better teachers. Meanwhile the reforms that did not follow these guidelines, teachers in this study believed, diminished their ability to be effective teachers in the classroom and members of the professional community outside the classroom. Several were so fed up with reforms they believed to be inappropriate that they threatened to quit. Ms. Zankovich's final words on the textbook driven reform at Vista Del Mar were, "I don't know where it's going, but I only have five years left... And every week I play the Lotto" (Interview, May 25, 2005).

Certainly this type of lament over administrative-driven reforms is not new and has, in fact been well documented in research that examines reforms by looking at teacher satisfaction overall (see, for example, Cuban & Usdan, 2003; Hubbard, Mehan, & Stein, 2006). However, often these concerns are believed by leaders of reforms to be the whining of a disgruntled few who really were not particularly effective teachers in the

first place. What this study indicates is that top-down TPD reforms have a significant negative impact on the most effective teachers in the school. These reforms put strains on teacher community, de-professionalize the role of teaching, inhibit critical reflection on practice, and threaten to drive the most effective teachers from those urban classrooms where their expertise is most needed.

Summary of Findings

At first glance the professional growth narratives of the teachers participating in this study appear to have few common elements. However, when viewed through the lenses of research on the practices of effective urban teaching practices, teacher development and change, and teacher education and professional development, significant commonalities do emerge. Highlights of the findings discussed above include the common choice made by teachers to become teachers of students, rather than allowing a love of a particular content area drive their choice of profession. This desire to work with students may have contributed significantly to the willingness shown by teachers in this study to listen to student feedback. Interactions with students, both formal and informal, prompted teachers to re-examine their pedagogy and improve their practice.

Teachers in this study used relationships as the primary means by which they connected their urban students to the classroom. This finding differs and expands on Ladson-Billings's (1995) work on culturally relevant pedagogy and connects to Erickson's (1975, 2004) work on the importance that "particularistic co-membership" plays in driving determining the effectiveness of counselor-student interactions. The

present study suggests that cultural and linguistic ties are one, but only one, means through which students from non-majority backgrounds can be drawn into the academic environment of the classroom. Common interests, activities, and experiences were also entry points that teachers in this study used to establish relationships with their students. These student-teacher relationships benefited both students and teachers, providing the caring environment that students needed to achieve academic success (Noddings, 1992; Ogbu, 2002; Valenzuela, 1999) and providing teachers with the understanding of students' interests, concerns, and abilities that they needed to support students in the classroom. Caring relationships with students also served to shape teachers' socio-political consciousness, providing participants with an understanding of the political, economic, and societal influences on students and deepening teachers' sense of their professional responsibilities both within and beyond the walls of the urban classroom.

The professional growth patterns of teachers in this study also reveal commonalities. Like new teachers everywhere (Bullough & Knowles, 1991; Feiman-Nemser, 2001), nearly all teachers in this study struggled in their early years of teaching. Time and experience brought some improvement, but it was not until after a transformative growth experience in their third to sixth year of teaching that participants in this study began to feel truly successful. These experiences were prompted by a range of influences including interactions with students, the questions of an instructional coach, and work to align instruction with content standards. But all led teachers to critically reflect (Van Manen, 1977) on their beliefs and practices about content, pedagogy, and student learning, and all led to second-order (Cuban, 1988) changes in ways of thinking, teaching, and learning.

The final set of findings described in this chapter comes from examining the data through the lens of research on teacher education and professional development. Highlights of the patterns that emerge here include a common belief among participants that teacher education programs did not adequately prepare them for success in the urban classroom and a general satisfaction with the incremental benefits gained from participation in traditional professional development workshops. Participants also expressed strong views about the role that site-based instructional reforms played in supporting or failing to support their professional growth. Reforms which were seen as respectful of teacher knowledge, supportive of the development of teacher community, and responsive to student needs, and which offered teachers the opportunity to growth through reflection on individual and school-wide professional practices were seen as helpful and supportive of teacher growth. Reforms which did not meet these criteria were believed to suppress both teacher and student learning and actually negate teacher growth.

These commonalities offer no easy answers to the implicit question addressed by this research – How can schools, districts, and other agencies that work to support teacher growth better support the development of effective urban high school teachers? However, they do suggest possibilities which merit further exploration. In particular, the above discussion points to the importance of student-teacher connections and opportunities for critical reflection. These two themes emerge repeatedly as critical elements in supporting the professional growth of the teachers in this study. Given the self-reporting nature of this research, it cannot be said definitively that these elements were the determining factors that allowed these teachers to develop into effective urban

high school teachers. However, the consistency with which these factors supported teacher growth across a range of subjects in a range of settings suggests that student-teacher connections and opportunities for critical reflection may play vital roles in supporting teachers as they grow from novices into effective teachers in the urban classroom. The following chapter explores these two factors in greater depth and suggests possible implications for institutions and individuals who work to support the development of effective urban high school teachers.

