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Envisioning Community: The Promise of Teacher Leadership for Career Sustainability

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Spencer Jones, '13
Senior Honors Thesis
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Abstract

This thesis explores the sustainability of the teaching profession by examining teachers' professional identities and goals and their work conditions. The author concludes that most teachers, while committed to their classrooms, cannot remain teachers in public schools for many years because there are too many structural conditions that compromise their morale and energy. The author further explores teachers' visions for their careers – primarily opportunities for professional community and collaboration and teacher leadership. Stronger professional communities and more access and opportunities for teacher leadership in the realms of curriculum development, professional development, assessment, and teacher evaluation will benefit schools and student achievement. Implementing these visions of professional community will also better prepare white teachers to serve the needs of minority students.

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Chapter I

Introduction

Reflection on Origin, Intent, and Direction of Research Project

My interest in the professional identities of young teachers developed this past summer during my eight week internship as a sixth grade teacher. I worked in New Orleans with an organization called Breakthrough Collaborative – A Summerbridge Program. Breakthrough is a non-profit organization dedicated to closing the achievement gap by encouraging college preparation skills and goals among middle school students. I worked with a cohort of twenty-nine teacher interns. Most were college students and a few were upperclassmen in high school. Our program served close to one hundred middle schoolers, including a small group of rising ninth-graders. We taught four core subjects: Writing, Math, Science, and Social Studies. We also spent an hour and a half each day leading extracurricular activities like crafts, sports, music, yoga, newspaper, and photography.

The diversity of the teacher cohort made my summer experience valuable and instigated my interest in the beliefs, attitudes, and identity development of early-career teachers. Our group was moderately racially diverse – about half our group were people of color. Twenty interns were women, nine were men. Some students attended elite private colleges, a few attended Ivy League universities, and some attended public institutions. Hometowns spanned the country and most interns attended college outside their home state. Some teachers came from poor or working-class socioeconomic backgrounds and some had grown up in middle-class or affluent homes. At various points throughout the eight week internship, we gathered together at the end of the teaching day and engaged in activities that tested, reflected, and presented our varying

beliefs and attitudes towards educational practice and policy. Our philosophies differed often

and in multiple ways. We never shared a consensus on anything: the benefits of charter schools,

whether or not all students should be expected to attend college, the role of the teacher, the

effects of race and socioeconomic status on quality and accessibility of education, funding for

public education, the role of federal and state governments in education, and current educational

reform efforts. Throughout the summer, I reflected on the diversity of our peer group and began

to wonder how the background and biography of each teacher informed and directed his or her

amateur teaching practice and educational philosophies and convictions.

I often asked my fellow teacher interns about their commitments to education, their

reasons for pursuing a career in education, their optimism or pessimism about the future of

public education in the United States, and their own experiences in primary and secondary

school. I was particularly interested in the reasons why so many different kinds of people were

committed to such a demanding and taxing career. The quick (seemingly superficial) responses I

got, while they may have been true, were dissatisfying. "I want to contribute to educational

equity! I want to help close the achievement gap! I think all kids should go to college! I want to

help young people and make a difference in the lives of children! I love working with these

kids!" While these goals are laudable and reasonable, I felt that most of my colleagues had much

deeper, perhaps yet unrealized, reasons for entering the urban teaching profession. Additionally,

I realized that not all of us would remain committed to teaching, at least not in the urban, public

school landscape. I wondered who would stay, who would leave, and for what reasons.

The summer marked my first extended experience working in a majority of-color

community. Throughout my childhood and adolescence I was raised in a majority white

neighborhood, attended majority white public schools, went to majority white churches, and

participated in majority white extracurricular activities outside of school. Almost all of my teachers had been white women throughout my primary and secondary years of school. As this past summer progressed, I reflected on my positionality as a young, white, female teacher with almost no experience working in communities of color. I wanted to teach writing with a focus on social justice and I wanted my lesson plans to be infused with my commitment to antiracism. However, I quickly became aware that I was still quite unsure what antiracism meant for me and for my teaching. I was not sure how to communicate my intentions to my students, or whether I should. Many aspects of our program and its location made my role and positionality difficult to define and locate. Many of our students attended struggling public or charter schools in the city during the school year. Some attended prestigious private or magnet schools. Some were from low-income families, others were from solidly middle-class households. The students were bused to the most affluent residential district of New Orleans and our program was housed in a premier New Orleans private school. The vast majority of students were black, some were multiracial, some were white, and a few were Latino/a or East Asian.

I never found a place of comfort in my roles as teacher, authority figure, friend, or confidant. I found myself struggling to present a true representation of my self and could no longer locate any true or desirable aspects of my personality. I spent the summer enjoying most of my work and my relationships with my peers and students, but I felt I had receded into the depths of murky adolescence, filled with uncertainty, shyness, awkward boldness, and mood swings. As I trudged awkwardly through the development of my own professional (and personal) identity and considered the similar developmental processes of my colleagues, I reflected most often on the gender and racial dynamics of professional identity development. As I progressed through my teaching experience, I began to feel that the white teachers were facing

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different challenges than our of-color counterparts. I felt that our interactions with our students sometimes had different dynamics, although I could not identify the origins of these differences. I began considering and reflecting on the role and positionality of white teachers in urban, low income, and majority of-color schools.

Almost a year has passed since my summer teaching in New Orleans and my reflections and goals for my research have significantly grown and shifted. Seeking narratives of teachers' identities and work experiences (and advice about how to survive my own transition into the teaching profession), I devised a long list of interview questions that I hoped would encourage teachers to share with me all aspects of their early career experiences. As I continued to reflect on my own teaching experiences and began to hear themes emerging from the stories of my interviewees, I realized the tenuous sustainability of the teaching profession for many young educators. The vast number of challenges for urban school teachers and structural constraints on their professional power, autonomy, and leadership often leads talented educators out of the profession before they gain the expertise that will most effectively serve schools and students. Thus, my first central research question arose: ***What might contribute to the sustainability of a teaching career in urban schools? How might schools and school districts be structured and run in ways that maximally retain great educators?***

I interviewed a total of fourteen educators. Most were in their first year of teaching or had just completed their student teaching semester at a private four-year university in the Mid-Atlantic. Some were more experienced teachers who had taken on leadership roles both within and outside their schools. (See a brief profile of the interviewee pool below.) The narratives of all these interviewees also brought to my attention the power of teacher leadership and

professional networks to improve schools and student achievement. My central thesis question thus took on an additional facet: ***How can teacher leadership improve the sustainability of the teaching profession in urban schools?***

Originally, my intent was to explore the salience of whiteness for women teachers serving urban schools. My research questions shifted and took on different facets because the interviews shed significant light on teachers' pressing concerns about their work conditions and the sustainability of their careers. However, I did talk about the meaning of race with my interviewees and I heard several stories about their experiences with racial and cultural social negotiations in their schools and classrooms. I realized that most of these teachers had experienced and were continuing to experience the same racial identity formation process that I had begun last summer. While my thesis does not deal centrally with critical race theory or whiteness studies, I dedicate a large portion of the study to exploring the salience of whiteness for professional identity and efficacy.

Methodology

I collected data through semi-structured interviews with ten teachers. Through these interviews, I gathered data about teachers' backgrounds, experiences in school and college, educational beliefs and philosophies, teacher training programs, professional development, career goals, relationships with students and colleagues, and various challenges and successes they face as early-career teachers. (See the appendix for a full list of interview questions.) Most teachers were early-career teachers (five or fewer years of teaching experience). My original intent was to explore the professional experiences and racial identity development of white teachers in urban schools, so all interviewees were white. As an additional data set, I conducted short interviews with five more experienced teachers who are also members of Philadelphia

Teacher Advocates (pseudonym). These teachers shared their teaching experiences, their professional networking experiences, and their visions for teacher leadership in Philadelphia. While most teachers work (or student taught) in urban schools serving primarily students of color, I interviewed a few teachers who student taught in predominantly white, middle-class schools in a suburb outside of Philadelphia. Some of their professional experiences mirror those of the urban school teachers in important ways and I found these patterns relevant and significant for my research.

Limitations

My interview pool was small. Most teachers were students or alumni of a small, private four-year college on the Mid-Atlantic East Coast. Thus, my sample was somewhat homogenized, although teachers did come from different hometowns, socioeconomic backgrounds, and taught in different schools. Further research would benefit from a larger and more diverse sample of teachers and representations of career experiences. Additionally, my data does not include classroom observations, an element of qualitative research central to the study of teachers and teaching. Due to IRB stipulations, I was unable to observe the teacher participants during their workdays.