CHAPTER 6: AN EXAMINATION OF THEMES AND IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

Two main discussion strands emerge from the findings of the present study. The first involves the importance of relationships. The critical role of student-teacher relationships is a theme that runs throughout the data, particularly when analyzed through the lens of practices of effective urban teachers. Although the importance of the role of positive student-teacher relationships on student learning has been recognized for some time (see, for example, Noddings, 1984, 1992; Ogbu, 2002; Valenzuela, 1999), there has been much less written about the role that student-teacher relationships play in supporting teacher growth. The present study highlights the reciprocal benefits of student-teacher relationships. The second strand that emerges from this study emphasizes the importance of critical reflection (Van Manen, 1977) in supporting teacher growth, particularly when that growth involves more than just tinkering around the edges, and instead prompts significant change in ways of thinking, teaching and learning (Cuban, 1988). This chapter will discuss these strands in greater depth and consider the possible implications for teachers, schools, districts, and other agencies which seek to support teacher professional growth.

The Importance of Teacher-Student Relationships in Supporting Teacher Growth

Evidence from this study indicates that the opportunity to develop meaningful relationships with student through significant interactions outside the traditional teacher-student classroom context supports the development of effective urban high school

teachers. The experiences of the teachers in this study consistently indicate that cues from students can promote, support, and sustain teacher professional growth and that student feedback plays a significant role in shaping teachers' images of themselves as professionals. Student cues led teachers to re-think their instructional practices, moving Ms. Krause and Ms. Patterson, for example, from traditional front-of-the-room instructors to educators who worked as facilitators to increase their students' engagement and involvement in the subject. Student cues shaped the manner in which teachers worked to connect students to the classroom, helping Mr. Lindt to effectively manage his classroom, Mr. Perez to pull in struggling students, and Mr. Evert to build relationships with students from different ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds. And student cues led teachers, such as Mr. Mason and Ms. Hernandez, to become more aware of the economic, political, and social forces shaping students lives and in turn, to become more active within their classrooms, schools, and in the larger society.

If teachers believed that students would benefit from a change in pedagogy or a re-thinking of curriculum, they sought out resources and willingly gave time to work to modify their instruction and content appropriately. Sometimes this work to improve practice was done independently in response to student cues that highlighted a particular weakness in a teacher's knowledge or practice. Ms. Krause and Ms. Patterson, for example, sought out resources and learning opportunities to develop their practices after realizing that they were not meeting the needs of their students. Other times, teachers gave of their time and invested in resources to support an established program, such as the AP workshops, or a district reform effort, such as the school re-design at Central, Mesa, and Mission, because they perceived there was an alignment between the goals and

potential impact of the reform or teacher professional development program and the observed needs of their students. On the other hand, if teachers believed that required reforms, such as the text-book driven curriculum reform that was underway at Vista Del Mar, would fail to meet their students' needs and could negatively impact students' achievement, they fought stridently against the effort.

The student cues upon which these teachers shaped their practices and beliefs were not simply superficial observation, an overview of the demographic data, or a general review of student work. Teachers in this study changed because they had personal connections with particular students and therefore, the direct and indirect feedback from those students mattered in determining their sense of achievement in the high school classroom. Ms. Krause responded to a student's failure because that student was her own daughter, someone she knew could be extremely successful. Mr. Mason responded a student's dramatic change in attitude and achievement, because he had come to know and respect that student during the years he coached the soccer team. Ms. Patterson responded to a student's success, because the paper did not match her previous interactions with the bandana-wearing student. Often, though not always, these connections with particular students were developed outside the traditional teacher-student roles that are typically found within the high school classroom. Many teachers in this study coached athletic or academic teams. Others ran clubs or sports. Still others spoke of simply "hanging out" and getting to know students as individuals. Investing in these relationships allowed teachers to come to understand their students as individuals, to learn and care about students' achievement, and to take ownership over their role in supporting that achievement to the best of their ability.

Discussion

What is perhaps most striking when considering these findings in relation to the existing research literature around teacher professional growth and development, is the absence of shared dialogue. In the present study, the importance of teacher-student relationships in shaping teachers' professional growth was a theme that reverberated within every lens through which the data were studied. When the data were considered in light of the characteristics of effective teachers, teachers indicated that direct and indirect feedback from students with whom they had significant relationships shaped their understanding of and ability to use pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1987), their ability to connect students to the classroom through the use of culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995) or, more often, through the development of meaningful relationships with students (Noddings, 1984, 1992; Ogbu, 2002; Valenzuela, 1999), and the development of their own socio-political consciousness (Oakes, et al, 2002).

When the data were considered in light of the literature on teacher development and teacher change, cues from students prompted transformative growth experiences in teachers to move them from an advanced beginner stage of comfort in the classroom to a stage of true understanding and mastery (Berliner, 1994; Huberman, 1989; Watts, 1980). Finally, when considered in light of the research literature on teacher education and professional development, the data in the present study reveal that teachers will seek out professional development opportunities if they believe that those opportunities will benefit their students, and that they are responsive to administrator-driven teacher

professional development reforms only if they believe that these reforms will benefit their students.

On the other hand, the research on teacher growth, teacher change, and teacher professional development, rarely mentions the role of student-teacher interactions in shaping teacher growth. The literature on professional development guidelines, for example, contains many lists of suggested guidelines for supporting teacher professional growth, but almost none of them connect to student-teacher interaction or the use of student cues to guide professional development efforts. Little (1988), for example, lists five principles that she believes should guide professional development efforts. They include: Ensuring collaboration, allowing collective participation in leadership, focusing on curriculum and instruction, continuing the work long term, and fitting the professional norms of collegiality and experimentation.

These are all good recommendations, but missing from this list is any connection to student cues or the role that student-teacher relationships might play in supporting professional growth. Similarly, Putnam and Borko (1997) list four "truisms" they believe should be recognized as guiding principles in developing teacher professional development efforts, and Abdal-Haqq (1995) lists 11 norms; neither of these lists contains any explicit reference to the role of student cues in shaping reforms. Even reform efforts that ostensibly focus on student learning and student needs, such as the work of the Cognitively Guided Reform Initiative (Carpenter, Fennema, & Franke, 1996; Fennema & Franke, 1992), typically approach teacher professional development with their own reform agenda and rarely utilize observation of students or feedback from students in the reform effort (Wilson & Berne, 1999).

When teacher-student interactions are directly mentioned in the literature in relation to teacher professional growth, they tend to be mentioned in passing or in a negative light. Within the naturalistic change literature, researchers who study reasons for teacher change list student cues among a long list of "dynamic and unpredictable" factors that may contribute to teacher change (Bullough & Baughman, 1997; Kelchtermans & Vandenberghe, 1994). These factors are seen as highly specific to the individual in terms of potential significance (Kelchtermans & Vandenberghe, 1994); the implication of this work seems to be that there is little value in studying influences such as student cues further or emphasizing it as potential agent of teacher change, due to its particularistic nature. Research evaluating success or failure of teacher professional development and school reform efforts tends to mention the role of student-teacher relationships only in a negative light, indicating that reform failure is often the result of negative teacher perceptions of student abilities based on previous interactions (Lipman, 1993; Marks & Gersten, 1998; Richardson, 1994). And research investigating high teacher turnover in urban schools (see, for example, Ingersoll, 2001; Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2002; Shen, 1997) list negative teacher-student interactions as one of many factors leading to high levels of teacher attrition in urban schools.

Given the overwhelming emphasis that the teachers in the present study place on their interactions with students as a primary factor influencing their professional growth, the near absence of discussion of the positive role of student-teacher interactions in the literature is striking. Perhaps it is the result of the perceived unpredictability of these interactions in providing timely and appropriate guidance for teachers. Perhaps it is due to the current emphasis on reforms that endeavor to re-shape instructional practices by

focusing on narrowly defined teaching techniques (Elmore, 1995; Little, 1994). Or perhaps it is due in part to the more pernicious influence of the perpetuation of a deficit view of students in urban schools (Haberman, 1991), and a refusal to acknowledge that information gathered from the interactions between these students and teachers could lead to improved teaching and learning.

Regardless of the reasons why student-teacher interactions have thus far been largely overlooked, it is clear, based on the results of this study, that attention now needs to be paid to the potential positive role that such interactions may play in supporting teacher professional growth. The teachers studied here, all of whom were successful in urban high school classrooms, some of the most challenging settings in this country in which to teach, indicated that student-teacher interactions played a critical role in supporting their growth. The consistency of this pattern across all 12 teachers participating in this study suggests that the role of such interactions in supporting growth is not an anomaly and deserves increased attention when studying and planning for teacher professional development.

Implications

The finding that teacher-student interactions had a significant positive impact in supporting teacher professional growth for the 12 teachers in this study suggests that similar interactions may be beneficial in supporting the professional growth more generally among teachers who work in urban settings. This suggestion has policy and practice implications for schools, districts, programs that are designed to support teacher professional development, and individual teachers. In this section two specific

recommendations will be explored: Providing teachers with the opportunity to interact meaningfully with student, and allowing student-teacher interactions to play a role in guiding reform efforts.

Teaching, particularly during the first years in the classroom, is nearly always overwhelming. High school teachers typically interact with 150 or more students each day, usually in time periods of less than an hour. Within the context of this setting, it is extremely difficult to interact with students in a manner that will yield input that will be helpful in shaping teacher growth. Schools and districts need to find ways to restructure the use of time and space in order to allow for teachers and students to have more meaningful interactions if they are to take advantage of the potential benefits that such interactions might have on teacher professional growth. The current reform efforts that have been undertaken as part of the national movement to re-design high schools (see for example, Darling-Hammond, 2002; Levine, 2002; Meier, 1995) suggest approaches that might be helpful in this context. These schools reduce the number of students each teacher sees each day, encourage teachers to "loop" with classes and continue to teach the same group of students for multiple years, and advocate for the use of advisory programs wherein teachers take responsibility for a group of students for all four years of high school. Although these efforts were founded in response to concerns that students were disenfranchised by large, comprehensive high schools and would benefit from the personalization made possible by the smaller school setting (Darling- Hammond, 2002; Levine, 2002), the present research indicates that the reciprocal may hold true as well and that opportunities to more meaningfully interact with students may benefit teachers.