Teacher Profiles

The following gives a brief description of each teacher (pseudonyms used) I interviewed, including number of years teaching, location of employment (pseudonyms for schools used), and grades and subjects taught.

Olivia is a second-year teacher at Mission School, a small parochial school in Philadelphia that serves primarily black and Cambodian students. She teaches seventh and eighth grade.

Michelle completed her student teaching semester at Liberation Charter School in Philadelphia,

where almost all of her students were black. Importantly, Michelle is of mixed-race heritage – she is part white, part Indonesian. Because she often passes as white in most communities, she was included in the study. She taught tenth-grade English and is now seeking full-time employment while tutoring and substitute teaching.

Frank is a first-year Teach For America fellow in a small city in the Southeast. He teaches Special Education at all grade levels in an elementary school. The majority of his students are white.

Chris completed his student teaching semester at Greenside High School in a suburb outside of Philadelphia. He served primarily white students from middle-class backgrounds. He taught eleventh-grade Social Studies and is now seeking full-time employment while tutoring and substitute teaching.

Heather completed her student teaching semester as a fourth-grade teacher at Westside Elementary School in Philadelphia. She served primarily black and low-income students.

Blair is a first-year public middle school teacher for the School District of Philadelphia. She teaches seventh and eighth grade science and serves primarily black and low-income students.

Grace completed her student teaching semester at a well-regarded public high school in Philadelphia. She taught ninth-grade math and served a racially and culturally diverse student body.

Lydia is a fourth-year teacher. She currently teaches first grade at International Charter School in Philadelphia, a well-regarded elementary school that serves a racially and culturally diverse student body. Previously, Lydia served two years in a district public elementary school.

Mary has taught at Chestnut High School, a public high school in Philadelphia, for five years. She teaches ninth-grade English, Spanish, and Playwriting. Before her current job, Mary served

for two years at a small Quaker school outside the city and also taught English and Drama for two years in Guatemala. Mary is an active member of Philadelphia Teacher Advocates.

Dorothy completed her student teaching semester at an elementary school in a suburb outside of Philadelphia. She taught second grade and most of her students were white and from middle-class households.

Ahmad has taught at a well-regarded charter school in Philadelphia for seven years. (His total years teaching are unknown but exceed the years he has spent at this school.) He teaches high school African-American history, biology, and chemistry. Ahmad is a person of color; I included data from his interview because he is a central member of Philadelphia Teacher Advocates.

Alice is a member of Philadelphia Teacher Advocates. She teaches third grade reading, writing, and social studies at an unknown charter school in Philadelphia.

Janet is a member of Philadelphia Teacher Advocates. She teaches second grade at an unknown public school in Philadelphia.

Linda is a member of Philadelphia Teacher Advocates. She teaches art at an unknown public school in Philadelphia.

Organization of the Thesis

Chapter Two briefly reviews literature on teachers' professional identities, the work conditions and professional experiences that significantly affect their identity formations, and the significance of whiteness for teacher identities. Chapter Three explores further literature and data from my interviews on the sustainability of the teaching profession. Chapter Four explores literature and data from my interviews on the promise of professional communities and teacher leadership for quality education. Chapter Five concludes the thesis by presenting final reflections, implications, and recommendations.

Chapter II

Literature Review

The Nature of Teachers' Professional Identities

Professional identity must be understood as an ongoing, dynamic process rather than a static conception of the self. Professional identity is formed and reformed as teachers respond to and interpret their experiences and social interactions. Identity is formed through reflection on the present self and envisioning hopes and aspirations for the future self (Beijaard et. al., 2004; Kerby, 1991; Conway, 2001). Teachers' professional identities are informed, influenced, and mediated by their particular classroom, school, and district contexts. The particularities of school contexts lead teachers to form diverse identities, choosing the professional knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes they will bring to their practice (Beijaard et. al., 2004). Positive and negative school cultures significantly influence the ways teachers respond to their students, colleagues, curricula, school policies, and professional development. Thus, teachers *use* their professional identities to create meaning in their work and make sense of themselves as educators (Beijaard et. al., 2004; Coldron & Smith, 1999). My data examines factors of school culture and professional community that significantly influence teachers' opportunities to develop efficacious professional identities.

Teaching in the United States has historically been individualized and privatized work (Lortie, 2002). Previous research identifies the profession as a conglomerate of mostly isolated teachers who enter their careers with predetermined attitudes and beliefs about teaching that are resistant to change (Richardson, 1996). Teachers' conceptualizations of their roles, their pedagogical and curricular orientations, and their beliefs about students and their capabilities are often largely predetermined by personal history and past schooling experiences. Formal

pedagogical training and education usually have significantly lower effects on shaping teachers'

identities and professional values. After completing professional training programs, teachers

experience identity transformations as they encounter the contexts of specific classroom, school,

and district cultures (Richardson, 1996; Flores & Day, 2006). Social and political contexts

significantly affect teachers' practices and identities, particularly when local and national

sociopolitical discourses affect education reforms. Economic fluctuations often shift national

educational goals and teachers are subsequently faced with new mandates and challenges that

may or may not conflict with their pedagogical orientations (Lasky, 2005). Teachers with

securely established professional identities are more likely to efficaciously accept or challenge

the changing demands and expectations of the educational system (Richardson, 1996; Lasky,

2005).

Structural Factors and Work Conditions Affecting the Experiences and Identities of

Teachers

The individualization of the teaching profession often leads most teachers to struggle

with discrepancies between their professional identities and ideals and the (often incompatible)

expectations of the bureaucratized educational system. Many beginning teachers do not feel

prepared for the complexity of their work, the high demands of the job, and the massive amounts

of energy necessitated by teaching that are characteristic of the daily work of educators serving

even the most stable and well-resourced schools (Lortie, 2002; Flores & Day, 2006). Teachers

spend their careers negotiating contradictions between the realities of their daily jobs and their

visions for themselves and their students. Common struggles are negotiating gaps between

pedagogical theories and the realities of classroom management and discipline (Flores & Day,

2006), a recurrent theme throughout my interviews with early career teachers. Most teachers,

working in isolated settings with little time and space for collegial support and collaboration, do not have the opportunity to solidify their practice in ways that enable them to negotiate balances between decontextualized reforms and mandates and their personal goals for students (Lortie, 2002). Importantly, however, professional identity formation entails constructing discourses that negotiate diverse understandings and expectations of teachers' roles: "To accomplish their implicit identity claims, teachers…talked back to certain constraints…to argue for the importance of alternative practices and dispositions…the teachers demonstrated how role claims can be understood as dynamic arguments that engage participants in a creative process through which new significances may be accomplished" (Cohen, 2008, 91). Teachers are constantly shaping their professional goals and identities as they are challenged by the educational system. Their educational philosophies and practices are simultaneously imposed and autonomously chosen. My data presents contextualized examples of these struggles. Each of my teacher interviewees shared experiences accepting and resisting challenges and conflicts with students, peer colleagues, administrators, and district-level leaders.

Working in isolation compromises the sustainability of many teachers' careers. Several factors of school and professional culture detract from teachers' ability to grow as professionals in positive and satisfying ways. Feeling powerless (and sometimes) hopeless in an increasingly bureaucratized educational system leads many educators out of urban schools (and often out of the teaching profession) within a few years. When isolated teachers with nascent professional identities experience conflicts between their practice and the expectations of administrators or non-local leaders, they sometimes respond by taking a "strategic compliance" stance – they adhere to the leadership of supervisors and administrators and (with reservation) adopt the pedagogical approaches of educators and bureaucrats outside their classrooms (Flores & Day,

2006; Vonk, 1993). This "social strategy" (Lacey, 1977) allows teachers to avoid conflict with supervisors and colleagues but also lowers their enthusiasm, morale, and proactive attitudes (Flores & Day, 2006). Thus, school and district professional communities are often characterized by separation of educators and lack of trust among faculty, administrators, and district-level leaders.