Of course, as the narratives of teachers involved in this study indicate, such specialized settings are not required for teachers to develop relationships with students. Teacher participation in athletic events, extra-curricular clubs and activities, even eating lunch with students, can serve to nurture teacher-student relationships. Schools and districts can support and encourage these types of interactions by adequately compensating teachers to participate in these activities and/or releasing teachers from other responsibilities such that they have the time to engage in these outside-of-the-classroom opportunities. Pre-service teacher education programs can help prepare teachers to take on these roles by encouraging aspiring teachers to participate in similar activities before or during their credentialing program. Finally, urban teachers themselves need to take responsibility for finding ways to reach out to students, to interact, and to be willing to re-consider practice in light of feedback from students.

In addition to providing teachers with the opportunity to interact with students, the findings from this study suggest that more formal efforts to improve teacher practice would be well served to consider using cues from students to guide, at least in part, their goals and structures. This could be done through individual teacher classroom-based research as well as through site-, district-, or university-based collaborative group inquiry projects which focus their questions using information gathered from teacher-student interaction. Using student cues to focus reform efforts would help to ensure that this work closely aligns with student needs and would push back against the one-size-fits-all reform agendas that are often imposed from outside. Furthermore, the narratives of the teachers in this study indicate that building teacher professional growth efforts around teacher concerns based on cues they have gathered from interactions with their students

will encourage teachers to invest time, thought, and resources in pursuing their own growth, and that that, in turn will improve classroom instruction and student achievement.

The Importance of Critical Reflection on Practice

A second theme that emerges when looking across the findings is the importance of critical reflection in supporting teacher change. When teachers in this study spoke of significantly altering their thinking and teaching, making changes that Cuban (1988) refers to as "second order change," it was always as the result of reflecting critically on practice. According to these teachers, the opportunity to critically reflect on content, practice, and student achievement had a powerful impact on their teaching practices and was a critical component of their professional growth.

The impetus for critical reflection came from a range of sources. Student cues certainly played a significant role. Ms. Krause, Ms. Patterson, and Mr. Lindt all provide examples of instances when the successes or failures of students led them to re-think their practices and beliefs. Professional learning opportunities that asked teachers to re-consider the alignment between their goals for instruction and their actions in the classroom also proved to be a significant impetus in promoting critical reflection. Mr. Evert and Mr. Mason, for example, came to better understand the relationship between their content-specific student learning objectives and their day-to-day instruction as a result of critically reflecting on content and pedagogy in response to work with an instructional coach and/or with colleagues engaged in standards alignment. Site-based instructional reforms, when organized around an inquiry approach, also prompted teacher

professional growth through critical reflection. The work at Vista Del Mar under the leadership of Principal Fletcher, for example, led to individual and collaborative reflection on teaching and learning. Teachers were asked to critically evaluate their work in light of poor student test scores, to identify areas of strength and weakness, and to work together to develop alternatives that would improve student achievement. Teachers in this study reported that this prompt led them to re-visit their own expectations for students and to re-think their practice in relationship to those expectations.

Just as the impetus for reflection was varied, so too was the structure within which that reflection took place. Sometimes, such as under the reforms of Principal Fletcher, reflection took place fairly consistently over a period of several years in collaboration with colleagues at the school site. For other teachers, however, the timing and level of support from colleagues varied significantly. Mr. Mason, for example, began his reflection working intensely with math teacher colleagues at his school site in response to an external push from a consultant hired by an administrator. However, that collaboration ended when Mission High began the process of re-design. By then, however, Mr. Mason was committed to changing his practice and continued the work on his own. Ms. Krause began to critically reflect on her practice in response to her own questions about student achievement. Lacking resources at the school, she sought out outside resources and became part of a loose network of teachers who were interested in investigating student learning styles. All teachers described the importance of periods of critical reflection during their third to sixth years in helping them make a transition from being competent to being truly effective. However, more experienced teachers noted that they had gone through other times of critical reflection in their careers that led to

additional changes. Ms. Zankovich, for example, recounts that she was in her fifteenth year of teaching when Principal Fletcher began his reform efforts at Vista Del Mar, and that her reflection as a result of these efforts led to profound changes in her approach to instruction and expectations for students.

Despite the variety in the reasons for and structures of reflection, the act of reflection was remarkably similar across study participants. These periods of critical reflection were not simply about tinkering the edges of practice by changing individual lessons or moving around the desks in the classroom. Rather, they were times when teachers questioned the worth and the nature of the knowledge taught in their courses (Van Manen, 1977), the means by which knowledge is learned, and the implications for student academic achievement and life-long opportunity. These were times when teachers re-evaluated existing beliefs and practices in order to integrate new ideas and new learning. They constructed new knowledge and derived new meaning about teaching, learning, and their role in the classroom.

There was a significant difference in learning reported during times of critical reflection in comparison to times when there was a lack of opportunity for critical reflection. Although teachers in this study appreciated traditional professional development workshops and the new ideas for instructional strategies and management techniques those workshops offered, none reported significant change as a result of attending these workshops. Rather, they reported incremental changes here and there as they integrated new techniques into an existing structure built on an unchanged belief system. Site-based instructional reforms which mandated particular texts or approaches similarly did not provide opportunities for reflection. These reforms did not encourage

teachers to critically reflect or re-think their practices in light of new knowledge, rather they attempted to replace existing classroom practices with new ones, regardless of whether these new ones matched the belief systems of the teachers (Lipman, 1993; Marks & Gersten, 1998). Teachers in this study responded to such reforms with a range of tactics including retreat and avoidance, grudging compliance, and active resistance. No teacher in this study indicated that this style of reform led to professional growth.

Discussion

There is remarkable consistency with which teachers in this study correlate professional growth and the opportunity to critically reflect on practice. Although the paths to these reflections varied tremendously, all teachers cited these opportunities to step back and critically reflect on knowledge, beliefs, and practices (Van Manen, 1977) as the primary means through which they were able to make significant, second-order change (Cuban, 1988) in their teaching.

This finding supports the work of researchers who have studied professional development organized around an inquiry-based approach (see, for example, Ball, 1996; Ball & Cohen, 1999; Driver, 1995; Franke, et al, 1998). This work has found that teachers who use research questions to investigate their practice in relation to student performance are likely to change their practice to better meet the needs of their students (Ball, 1996; Ball & Cohen, 1999).[6] The scope of much of this research has been limited,

[6] Critical reflection and inquiry-driven reform are not synonymous. As it is used in the present study, critical reflection describes a process of re-thinking practices and beliefs which may be done in more structured settings such as those encouraged through inquiry-driven reform efforts, or may be done less formally and utilizing more loosely organized

however. Typically researchers are investigating the efficacy of teacher professional development programs which they have played a role in designing and implementing. Often the assessment of the success of these programs is limited to surveys of teacher attitudes. There are very few studies tying such reform efforts directly to student achievement (Kennedy, 1999). In the present study, no particular reform effort was the focus of study; rather, teachers were simply asked to describe their professional growth experiences. Every one of these effective urban teachers described critical reflection opportunities as significantly contributing to their own growth, which, according to the teachers, led to increased student achievement. This finding lends weight to previous studies and supports the assertion by researchers that inquiry-based teacher professional development can serve an important role in supporting teacher professional growth.

The lack of significant growth when these teachers encountered reforms which were not built on an inquiry foundation connects to research examining the challenges of large-scale reform. Repeatedly, research on large-scale, professional development-driven reforms in urban school systems has found that such reforms fail to have a significant impact on changing teacher practices and improving student achievement (see for example, Cuban and Usdan, 2003; Hubbard, Mehan, & Stein, 2006). One of the major reasons for these failures has been found to be the perception, on the part of teachers, that the reform is imposed upon them (Cuban & Usdan, 2003; Sarason, 1996). Teachers often do not understand the purpose for the reform nor the connection between the reform and

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collaborative networks in response to teachers' observations of student behaviors and levels of achievement. An inquiry-based approach to professional development encourages the kind of critical reflection that teachers in the present study report as significant in supporting their growth.

their existing beliefs and practices. They have not made meaning of the reform in relation to their practice because such reforms are not approached from an inquiry stance.

Even reforms that began as teacher-driven inquiry efforts, such as the Coalition of Essential Schools (http://www.essentialschools.org/), Advancement Via Individual Determination (www.avidonline.org/), or the Comer School Model (http://info.med.yale.edu/comer/), and that, in their early instantiations, experienced great success, have been shown to be significantly less successful when extended to other sites. This lack of success may be due, in large part, to the fact that the teachers at the other sites have not pursued the same process of inquiry and reflection that allowed for the creation of the reform in the first place (Datnow, Hubbard, & Mehan, 2002). Without such reflection, these reforms become merely another set of mandates imposed from the outside. The present study suggests that as long as large-scale teacher professional development efforts attempt to impose specific instructional methods, without opportunities for teachers to interact with and adapt those methods to meet the needs of their students, the reforms will continue to be unsuccessful. The highly effective teacher participating in this study resisted reforms that did not include critical reflection opportunities. To make reforms more likely to succeed, this study suggests that teachers need opportunities within the reform to critically reflect on their existing knowledge, beliefs, and practices in light of new questions and new knowledge, and that these reflections should play a crucial role in guiding the course of the reform effort within the school site.

Implications

The important role which critical reflection played in supporting the growth of the teachers in the present study has significant implications for those interested in supporting teacher growth, particularly in urban school settings. In particular, these findings suggest that school sites need to be re-organized to allow more opportunities for critical reflection and that school reform efforts need to move away from district-mandates and toward a site-based, inquiry-drive approach.

Schools are remarkably busy places that tend to fragment the time and work of both teachers and students (Darling-Hammond, 1999; Fullan, 1995). Within the scope of the average school day, week, and year teachers tend to have little time for reflecting on a single lesson, let alone to critically reflect on the larger issues involved in teaching and learning within the urban school context. However, the present finding suggests that time and space for just that kind of reflection may play a crucial role in supporting the development of effective teachers. As such, efforts should be made to carve out opportunities for teachers to reflect in this manner.