Standards-based school reform may compromise student-teacher relationships when high stakes accountability mandates and policies detract from teachers' power to govern their curricula and reduce time that teachers spend building trust and rapport with students (Lasky, 2005). As educational reforms continue to present new challenges and expectations for accountability to schools, most American school systems continue to acknowledge educational leadership among bureaucrats and administrators working outside classrooms. Thus, teachers continue to progress through their (often short-lived) careers without opportunities to collectively own and direct reform efforts. Collingridge (2008) identified five thematic elements of teachers' feelings regarding lack of opportunity for teacher leadership and professional growth: powerlessness, hopelessness, anger when their decisions and methodologies are not respected by their superiors, anger when administrators do not consult them about bureaucratic decisions that impact classrooms, and guilt and regret when they are unable to meet goals that impact the achievement of their students. Importantly, all of these frustrations have their roots in relationships between teachers and administrators. Strong relational expectations among colleagues are essential for effective school and district cultures (Collingridge, 2008). The healthy functioning of any profession rests on the ability of people to build strong working communities. Sachs (2001) and Wenger (1998) note that any professional practice cannot be successful unless its members form an engaging community and acknowledge one another as

contributing participants. Without trusting relational expectations between themselves and administrators, teachers do not feel they have autonomy over their work and thus do not feel they can adequately or effectively teach their students. Such a professional circumstance severely compromises the energy and optimism of teachers and consequently their students' academic achievement. When teachers feel powerless to effect change in their classrooms and schools, their professional efficacy is severely compromised. Schools are subsequently caught in dire situations, because most teachers without power or hope will choose not to expend valuable time, resources, and energy addressing adverse circumstances if they feel their efforts will be in vain (Collingridge, 2008). The inability to effect change in their schools and classrooms and further their professional growth compromises teachers' morale and the sustainability of their classroom careers.

Sachs (2001) identifies two distinct discourses that can permeate educational reform efforts and have vastly different effects on teachers' professional identities. The managerialist discourse is born from reform efforts that attempt to treat the institution of school as a marketplace in which accountability, economy, efficiency, and effectiveness are primary concerns and teachers are treated and evaluated individually. The managerialist discourse leads to competition among schools for a limited number of resources and incentivizes competition rather than professional collaboration. Teachers may thus take on an externally defined "entrepreneurial" identity that grows from individualism, competition, and bureaucratic control and regulation. Many scholars see the managerialist discourse and entrepreneurial teacher identities as destructive for school and teacher efficacy (Sachs, 2001; Fergusson, 1994; Menter et. al., 1997). In contrast, democratic reform discourses recognize and reward teacher knowledge and expertise and promote teacher leadership for professional engagement and development.

Democratic discourses privilege "activist" teacher identities that value and grow from collaborative communities of practice. Schools that afford opportunities for teachers to develop activist professional identities have strong professional cultures that privilege the voices of all community members equally and are committed to eliminating exploitation, inequality, and oppression (Sachs, 2001; Beane & Apple, 1995). My data demonstrates that many teachers seek to access democratic professional discourses through professional networks and communities. They hope that democratic discourses will permeate their school and classroom cultures and they work hard to cultivate positive school environments in which these discourses will flourish.

The presence of positive professional discourses directly affects teachers' engagement and relationships with their students. My data reveals that teachers who experience positive work conditions and are supported by their colleagues and school administrators are more open and willing to cultivate strong relationships with students. Most teachers consider the strength of their relationships with students to be central to their efficacy and their professional identities. They seek to develop classroom cultures that foster openness and vulnerability between themselves and their students. The ability to know students well and develop mutually respectful and trusting relationships are prerequisites for high student achievement and academic engagement (Lasky, 2005). These goals point to the blurring of the line between personal and professional identities for teachers. Teachers are often guided and motivated by their relationships and their ability to develop rapport with students. Scholars agree that students will not give their full effort if they do not feel accepted by or cared for by their teachers. They cannot achieve academically until they are fully aware that their teachers are invested in their success (Lasky, 2005; Shann, 1999). My data corroborates evidence that negative school and classroom cultures hinder openness and understanding between teachers and students and

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compromise students' learning. Factors that detract from the strength of school and classroom cultures include teachers working in isolation, teachers and administrators not sharing common goals or power in decision-making, professional development administered from outside the school building rather than developed and facilitated by teachers, weak administrative power to support the decisions and policies enacted by teachers, and unexamined cultural boundaries between teachers and students. The complex process of establishing credibility and rapport with students takes many forms in different school and classroom contexts and requires a significant amount of cultural navigation and negotiation when teachers and students have different racial and cultural identities and backgrounds. These tensions arise often in urban schools because the urban teaching force is dominated by white female teachers, who serve primarily students of color.

Whiteness and Teacher Identity

Racial identities subtly but thoroughly infuse and influence teachers' professional decisions, pedagogies, curricula, and social interactions with students and colleagues. With the advent of scholarship on whiteness within critical race theory, researchers have begun examining the significance of whiteness as a central element of white teachers' professional identities (Howard, 1999; Lawrence, 1997; McIntyre, 1997; Sleeter, 1993). As the student population in American public schools becomes increasingly diverse and the teaching corps remains largely populated by white women from middle-class backgrounds (Zuniga-Hill & Barnes, 1995), scholars and educators have begun to critically examine the social positions of white middle-class teachers and their abilities to effectively teach and engage students of color.

Scholars have explored white teachers' conceptualizations of race and their narrative constructions of whiteness. White teachers most often enter the professional world with

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preconceived notions of race that they have developed through privileged life and schooling experiences (often segregated from people of color) (McIntyre, 1997, Sleeter, 1993). They most often conceptualize racism as a problem of prejudice rather than an unequal distribution of economic and institutional resources and privileges. A prejudice-focused understanding of racism allows white teachers to claim a "colorblind" professional identity – they claim to see and treat all children as equal students regardless of color. White teachers invoke colorblind rhetoric when they are actually (perhaps subconsciously) trying to dislodge their own psyches from the prevalent negative stereotypes of people of color and from an awareness of their unearned white privileges (McIntyre, 1997; Sleeter, 1993). In practice, claimed colorblindness among teachers in diverse schools becomes a cover for the standardization of Whiteness as normative: "Deciding that skin color does not or should not matter allows whites to ignore the advantages of whiteness as well as the experiences of people of color. Colorblindness is not race-neutral" (Cornbleth, 2008, 87). Whiteness remains invisible to its perpetuators, thus further dominating the curricula and pedagogy in diverse schools, sacrificing the quality of education for all students.

McIntyre conducted a participatory action research project in which white female teachers gathered to discuss and explore their positions as white educators. She reveals the strong tendencies of white teachers to control and direct narratives of whiteness that exculpate them from responsibility for contemporary racism (1997). Many white teachers exhibit discursive strategies to evade, deny, and explain away white culpability for racial oppression and inequality. In so doing, they covertly perpetuate racism and remain in denial about their own privileged positionalities as white women (McIntyre, 1997; Sleeter, 1993). McIntyre notes that white female teachers collectively create a space for mutual "caring" that enables them to

covertly support one another's racism and blocks them from calling each other out when speaking problematically (1997). These discursive strategies and white teachers' misconceptions of racism often permeate their pedagogies and curricula (Sleeter, 1993). Sleeter distinguishes between critical race theory, an examination of the institutionalization of racial oppression, and ethnicity theory, an exploration of difference based on the experiences of European ethnic groups in the United States. The latter most often characterizes the curricula and pedagogies of white teachers and the social discourses driving educational policies and reforms in American schools.

White teachers most often plan lessons highlighting the positivity of race and difference by celebrating the European immigrant experience. These lessons frame people of color as "others," most often depicted superficially and celebrated for their experiences and successes perceived as comparable to those of celebrated white immigrants. White teachers rarely use these lessons as teachable moments about the history of social structures and inequality in the United States (Sleeter, 1993). Instead, white teachers (perhaps unconsciously) select information and pedagogies that reinforce conceptualizations of race they have constructed throughout their privileged lives. Ethnicity theory supports the dominant ideologies of individualism and meritocratic mobility, anticipates the eventual disappearance of ethnicity as a determinant of life chances and success, ignores the violent colonization and oppression of people of color by Europeans and their American descendants, and denies the historical and contemporary salience of race in the United States. Thus, the American educational system, still dominated by white educators and bureaucrats, continues to deny the schoolhouse any complicity or culpability in the continued unequal treatment and subordinate socioeconomic status of people of color (Sleeter, 1993). The institution uses the rhetoric of colorblindness and ethnicity theory to support

educational policies that keep urban schools functioning (usually poorly) without affording them power to challenge the status quo of racial inequality in education.

While white teachers sometimes voice discomfort and frustration over the new challenges they face as educators of a more racially diverse student body, they also voice strong desires to teach their students of color effectively. They seek more professional development opportunities that will help them develop effective multicultural teaching strategies and believe new teaching tools will contribute to the academic achievement of historically underserved students. They also feel they often cannot pursue multicultural teaching because administrative duties, time constraints, and a bureaucratic focus on test scores hinders their ability to take full control of their teaching (Henfield and Washington, 2012). "Whether the issue was exhibiting confidence amid accusations of racism or challenging racial insensitivity, teachers felt compelled to do what was expected of them…other professional responsibilities…seemed to constrain teachers' creativity, destroy morale, and create cynicism toward other initiatives, including those regarding diversity" (Henfield and Washington, 2012, 157). Lack of professional power hinders white teachers from exploring multicultural pedagogy and curricula, presumably detracting from the likelihood that teachers will engage with a critical analysis of racial dynamics (or structures) either self-reflectively or in their classrooms.

Unfortunately, colorblindness persists in diverse schools because many white teachers feel comfortable and protected under its subtle and covert defense of white dominance. Cornbleth (2008) found that colorblindness allows teachers to protect schools from discrimination charges by reducing the appearance of disparities in treatment as race-related, create a "veneer of politeness" that protects faculty from embarrassment or awkwardness in cross-racial situations, and avoid tough decision-making in situations and policies involving race.

Importantly, white teachers teaching African-American students in predominantly white schools voice the same covertly racist rhetoric as white teachers working in schools primarily serving students of color (Henfield & Washington, 2012). Teachers are often uncomfortable discussing their understandings of race and sharing their cross-racial teaching experiences and avoid these discussions for fear of being accused of racism (Henfield and Washington, 2012). Clearly, white teachers are often unequipped with the knowledge, antiracist identities, and cultural navigation skills necessary for teaching students of color effectively and empathetically. My data demonstrates that while most white teachers do not approach their work with intentionally racist pedagogies or curricula, they often struggle to successfully engage their students and colleagues of color in conversations about race and the significance of race in school. Some teachers are more aware than others of the ways in which their whiteness may affect their relationships with students, parents, and colleagues. Some teachers reflect more than others on the ways in which their privileged positions as white educators will affect their teaching. All my teacher interviewees strive to teach their students effectively and with respect and appreciation for their diverse backgrounds and experiences. However, there are several patterns and conditions within the professional experiences of teachers that combat their power and ability to critique and reinvent their practice to best meet the needs of diverse learners.

Chapter III

The (Un)Sustainability of the Urban School Teaching Profession

The following chapter examines factors in the professional lives of teachers that compromise the sustainability of their teaching careers. The literature review and my data highlight six central themes that characterize negative work conditions for teachers. First, *isolation and lack of opportunity for collegial collaboration* severely exacerbate teachers' stress and chip away at their professional morale and commitments to classroom teaching. Second, *faculty segregation and segmentation* disables teachers from learning and practicing communally and thus compromises teacher efficacy and school and student achievement. Third, *lack of shared goals* among teachers and administrators detracts from positive school and classroom culture and disables teachers from having effective control over their practice. Fourth, *professional devaluing and disrespect toward teachers* at the school district level frustrates teachers and disables them from teaching curricula and utilizing strategies they believe will best benefit their students. Fifth, *obstacles to professional growth and development* compromise teacher efficacy and opportunities for leadership. Sixth, *white teachers* (comprising the majority of the teaching force nationwide) *are not fully prepared by teacher training programs or professional communities to meet the needs of diverse learners* in urban schools. The teachers' struggles to effectively serve students of color and low-income students challenge their professional efficacy and identities and are compounded by lack of professional community and support. I will first briefly review previous scholarship that examines these six elements of teachers' work and then proceed to explore relevant data from my teacher interviewees.

Teachers spend the majority of their work lives separated from their colleagues. They most often plan lessons and reflect on their teaching strategies alone. Many scholars have noted

the detrimental effects that working in isolation can have on teacher efficacy and morale and student achievement (Lortie, 2002; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001; McLaughlin & Yee, 1988; Little, 1988; Nieto, 2003). Lortie contrasts the largely individualized early career experiences of teachers with different apprenticeships that involve significant collaboration and infusion within a professional community. While novices in most industries learn their trade with the close support of numerous experts and receive wisdom and expertise from multiple mentors and coaches, teachers work almost entirely in solitude, even from their first workday (Lortie, 2002). Such solitude, particularly for early career teachers, can and often does produce severe stress and anxiety as teachers struggle with the high demands of the job. Consequently, teachers' effective professional growth and development are stymied as well as pedagogical creativity and innovation (Lortie, 2002).

Isolated teaching significantly detracts from positive school culture and exacerbates tensions between and among faculty, administrators, and students (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001; McLaughlin & Yee, 1988). Most public schools, regardless of resources and funding, "are segmented, egg-crate institutions…objectives are framed in individual, not institutional, terms; problems are hidden rather than examined; and rewards are associated with past performance, not future challenge…most teachers have jobs not careers" (McLaughlin & Yee, 1988, 40). Importantly, faculty separation comprises mutual trust and reciprocity that are essential for effective professional collaboration and community. When teachers do not have opportunities to develop strong relationships with one another, they are often hesitant, unwilling, or unable to reflect on their professional weaknesses with peers and they are unlikely to indiscriminately seek advice from colleagues (Lortie, 2002). Isolated teaching negates opportunities for teachers to share common professional goals and technical cultures. The absence of a common technical

language detracts from teacher efficacy and the potential of schools to offer quality learning environments to students (Lortie, 2002). Most academic departments in public schools lack strong technical cultures and have little "department effect" on the quality of teaching and learning happening in individual classrooms. Academic departments more often function as individual teacher units rather than as professional collectives and teachers consequently lose significant opportunities to improve practice and ensure greater academic success among students (McLaughlin and Talbert, 2001).

Lack of shared goals among teachers and administrators detracts from positive school and classroom culture and disables teachers from having effective control over their practice McLaughlin, 1991; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001; Lieberman & Miller, 1991; Hawley & Valli, 1999). School culture benefits when administrators and teachers have frequent and direct communication and when administrators provide organizational structures for teachers to work collaboratively as professional learners. Administrations and districts that provide spaces and opportunities for teachers to develop and facilitate their own learning and professional growth contribute to positive school culture and high student achievement. The majority of my teacher interviewees struggle with unsupportive school and district leaders and crave the collaborative support that will afford them opportunities to take full control of their classrooms and promote positive development within their schools. Professional devaluing and disrespect toward teachers at the school district level frustrates teachers and disables them from teaching curricula and utilizing strategies they believe will best benefit their students. Lack of professional respect for teachers often produces exhaustion and desperation and demoralizes even the most talented and committed educators. Young and veteran teachers who are fully committed to urban education and fighting for the needs and rights of their students often feel beat down by an

oppressive professional structure and lose their drive to remain working in urban schools (Nieto, 2003).

Teachers desire power and control over teaching tools and resources within their schools. They strive for the professional respect that will afford them the ability to influence the shared goals and directions of their schools: "Lacking a sense of power, teachers who care often end up acting in ways that are educationally counterproductive by 'coping' – lowering their aspirations, disengaging from the setting, and framing their goals only in terms of getting through the day" (McLaughlin & Yee, 1988, 29). Relationships between teachers and school district leaders are crucial to the sustainability of the teaching profession because "while school-level interactions with students and colleagues determine teachers' professional rewards, their pride in their work and sense of professional value derive from their district's professional community" (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001, 106). Professional development programs and policy mandates are often cited as the primary areas of contention between teachers and district-level administrators. Teachers desire the opportunity to lead policy reforms and professional development programs because they have the closest access to students and thus will likely be more successful critiquing and revising teaching practices in ways that have the most benefits for students. Professional development programs created, mandated, and implemented by non-local administrators are almost inherently less effective and productive than innovative programs developed and facilitated by teachers (Hawley & Valli, 1999). My data clearly demonstrates these conflicts between teachers and school and district-level administrators. My teacher interviewees strongly desire more opportunities for teacher leadership that will empower them to facilitate their own professional growth and development and influence reforms and policies that affect their students. Obstacles to professional growth and development compromise teacher

efficacy and their opportunities for leadership. First-year teachers often share the same roles and responsibilities as veteran teachers who have served schools for decades (Lortie, 2002). Most teachers do not have opportunities to develop and facilitate their own professional development. Most staff development programs and activities are imposed by the educational system from outside the school building and therefore are less than maximally effective for teachers and for students' learning (McLaughlin, 1991; Little, 1988). My data demonstrates that teachers are dissatisfied with this horizontal structure of professional growth and development. Lack of opportunity for taking on leadership roles significantly compromises many teachers' morale and commitment to their careers in classrooms.