A model that suggests ways in which this goal might be achieved comes from Japan where the use of "lesson study" is a routine practice among teachers (see, for example, Fernandez, 2002; Fernandez & Yoshida, 2004; Lewis, 2002). Rather than using limited common time to hold general faculty meetings and then expecting teachers to learn and plan on their own, as is the norm in so many U.S. high schools, Japanese schools are structured to allow teachers to plan lessons together, to collaboratively implement those lessons, and then to work together to debate on the strengths and weaknesses of the lesson and reflect on the implications for future instruction. Although

there are specific instances of this approach being used in the United States (Chokshi & Fernandez, 2004; Stigler & Hiebert, 1997), there is no evidence of the widespread use of this approach. The present study suggests that American schools could benefit from thoughtful incorporation of the lesson study model or from similar efforts that would re-organize the school structure to allow for more opportunities for teachers to critically and collaboratively reflect on their practice.

A second model may be drawn from teacher research approaches that are commonly used as a key component of university-based masters degree programs in this country. This form of research encourages teachers to inquire into their practice by studying a particular problem or concern. The aim of practitioner research is not just to help teachers solve the problem under investigation but to provide them with the opportunity and the framework to critically reflect on their practice (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1990, 1999; Lampert & Ball, 1998). Although widely discussed, practitioner research and similar reforms that encourage teacher inquiry and reflection are often overlooked by school and district officials as a means to support teacher professional growth in an era of high stakes accountability (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). Though these approaches may not yield immediate improvements in test scores, findings from the present study indicate that they are likely to yield long-term benefits for schools and students as teachers become more effective in their practice and that engagement in practitioner research or similar reflective practices should be encouraged by schools and districts, particularly for third to sixth year teachers.

A final recommendation suggested by this research is the integration of an inquiry stance into the design of school reform efforts. Teachers in the present study defined as

successful those reforms in which they were actively engaged with their colleagues in the investigation of concerns that were particular to the needs of their students. They defined as unsuccessful those reforms which were district-mandated and which required simple implementation of a particular program or instructional strategy. The successful reforms engaged teachers as knowledgeable, thoughtful professionals who were able to inquire into their own practices and develop solutions to meet the needs of their students. The unsuccessful reforms merely expected compliance. These findings, along with research on the lack of success in large-scale, district-driven reform efforts (see, for example, Cuban and Usdan, 2003; Hess, 1999; Hubbard, Mehan, & Stein, 2006), suggest that educational leaders would do well to reconsider their approach to urban school reform. Rather than attempting to simply adopt district-wide an approach which has been successful elsewhere, reform efforts would likely be better served if teachers and site-administrators are provided with resources and support and allowed to work together to develop their own localized approach to school improvement.

Models that demonstrate the effectiveness of a site-based reform approach can be found in schools such as Central Park East in Harlem (Meier, 1995) and the Preuss School in San Diego (Mehan & Alvarez, 2006). At these schools teachers have been brought into the process of reform. Administrators set expectations for student achievement and impose structures for teacher collaboration and reflection, but give teachers responsibility within these boundaries for determining how best to serve their students. Time and space are provided for teachers to collaborate in planning and student assessment. Collaborative review of student achievement data and teaching practices encourage thoughtful reflection into beliefs and practices. Information and ideas on

school structures and teaching methods are gathered from outside sources, but teachers are allowed the flexibility to adapt those ideas to fit the needs of their students. By engaging teachers in the process of reform, these schools actively encourage teachers to critically reflect on their own practices and beliefs. These opportunities have resulted in significant changes in teacher practice and remarkably high levels of student achievement.

A site-focused, inquiry-driven approach to urban school reform is a radical concept in light of the current cookie-cutter, one-size-fits-all mentality that characterizes many large-scale reform efforts. However, the present study suggests that if teaching practices are to improve, reform efforts must be founded on an inquiry-stance which honors the wisdom of teachers' experience and recognizes that teachers, as learners, need time and space to construct new understandings.

Limitations of the Study

The small size of the sample investigated, the reliance on teacher memory, and the particularities of the teachers involved all serve as limitations when considering the generalizibility of the findings discussed above. Certainly 12, the number of teachers investigated, can by no means be a representative sample of all teachers, or for that matter all effective urban high school teachers. However, the diverse background, interests, subject areas taught, and professional growth experiences within even this small sample indicates that findings which hold for all or nearly all of the teachers involved are likely to have significance more broadly.

Within the scope of this study it was not possible to do a longitudinal investigation of teacher growth experiences, especially since the focus was not a specific professional development intervention. Rather, the focus was on a particular type of teacher, the effective urban high school teacher, and it would have been very difficult, if not impossible, to foretell which individuals would grow into this status at the beginning of their careers and follow their progress accordingly. A longitudinal study would be worthwhile; indeed, a very appropriate next step in this research would be to follow the growth trajectories of teachers as they enter the urban high school. However, in the current context, such an approach was not feasible.

The use of teacher self-reporting and teacher narrative must be kept in mind when considering the findings. This study reports on those experiences which teachers believe to be significant in supporting their professional growth. Previous research into the credibility of self-reporting has shown that individuals who have lived through experiences about which they claim to be experts do have valid and credible expertise on the subject (Collins, 1991; Shulman, 1987). There may have been other influences on teachers' growth, but participants in this study recounted the events discussed herein because, in their experience, these were the events that had the most significant influence in supporting their professional growth. Similarly, the particulars of the specific workshops, reform efforts, teacher-student interactions discussed may have been different from the manner in which they were characterizes herein, but the workshops, reforms, and interactions described by teachers accurately represent those teachers' experiences of the events. This research does not attempt to formulate an exact recipe for building an effective teacher; indeed, this research suggests that no such formula is possible. Rather

the findings are intended to suggest opportunities and experiences that these effective urban high school teachers found useful in supporting their growth, and therefore, may be useful in supporting the growth of other teachers who work in similar settings. As such, the use of teacher self-reporting, particularly when individual reports are triangulated against the self-reports of others, is appropriate.

A final limitation that is inherent to the design of this study relates to the particulars of the teachers studied. Only teachers identified as effective, urban high school teachers were investigated. This was intentional. The goal was to learn from the experiences of those who had managed to succeed in classrooms where so many struggle. However, it is reasonable to question whether those factors which so significantly influenced these teachers might similarly influence their colleagues. This research revealed that these teachers grew into their present level of classroom success and did not magically emerge fully formed from some mythical pool of successful urban educators. However, there may still be characteristics internal to their make-up and personality that allow the influences identified here to play a profound role in shaping them, where similar influences may have little impact on others. The fact that all of these teachers chose to be teachers based on a desire to work with students, for example, is a characteristic that not all teachers share, and may have played a significant role in causing teachers in this study to take student cues more seriously or to be more willing to reflect on their practice. Nevertheless, the commonalities found across all 12 case studies are striking, particularly when considered in light of the very different growth narratives these teachers share. As such, it is worthwhile to pursue the broader implications of these

findings in the hope that this pursuit might yield positive benefits for teachers and students in our urban high schools.

Conclusion

After listening to me describe my research findings, a teacher colleague posed the question, "If there are so many paths to become a effective urban teacher, why do there seem to be so few effective urban teachers?" The question is simple and straight-forward, but its implications are profound. This study does indeed reveal many paths to becoming an effective teacher. The study participants exhibited great variability in their backgrounds, interests, and personal and professional experiences. Most struggled early on in their careers and yet, through a variety of different paths, all made it to the point at which they are identified by students and administrators alike as "effective." If these teachers can, through a multitude of pathways arrive at such a level of expertise, why there not more teachers able to attain similar levels?

The answer, I believe, lies in the mismatch between the kinds of opportunities that the teachers in this study indicate are most influential in supporting their professional growth and the limited opportunities for learning allowed within the existing structures of urban schools and school districts. Schools, school districts, and other agencies that work to support teacher professional development are not designed to listen to student cues nor do they allow time and structures for teachers to critically reflect on their practice.

These limitations are particularly prevalent in urban settings, where learning opportunities for both teachers and students are reduced by the "pedagogy of poverty" (Haberman, 1991). In urban schools teachers and students alike are seen through a deficit

lens (Anyon, 1997; Dougherty & Barth, 1997; Haberman, 1991). Researchers and school leaders focus on what is not being done, what these teachers and students cannot do, rather than recognizing the knowledge and ability that does exist. Urban school districts adopt regimented literacy and mathematics programs intended to drill those skills into students' heard. They hire expensive consultants to train teachers in the use of the latest and greatest teaching methodology.

Such approaches are understandable in light of the current high-stakes environment where elected officials clamor for immediate improvement in test scores and "failing" schools are threatened with "takeover" plans. Superintendents and school principals are under enormous pressure to "fix" the schools. Meanwhile, teacher turnover in urban classrooms is remarkably high (Ingersoll, 2001; Shen, 1997) and these same administrators are faced with a constant flow of new teachers who struggle with basic management and organization (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Wasley, Hampel, & Clark, 1997). Given these pressures, along with the limits on time and funding, it is no surprise that school leaders turn to band-aid approaches designed to shore up immediate needs. Unfortunately those band-aid solutions rarely lead to significant improvement in teacher performance or student achievement (Cuban & Usdan, 2003; Hess, 1999).

The experiences of the teachers in this study suggest another path toward improving teaching and learning in urban school settings. These teachers did not become effective by teaching from one of the many series of glossy textbooks that are on the market, nor did they attain success because they adopted the prescriptive methodologies of a highly paid consultant. They became effective by listening to and learning from their students and by critically reflecting on their own practice. Meaningful interactions with

students provided these teachers with an understanding of the local particulars of their students' strengths, interests, and needs. This knowledge informed teachers' actions in the classroom and their efforts to improve their own practice. Significant improvement in practice for these teachers was consistently and exclusively the result of critical reflection on practice. Prompted by perceived student needs, new knowledge of content, and questions about pedagogy, teachers in this study thoughtfully reflected on the nature of their subject, the needs of their students, and the role of the teacher in the classroom. This reflection allowed teachers to develop deeper understandings of content, pedagogy, and student learning which, in turn, resulted in stronger classroom practice.