Finally, white teachers are not fully prepared by teacher training programs or professional communities to meet the needs of diverse learners in urban schools (Howard, 1999; Nieto & Bode, 2008; Groff & Peters, 2012; Tatum, 2007; Rosenberg, 2004). Their struggles to effectively serve students of color and low-income students challenge their professional efficacy and identities and are compounded by lack of professional community and support. Importantly, white teachers' experiences teaching primarily students of color are not sufficient to make these teachers aware of the significance of their privileged racial status for their teaching (Groff & Peters, 2012; Rosenberg, 2004). Teachers will not be able to approach their work and relationships with students from an antiracist stance until they have access to collaborative dialogue with colleagues, students, and administrators about the salience of race in school and the wider American society. Additionally, professional dialogue will not necessarily be effective or productive for better teaching practice in urban schools (Nieto, 2003). Particularly with regard to teaching diverse learners and engaging minority students, teachers must be ready and willing to question their most fundamental beliefs and understandings of teaching. Because

schools and many teacher training programs most often ignore differences between minority students and white teachers, critical conversations on race, social class, and structural inequalities in schools "are tough for many teachers to face…having to engage in what may be disquieting dialogue is part of the price to be paid…a prerequisite both for developing the intellectual community that is desperately needed in schools and for imagining different possibilities for teachers and their students" (Nieto, 2003, 78-9). Teachers aiming to construct culturally relevant pedagogy and curricula for their classrooms will likely be unsuccessful without the support of an innovative professional community. Teachers who attempt alone to construct culturally relevant pedagogy by planning lessons "focusing on students' age, gender, ethnicity, race, academic status, inferred interests, or futures often alienate the students they aim to reach" (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001, 36). Schools without communities of learning that share common goals and commitments to professional innovation are not equipped to develop successful pedagogy and curricula for diverse learners (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001).

Stressful Solitude: The Negative Effects of Working Alone in a High-Demand Environment

Teaching in isolation breeds stress and anxiety for teachers at all levels of expertise. Scholars cite the negative effects that individualized teaching can have for teachers' efficacy and career sustainability and students' learning (Lortie, 2002; McLaughlin, 1993; Rosenholtz, 1991). My data demonstrates that teachers crave daily support, guidance, and mentoring. Student teachers express significant hesitation about entering the teaching profession permanently after realizing the lack of collegial interaction and support within schools during their student teaching semesters. Experienced teachers feel that lack of collaboration severely detracts from their continued professional growth and creativity.

Grace spent her student teaching semester interacting closely with her cooperating teacher, but rarely had the opportunity to get to know other teachers in the school building. Grace noted that most teachers in the school building valued refining and revising their practice, but that most of this process happened privately. Grace did not feel as supported as she desired; her only established time to engage with other teachers was during lunch. She expressed hesitation about joining the teaching profession upon graduation due to her concern about lack of time for teacher collaboration and support. After one semester of student teaching, Grace was aware of the necessity of dialogue and communal planning for effective professional growth and competence in the classroom (Interview, 1.31.13). However, her positive attitude towards her students, her cooperating teacher, and her curriculum could not mediate the stress she experienced trying to balance the high demands of the job:

> I burnt out from teaching after a while…ultimately, I loved what I was doing. There's just so much responsibility riding on my shoulders…It was exhausting…it was never really the teaching that made it something I was like, "Ugh," about. But it was just teaching plus everything you have to do, and the whole weight about teaching that I felt crushed by for quite some time (Interview, 1.31.13).

Michelle similarly struggled emotionally as a student teacher. While she felt committed to strengthening students' literacy skills, the high demands of her job challenged her resilience daily: "I didn't think it was going to be that hard…I didn't think it was going to affect me emotionally that much…I didn't think I would go home every day being like, 'I hate student teaching. I hate student teaching.' I don't think I did a terrible job, but I definitely don't think I did a good job" (Interview, 2.24.13). Blair similarly and concisely summed up her feelings about her teaching: "I do not know if I'm cut out to do inner city middle school" (Interview,

2.21.13). Lydia elaborated on her physical and emotional exhaustion and her feeling that the

unrelenting demands of the profession detracted from the sustainability of her teaching career:

> I get to work at 6 AM every morning and so I have a full two hours in my
> classroom before school starts and then I have my school day which is constant
> go, go, go, go, go, and never like a moment to sit down and just relax and then
> after school there's generally things to do. And then the worst is the weekend on
> Sunday, if you're going to do even a half decent job on your lesson plans and
> planning for the week, you're spending a good few hours on your Sunday or your
> Saturday…you start feeling a little resentful of that (Interview, 2.12.13).

While Mary loves teaching and is heavily involved in teacher leadership opportunities and

advocacy outside her classroom, she feels certain that her current career situation will ultimately

have to change. She recognizes that she will most likely have to abandon one of her current

commitments in order to lead a sustainable and healthy work life. Mary struggles emotionally

with finding balance between her passion for classroom teaching and her commitment to

advocacy and teacher leadership outside the classroom: "It's emotionally exhausting…I feel like

I could do an awesome job if I could teach every other day. But…most days it feels like I'm

coming up short…I'm trying to fight for the kind of change in the system that will make it

sustainable to be a good teacher…" (Interview, 2.25.13)

> *Structured Disunity: Conflicts Among Teachers, Administrators, and District Leaders*

Discrepancies and discontinuities between the goals and expertise of administrators and

teachers may significantly compromise the strength of school and classroom culture and

consequently detract from teachers' efficacy and the quality of student learning. Scholars point

to the importance of administrators and teacher sharing goals and the necessity for administrators

allowing school faculty to have power over curricula, teaching practice, and professional

development. School culture benefits when administrators and department heads develop spaces

and opportunities for teachers to facilitate their own learning. These school leaders are

reponsibile for creating the internal school structure that will allow teachers to work collaboratively and ensure that they are working with similar goals (McLaughlin, 1991; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001; Lieberman & Miller, 1991). Administrative teams that effectively organize schools for collaboration ensure the success of teachers and students because "learning can be integrated into ongoing practices and shared with colleagues. Such a school…is a place where teachers see professional growth as an expectation and collegial encouragement as unquestioned…it is safe to examine practice critically and take risks…" (McLaughlin, 1991, 75). The teacher participants in my study desire strong administrative leadership that exercises control over organization and management of the school, supports their teaching and discipline decisions, and affords them opportunities for devising and implementing innovative practices and professional development programs.

Several teachers struggled with weak administrative leadership that undermined the organization and management of the school and students. Lydia spent two years serving a struggling public school she described as "chaotic." The high amount of stress Lydia experienced daily compromised her ability to form strong relationships with her students. The level of emotional anxiety and exhaustion she experienced led her to put limits on the connections she pursued with students (Interview, 2.12.13). Michelle, working with an administration that exerted little authority regarding student discipline, struggled throughout her student teaching semester to connect with students and engage their learning. She affirmed the indispensability of an authoritative (and supportive) administration for strong teaching and classroom culture. She understands her power to engage and lead her students as being inextricably linked to the administration's clout:

> Having a good administration may be more important that actually having good
> teachers. If you have a good administration and bad teachers, then [students are]

not learning in the most creative way, but they're learning something. Or say you have great teachers and bad administration, it's chaos, nothing could happen. You as a teacher, your power comes from what the school can do (Interview, 2.24.13).

Blair similarly struggled with weak administrative powers and felt that discipline was lax at her middle school. She felt that the administration's inability to address behavior effectively (due to district mandates to decrease rates of suspension) significantly curtailed her teaching efforts and frustrated the school climate. Students' knowledge that there would be few (if any) consistent significant consequences for their actions presumably compromised their engagement with learning (Interview, 2.21.13).

Teachers often struggle to practice efficiently and effectively when their pedagogical beliefs and orientations are in conflict with those of their administrators' or with local, state, and national educational policies. Teachers are also challenged when they feel unsupported and distrusted by their principals and district-level administrators. Teachers' negative relationships with principals directly affects the quality of students' learning because "when teachers view a principal as critical or punishing, they are less likely to take risks and try new approaches" (Lieberman & Miller, 1991). Lack of professional respect from the upper levels of educational bureaucracy may significantly stress and frustrate a teacher and severely compromise the sustainability of her classroom-based teaching career. Some teachers have more power than others over their curricula, class activities, and school-wide professional development. Teachers who have no ability to exercise leadership in their classrooms and school buildings often feel they are permanently limited in their professional growth and struggle with their commitment to classroom teaching.