The important role which these two factors, teacher-student relationships and critical reflection, played in supporting professional growth for these effective urban teachers is in stark contrast to the expectations and organization of urban schools and professional development programs. However, a re-examination of Shuman's (1987) description of effective instructional practice confirms the need for exactly the kinds of opportunities which these teachers found to be so important in supporting their professional growth. Shulman writes:

> Comprehended ideas must be transformed in some manner if they are to be taught. To reason one's way through an act of teaching is to think one's way from the subject matter as understood by the teacher into the minds and motivations of the learners.... These forms of transformation, these aspects of the process wherein one moves from personal comprehension to preparing for the comprehension of others, are the essence of the act of pedagogical reasoning, of teaching as thinking, and of planning—whether explicitly or implicitly—the performance of teaching. (Shulman, 1987, p. 17)

It seems impossible for teachers to meet Shulman's description in the absence of teacher-student relationships and critical reflection. If teachers are to "transform" subject matter such that it is appropriate for the "minds and motivations of the learners," then they certainly need to know their students as learners. Teachers need to understand students' interests, abilities, and concerns in order to engage them in learning. Furthermore, in order to "reason one's way through an act of teaching," to "transform" ideas, and prepare "for the comprehension of others" opportunities to critically reflect on content and pedagogy are essential. The teaching Shulman describes is not an act which can be done mechanically, it requires thoughtful understanding of the goals of the instruction, the needs of the students, and the role of the teacher. This understanding can only be gained through critical reflection on content, pedagogy, and student learning.

If urban schools are to improve, this study suggests that more attention needs to be paid to the wisdom and experiences of both students and teachers in these schools. Time and space for teachers to have meaningful interactions with students and to critically reflect on their practice must be built into the structure of the school day. Professional development opportunities should grow out of the questions and concerns raised by teachers in response to their interactions with students. Urban schools need to stop pouring resources into band-aid solutions and instead recognize "the social, dynamic, and generative quality of learning [needed to] support the development of competencies in urban schools" (Oakes, et al, 2002, p. 229). Building professional learning around student-teacher interactions and critical reflection is unlikely to result in an immediate improvement in test scores and it is likely to be challenging and uneven. However, the experiences of these teachers tell us that building opportunities for

meaningful student-teacher interactions and encouraging critical reflection on practice may be the only way to, in the long-term, support the development of effective urban high school teachers.

APPENDIX

Teacher Interview Question Guide

Research question-- What experiences support the growth of effective, urban, high school teachers?

Interview focus-- What experiences contributed to your growth as a teacher in an urban high school?

1. Choosing to teach and choosing to teach in an urban setting –
   - Why did you become a teacher?
   - How did you come to teach in an urban school setting?
   - Why have you chosen to stay in an urban school setting?

2. K-12 education—
   - Describe your own K-12 education experiences.
   - Were there particularly memorable teachers, classes, friends, experiences, etc.?
   - Looking back, how did those early experiences with education influence your decision to become a teacher and your development as a teacher?

3. College—
   - Describe your college experience.
   - Were there particularly memorable courses, professors, jobs, volunteer experiences, friends, etc.?
   - How did your college experience influence your decision to become a teacher, a teacher of a particular subject, and/or your development as a teacher?

4. After-College—
   - What did you do after college? (e.g.: Graduate school, credential program, teaching, other job)
   - Describe that experience – What was memorable?
   - Did that experience influence you as a teacher? If so, how?

5. Pre-service teacher education –
   - Describe your pre-service teacher education program – What was memorable?
   - Did the program prepare you to be an effective teacher in an urban school? Explain.

6. Teaching—
   - Take me through your teaching career – What courses did you teach? What schools? What did you find challenging? What did you find rewarding?
   - Many teachers, especially in urban settings, don't make it more than a few years... Did you find teaching challenging in the beginning? If so, what helped you to continue on? When did you manage to make it out of survival mode?

- At what point did you really start to feel successful as a teacher? What helped you to reach that point?
- Have there been times (beyond the first few years) when you questioned your effectiveness as a teacher? Describe those times-- What caused them? How did you respond? How did those experiences effect your development as a classroom teacher?
- Have there been times of particular success? How did those experiences effect your development as a classroom teacher?

7. In-service professional development –
   - Describe the professional development experiences (within and outside of your school site) that you have undertaken since you became a teacher.
   - Which were most helpful? Why?
   - Which were least helpful? Why?
   - Role of professional associations?

8. School setting –
   - Does the school setting matter to your success as a teacher?
   - How has the school supported (or failed to support) your development?

9. Community of practice—
   - Describe your professional interactions with colleagues-- formal or informal, in school or outside of school.
   - How have these interactions supported or failed to support your growth as a teacher

10. Interactions with students –
    - Have there been particular events or students that have helped to shape your thinking as a teacher?

11. Family and community experiences—
    - Discuss your involvement with your family and community outside of school.
    - How do your family and/or community experiences influence your teaching?

12. Evaluation –
    - Are there other significant experiences / influences that we have not yet discussed?
    - Among the many experiences we have discussed, what were the most important to your development as a teacher? Why?
    - If you were to give advice to someone who wanted to become an effective teacher in an urban high school, what would you tell him/her? Why?
    - Do you feel that you need to continue to grow? If so, how?

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