Mary struggles with an unsupportive and disrespectful principal at Chestnut High School. While she does have power and autonomy over the academic material she shares with her

students, Mary often cannot carry out plans and activities with her students when her goals and the expectations of the principal conflict (Interview, 2.25.13). Mary believes that the majority of the faculty at Chestnut High are dissatisfied with the principal's leadership and most often credit the school's success entirely to individual teachers. Mary (and presumably many of her colleagues) resents the principal for attempting to use the school's admissions policies to recruit talented basketball players and unfairly privileging the team (Interview, 2.25.13). The principal has blatantly ignored and disrespected her professional needs, leadership voice, and teaching methods. Mary recounted a particular incident involving her work with the school newspaper. At the beginning of the school year, she was advised by her National Board Certification mentor teacher to meet with the principal to let him know the demands of the certification process and her need for fewer school responsibilities outside her classroom. The principal blatantly disregarded Mary's needs and assigned her an additional elective Journalism class. With little time and energy for this extra course, Mary worked hard and thoroughly engaged her students with the school newspaper. However, the principal thwarted these efforts by rejecting the creativity and voice of the class. Mary and her students created a new school paper, launched a website to share their journalism online, and changed the name of the newspaper. The principal decided that changing the name of the newspaper went against school policy and took action to "sue" Mary and her students. There was a trial in the school court and Mary's class lost the case. They were told that in order to change the name of the school newspaper, they would have to write a bill and have it signed by the House of Students, the Faculty Senate, and the principal. Otherwise, the class would have to entirely cease publication of the paper (Interview, 2.25.13). Mary's utter frustration with this experience speaks to the distrustful relationship she shares with her principal. She goes to work every day not knowing how he may exacerbate stressors in her

work life. Mary has been manipulated and wronged by her school leader and feels strong

resentment for being punished for working hard and creatively with her students:

> Sometimes I think it was personal because he didn't like that I was being in
> control of stuff or not running stuff by him. But he felt threatened by the
> newspaper because he knew that we might publish stuff that would be critical of
> the basketball team...I was like, "I really don't know if I [have the time to take on
> an additional class]." He was like, "I'll make it so easy for you. I will go to bat
> for you. I won't hassle you about anything." And then he did (Interview,
> 2.25.13).

Mary has also experienced conflict with the school district office. She shared a telling

experience about the failure of the district to treat her professionally and appreciate her students'

work. Mary worked with her Spanish students for two years to slowly raise $10,000 for a class

trip to Mexico. She and her students raised funds -- dollar by dollar --every day selling Mexican

snacks in the cafeteria. Mary diligently signed the appropriate paperwork and gave the district

office a copy of the trip itinerary. The school district leaders responded by overlooking her

adherence to the official process and communicating late or not at all with her. After two years

of fundraising, the district abruptly refused to grant Mary permission to take her students to

Mexico, reasoning that the country was a dangerous place and thus unsuitable for an overnight

field trip. Mary was under no impressions that the field trip would or could be cancelled last

minute. She was furious when the district refused to apologize and admit their

unprofessionalism. Mary felt that her and her students' hard work was being completely shot

down and unacknowledged (Interview, 2.25.13).

Blair has also experienced conflict with district-level administrators. She shared a

particularly frustrating experience that has significantly colored her first-year teaching

experience at her public middle school. As an effort to contribute to her professional growth, the

district has assigned her a consulting teacher who occasionally visits her classroom, observes her

teaching, and provides her feedback (usually directives and commands) for changing plans and strategies. Blair feels professionally disrespected during her interactions with the consulting teacher and most often disagrees with her perspectives, feedback, and expectations. However, she has decided to defer to the coach and remain mostly silent when their beliefs and styles conflict:

> [I've often thought], 'Alright, I will try to implement this and make it work, fine, because you told me I have to'…I have taken to smiling and nodding, rather than arguing with her, which frustrates me because I would really like to tell my side of the story. But I also just don't have the time for the argument that would happen. And I can't even call it a discussion because I would get told that I was wrong a lot (Interview, 2.21.13).

Blair exhibits "strategic compliance" (Flores & Day, 2006; Vonk, 1993) as a beginner teacher experiencing conflict with an educational bureaucrat. Many early career teachers who have not had access to supportive professional environments struggle to fully own their practice, especially when they encounter differences in the expectations of administrators or district leaders and their own professional beliefs, goals, and teaching strategies. Beginning teachers exhibit workplace "social strategy" (Lacey, 1977) by (uncomfortably) adhering to the mandates and recommendations of administrators and adopting proffered pedagogies whether or not these new strategies are compatible with their own professional goals and identities. This "strategizing" allows teachers to avoid conflict with supervisors and colleagues but also lowers their enthusiasm and morale for classroom teaching (Flores & Day, 2006). Blair views her relationship with her consulting teacher as detrimental for her teaching. She feels disrespected professionally by the district and by the consultant teacher. Her reflections and experiences highlight the potential destructiveness of teacher-administrator relationships that detract from teacher leadership and autonomy within the classroom.

Lydia is often frustrated by discrepancies in teacher expertise between faculty and school administrators. She feels that the school leaders at International Charter and her previous district public school are "not really academic leaders" and "don't actually really know how to teach." She views these gaps in knowledge as obstacles to her professional growth and ability to perform her job efficiently, because the administrators don't understand her pedagogy and teaching goals. Lydia is often assigned extra work by her administrators that are not productive for her professional development, lesson planning, or engagement with students. Lydia feels constrained by this daily "busy work." She cannot perform her job as effectively and efficiently as she desires and resents not having full autonomy over her daily work load: "It's just one more box to check off for [the administrators]…and it's not helpful to the kids either…it's not actually authentic to what's happening in your classroom…" (Interview, 2.12.13)

Frank, a TFA fellow in New Orleans, feels confident about his development as a new teacher and believes his students will succeed. However, he often feels constrained by state and district mandates that disrupt his power to take full control of the curricula. As a Special Education teacher, Frank teaches students with a wide range of cognitive, physical, and emotional disabilities. The diverse learning styles and needs of his students necessitate Frank's free ability to depart from a standardized curriculum. Frank expresses a desire to teach in a way that harnesses the abilities and knowledge of individual students. He wants them to learn well and efficiently, but his classroom will only offer such a learning space if he has the power to base his lessons off individual students' assets and needs rather than a decontextualized curriculum. Frank is often frustrated by bureaucratic mandates, particularly testing requirements, which pay no mind to the needs of Special Education students. Frank has had no choice but to ignore some of the testing requirements:

> I'll be honest, I've gone rogue. I'm not doing all the tests because…as much as I've explained it to them, I don't think that they're getting that my kids go at a slower pace…it feels impossible because if you're going to be testing all week, then you're not actually teaching at all…they're not actually realizing that the tests are adverse to these kids (Interview, 2.24.13).

Frank's students suffer mental and emotional stress from testing requirements and often cannot function well in school when they are told they are expected to take a state or district exam. Their anxiety over testing makes them afraid and unsafe and thus the testing requirements detract from the strength of Frank's classroom culture. Thus, his students' academic and behavioral progress are severely curtailed: "My students will see a white piece of paper and throw a chair because they're so afraid of failing…You need…to realize that sometimes kids just need emotional behavioral intervention…I'm not saying to not teach kids how to read, but to remember that actually for us sometimes, the behavior is the big focus" (Interview, 2.24.13). Frank feels that the needs of his students cannot be met by non-localized educational policies and mandates. He explains that students' surest routes and resources for success will be their teachers. The needs and abilities of Special Education students are highly particularized and often misunderstood or unrecognized. Frank feels strongly that teachers, those who have the closest and most consistent access to these students, should be directing the curricula and learning processes in Special Education classrooms. He also explains that such leadership requires significant self-education and self-reflection:

> We need to educate ourselves more. And until you educate yourself, you are just working off of a myth you've created in your mind of what's best for this child. I think that a lot of people assume that if a kid with an intellectual disability sorts coins, he's doing a great job because that's him doing at least something. But what I've learned in my experience working with students and getting to know them and seeing their abilities is that you have to push them harder. And I feel like there's often low expectations for these kids because people don't know. People are afraid…it's not overt discrimination. It's just lack of education…I'm

getting my kids to read and do all these awesome things…that required me to have high expectations for my students, but also to get more informed of how to differentiate, how to meet them at their level…bureaucracy is partially why kids' needs aren't being met. And lack of education or lack of knowingness or sensitivity to kids…to students who don't have traditional needs… (Interview, 2.24.13).

Rich (2008) found that Special Education students are negatively impacted by the No Child Left Behind Act. Standardized tests given to students are usually not in line with the instruction these students have received and the administering of the tests causes undue stress and anxiety that compromises and stalls these students' continued learning.

Denying Capacity and Opportunity: Obstacles to Professional Growth and Development

Several teachers feel that their current career is unsustainable because there are not enough avenues for positive professional growth and teacher leadership while they remain in the classroom. Several of them voiced desires to combine their teaching with other responsibilities and commitments: educational advocacy outside their school building, research within their schools and classrooms, mentoring younger teachers, and influencing educational legislation and policies. Scholars have highlighted the positive effects of teacher leadership and collaborative professional learning on school organization, school culture, and student learning (Little, 1999; Hawley & Valli, 1999; Elmore & Burney, 1999).

Mary feels that opportunities for teacher leadership in her school and district are severely limited. Professional development days that are facilitated by the principal or the district are most often unproductive and have little to do with teachers' professional growth or students' needs. Mary most often feels disrespected by the condescending and unengaging nature of the school and district-mandated programs. Her principal will often use professional development meetings to distribute his own work to groups of teachers. Mary suffers emotional stress over

her loss of time that could be used much more efficiently and productively: "I honestly have taken personal days on professional development days because…I know by the end of the day, I will just be so angry and so bitter that it's not worth it" (Interview, 2.25.13). During her first few years at Chestnut High, Mary had high hopes for taking on leadership roles with her colleagues. They envisioned taking control of professional development so that each program and activity would be useful and valuable for the faculty. Unfortunately, the effort "totally bombed…the principal…just really co-opted it and used it as a way of getting his work done. We didn't get to do any of the stuff we wanted to do…so I think when that happened, I decided that anything meaningful I was going to do was probably going to be outside of my school" (Interview, 2.25.13). These experiences led Mary to seek opportunities for professional growth and teacher leadership among educators in the greater Philadelphia area. Two years ago, she joined Philadelphia Teacher Advocates, an organization that serves the interests and goals of teacher leaders in the city (Interview, 2.25.13).

While Lydia is involved with several teacher networks and organizations (including Philadelphia Teacher Advocates) that support and add to her professional growth, she notes that without a fundamental shift in the structure of the teaching profession that will afford her more decision-making power and routes for advocacy outside her classroom, teaching will not be a sustainable or professionally satisfying career. Lydia explained the concept of the teacher as "humble servant" and expressed her dissatisfaction with such a vision of leadership:

> …the "humble servant" version of leadership [is] that…by remaining an experienced teacher in a tough situation, you are being a leader and…you are really changing the world by being that person who stays. But unless you have that ideal that you are changing things just by continuing to remain in a situation even if it's not a perfect situation, there's not…a lot of room to grow in the profession because you've got the same responsibilities you got the day you

became a teacher…unless you leave teaching…it's very limited, what it means to be an expert teacher (Interview, 2.12.13).

As student teachers, Chris and Dorothy did not feel they had power to take leadership over curricula. They were expected to follow lessons that were largely predetermined and they had little freedom to engage their students' thinking on different perspectives within these lessons. Both Chris and Dorothy taught at relatively privileged schools in a suburb outside of Philadelphia. They taught primarily white, middle-class students. As a student teacher at Greenside High School, Chris experienced an eleventh-grade classroom culture that was unreceptive to his critically questioning the Social Studies curriculum and classroom gender dynamics. He was expected by colleagues and students to cater to a specific set of lesson plans and objectives and prepare students for a final exam written by the department and distributed to the entire eleventh grade (Interview, 2.25.13). Chris recognized the tendency for boys to speak in class more often than girls and attempted to integrate a critical discussion about these gender dynamics into his history lessons. However, the students remained wary and generally unappreciative of his efforts. Chris also recognized that the predetermined history curriculum was dominated by the historical perspectives of white men. His students perceived his attempts to question the curriculum as contrived and they responded with discomfort:

> …students can sense when something is arbitrarily happening…they can sense when you're trying to overcompensate for something. And they don't like that. I think that they kind of saw it as a message as, "Oh, somehow, this curriculum or the way that this school environment has been set up is not legitimate." And as part owners in that community, I don't think they liked that very much…in my own classroom…I would definitely try and integrate [gender equity] into the actual content more, so it doesn't seem like this kind of trimming on (Interview, 2.25.13).

Chris also realized the necessity of support from fellow teachers to question curricula and the power dynamics within classroom culture. When attempting to question and rework gender

dynamics among students during classroom discussions, Chris received little support and feedback from his cooperating teacher. The professional community within the Social Studies department at Greenside seemed largely unconcerned with the dominance of male student voices during academic discussions:

> …the attitude of the teachers at Greenside did not help me because…the other Social Studies teachers were all male, and not only male, but just very much a boys' club…One of my favorite parts of student teaching actually were those conversations with the class being like, "Well, I noticed the power dynamics in this room are very specific. And [I am] a white male teacher…and my co-op is a white male teacher, and everyone else is a white male teacher, it seems like. And this classroom just has more male students than female students. I want to make sure that everybody's voice is heard…" Meanwhile, my co-op was probably rolling his eyes in the background…to him, the days that I took out to talk about classroom dynamics were wasted days (Interview, 2.25.13).

While Chris characterized his relationships with his cooperating teacher and department colleagues as generally positive, he recalled that they rarely collaborated on curricula and pedagogy and often skipped faculty meetings: "It was very much an attitude of like, "Oh, I don't really lesson plan," or "I don't really do this work." You know, "We don't actually go to faculty meetings," and stuff like that. And…we'd frequently skip faculty meetings and go to a bar or something, which was like really kind of weird" (Interview, 2.25.13). Chris felt uncomfortable with the lack of strong department commitment to critically examining curricula and power dynamics among students and faculty.

While Dorothy felt welcomed by a relatively supportive faculty, she expressed frustration about having no autonomy over the literacy curriculum she was expected to teach her second-grade students. Dorothy was uncomfortable with the literacy lessons because she felt they represented history falsely and euphemistically and entirely from the perspectives of white people. Some of the lessons presented a contrived multiculturalism: "[Teaching history] would

be like, 'Well, the pilgrims and the Indians are an example of cooperation because they were like together.' In my mind…that is not history. The pilgrims like slaughtered the Indians" (Interview, 3.4.13). The inflexibility of the predetermined curriculum disabled Dorothy from having critical literacy conversations about multiculturalism and diversity with her students. She feels that students must have access to these conversations at an early age and that students who attend white-dominated schools must be introduced to these issues through their reading and writing curricula: "I think literacy is a way that you can get into those issues when you have a primarily white population…If you have no flexibility with your literacy, you're not going to be able to read about these issues…where are these conversations going to come up?" (Interview, 3.4.13) While Dorothy hoped to offer her students a more engaging and truthful reading curriculum, she could not find a way to confidently share her concerns with her cooperating teacher or other staff members. Thus, she exhibited strategic compliance: "I ended up just letting it go…this was not a school that was like, 'We're going to do some social justice conversations.' That was not going to happen…There wasn't a jumping off point. I didn't think my teacher wanted to talk about it…I'm not going to be able to approach this in a non-progressive education" (Interview, 3.4.13). Scholars note that academic departments who do not engage in these critical examinations of their school culture and collective teaching strategies compromise the learning of students' and are unable to innovatively reinvent their practice when necessary (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001).

Divided We Stand: Faculty Segregation and Segmentation Within Schools, Departments, and Grade Levels

Some of the teachers in my study noticed cultural and racial segregations among teachers in their schools. Most of my teacher interviewees struggled to find opportunities for collegial

collaboration. On top of their lack of time and space for communal planning and learning, several had to bridge cultural and racial boundaries before establishing trusting and open collegial relationships that would allow them to engage in professional community-building.

Olivia understood cultural differences between herself and her Cambodian colleagues at Mission School as potential obstacles (though not necessarily unbridgeable divides) to open faculty discussions. She often felt on her own when challenging school policies or making suggestions for changes or improvement. She described her approach to working with the school administration as vocal and assertive and perceived the Cambodian teachers as entirely submissive:

> [I am] much more likely to throw my weight around and stand up when I think
> something is wrong and they will totally just ride it out, do their own thing later
> maybe, but are not ever going to contradict [the school principal]…the
> Cambodian teachers just shrink, they just shut down and are ignoring and
> pretending they're not actually in the room, whereas I would feel either the need
> to mediate or jump in with my own opinions (Interview, 1.24.13).

In order to hear the voices of the Cambodian teachers, Olivia implemented a weekly lunch open only to faculty. She believed the opportunity to interact with peer teachers with administrators absent would encourage the Cambodian teachers to more freely share their opinions and desires. This initiative grew out of her desire to try and mute her assertive nature for problem-solving and take a listening stance in order to better serve the needs and culture of the community. While discussions did become more open without the oversight of the principal, Olivia's leadership role as the vocal teacher did not drastically change:

> I ended up really using that time to try to get as much wisdom from them but also
> trying…to weasel opinions out of them…if I'm going to stand up for something I
> want to make sure it's something [the Cambodian teachers] want, something that
> [they] would agree with if [they] were going to take a stand on it, which [they]
> won't, but I will for [them] if I know what [they] want (Interview, 1.24.13).

Olivia exhibits the pseudo-independence state of white racial identity development (Helms, 1990). While she has immersed herself in a predominantly of-color community and is taking steps to engage as an ally with her Cambodian and black students, some of her professional choices (while well-intentioned) are paternalistic. Howard notes that whites'

> attempts to abandon racism in this stage are usually characterized by a desire to 'help' people from other racial groups rather than to systematically change the dynamics of dominance. The missionary zeal of the pseudo-independence stage often grows from a conviction that Whites really do have the answers for other people (1999, 92).

Olivia exhibits these characteristics because she attempts to speak for her colleagues rather than work to create a professional space and system that will allow her colleagues to feel that their voices are equally privileged and valued.

Heather, a student teacher at a school with a relatively positive learning and professional culture, observed a separation between white teachers and teachers of color, as well as between teachers working with different grade groups. She noticed a physical racial segregation of the faculty during lunch, break periods, and professional development meetings. The divides among the faculty disabled the teachers from talking to each other about their students. Teachers in the upper grades rarely heard information about their students from colleagues who had previously taught the same children. Heather did express appreciation for a strong and supportive principal who communicated well with all of the teachers and forged strong relationships with both black and white teachers. However, strong administrative leadership seemed not enough to bridge the racial and grade-group segregation among the faculty. This lack of professional community disappointed Heather (Interview, 1.25.13).

Similarly, Lydia does not interact professionally with teachers outside of her grade group. International Charter occupies a three-story building in Philadelphia and each floor of the school

holds two grade groups, with the two highest grades at the top of the building and the two lowest grades on the ground floor. The physical structure of the space, as well as time constraints, do not allow flexibility for large-group professional collaboration and collegiality. Teachers are most often confined to working with a small number of peers who teach their same grade (Interview, 2.12.13). Chris observed a distinct gender separation among teachers during lunch breaks and referred to the Social Studies department in his school as a "boys' club." The professional culture of the faculty seemed to mimic stereotypical high school cliques and social interactions: "The boys sat over here and talked about football. And the girls sat over here and talked about the office…I think I ate maybe six lunches in which there [was] mixed-gender seating" (Interview, 2.25.13).

Teaching with Uncertainty: White Educators and the Problem with Solitude in Urban Schools

Several of the student teachers reflected critically on their personal and professional identities as they sought to develop strong relationships and build positive classroom cultures with students of color. Heather and Michelle recognized that their whiteness could present particular challenges to their ability to engage with students across cultural and racial boundaries. Heather thought critically about her race and how her positionality would impact her approach to classroom discipline. Having read numerous academic publications on the criminalization of black boys in the United States' white-dominated education system, she was particularly concerned with the ways in which she interacted with and disciplined the fourth-grade black boys in her class. She recognized that she was entering her first classroom with stereotypes about the attitudes and behaviors of black boys. She saw these stereotypes surface in her written reflections on her students as she used "token phrases" to describe her boys and often had fuller understandings of her girls. Heather reflected critically on her pedagogical and classroom

management decisions to ensure her boys were being treated fairly and equally (Interview, 1.25.13).

Michelle grew up in a working-class neighborhood and attended charter schools before graduating from an elite college. Before student teaching at Liberation Charter School, she assumed her own schooling background had prepared her for the challenges of urban education. She felt that her experiences growing up in integrated neighborhoods and schools would help her relate to and develop strong relationships with her students. After a semester of student teaching, Michelle perceived much stronger cultural separations between herself and her black students. She realized that her late adolescent and early adult experiences in a private high school and at Swarthmore College had significantly influenced her cultural identity such as her styles of speaking and her musical preferences. Her student teaching experience threw into perspective the cultural gap between herself and her students that was a product of her identity development at an elite high school and college: "I'm not part of this culture anymore. And what's more important is that I am not perceived as belonging there...for all they knew, I was from suburban Iowa" (Interview, 2.24.13). Like Heather, Michelle is aware of the ways in which her whiteness affected her relationships with her students. She realized that her black students held stereotypes about white teachers that prompted their expectations for her to approach classroom management hesitantly and unassertively. Michelle struggled to not fulfill the predetermined role of the timid white teacher because she recognized that such a stance would compromise her credibility with her students and thus her ability to engage their learning. At the same time, Michelle hesitated to take a more authoritative stance because she understood that her position as a white teacher in an urban school afforded her certain unearned powers:

> ...it was so hard for me to be good at classroom management because I didn't
> want to be too assertive because I was really aware of that power and balance, but

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then when I tried to make it equal, then I got stomped over…There wasn't hostility towards me because of my race. If anything, there was pity toward me because my race made me not as good at classroom management (Interview, 2.24.13).

Heather and Michelle understood their whiteness as playing a significant role in their professional identities and their abilities to engage effectively and appropriately with students of color. These teachers, through their recognition of the significance of whiteness and its potential impact on their relationships with students of color, are striving to teach from an antiracist position. They constantly seek to recognize, understand, and interrupt their own power as privileged white women without also compromising their necessary authority as teachers.

Several teachers voiced hesitation over effective and appropriate ways to discuss race with their students. Grace, Mary, and Chris observed race affecting different aspects of their classroom and school culture, but they struggled to find the best approach to confronting each issue positively and productively. Grace remained uncertain about the best approach to conversations about race in her classroom. She struggled with wanting to run a democratic classroom as a safe space for critical discussions, while also feeling the need to keep her students focused on mathematics throughout each class session. One experience stood out as a particularly difficult conflict to manage. During a group activity, an African-American boy, Darren, shared his concern about the presence of racial segregation within Middletown High. His comment interrupted his peers' focus on the assigned task and the surrounding students sat briefly in silence, unsure how to respond. Grace decided to avoid the conversation at the time because she did not want to draw unfair or unwanted attention to Darren (the only African-American student in his working group) and she felt that completion of the assignment was necessary and more pressing (Interview, 1.31.13).

As a math teacher, Grace recognized the importance of allowing students to raise these concerns and speak openly about diversity issues in their school building, but she did not know how to incorporate such openness into her classroom culture in ways that would not detract time from math instruction. While aware of the fact that race, gender, and socioeconomic status significantly impact students' relationships with their teachers and peers, Grace remained uncertain how to utilize this knowledge productively in her classroom. In college, she was exposed to academic material on race/ethnicity, gender, and class and theoretical notions of the ways in which individuals perform and make sense of their identities. However, she did not find explicit ways to use this knowledge in her teaching. Grace became aware of racial and gender dynamics affecting her relationship with Darren. Although she offered to sit down and talk with him privately, the student did not feel comfortable or motivated to speak with her about his frustrations. This social distance contributed to Darren's lack of engagement in Grace's math class; he often would not complete work or follow Grace's instructions on assignments. Grace expressed confusion over how to approach the situation and begin to develop a productive relationship with Darren. Fortunately, she had the space and time to collaborate with her cooperating teacher. Together, Grace and Amy were able to devise successful strategies for engaging Darren. By the end of the semester, the pair had successfully found ways to interact positively with him and he began to engage fully with the academic material, even staying after school some days to practice calculus (Interview, 1.31.13).

Throughout her time as a district public school and charter school teacher in Philadelphia, Lydia has encountered conflicts and tensions stemming from her position as a white educator in schools serving primarily students of color. As a third-grade teacher during her first year at a district public school, Lydia had to navigate racial tensions with her black students. She

perceived that some of the students were mimicking their parents' hostility towards white people:

> [The kids would say], "Oh, if I had a black teacher they wouldn't make me do that." You would hear things that clearly came from their parents, like, "I don't have to listen to you because you're a white teacher," those sort of things…at one point some of the fifth-graders [nicknamed me] the "golden retriever" because I was a "white bitch…" (Interview, 2.12.13)

Lydia did not feel that these tensions detracted from her performing her job to the best of her ability. She perceived these seemingly negative interactions as harmless and meaningless and continued reaching out to the families of her students. Lydia chose to respond to these tensions by working hard to improve her teaching practice and communicating regularly and clearly her goals to students and parents. Lydia hoped that her consistent hard work would "give them an idea that perhaps just saying that I was a white person and dismissing me was a limited view of the world" (Interview, 2.12.13). Lydia had little (if any) space or time to meet with colleagues and collaboratively consider the significance of her whiteness as part of her professional identity and the potential impact these racial tensions might have on her students' learning.

Mary believes that a significant part of her teaching efficacy depends on her ability to effectively navigate the cultural differences between herself and her students. She recognizes that developing the relationships necessary for strong communication and engagement with her students requires ample time for listening, learning, and social negotiation. Mary's identity is constantly being challenged and reshaped as her work prompts her to reflect on her personal background and the ways in which her history affects her teaching and interactions with students: "…a lot of times we don't understand each other, just me growing up in the culture I grew up in and having my certain cultural understandings and them having different ones. Sometimes we just don't understand each other, and it takes a while to sort of trust each other" (Interview,

2.25.13). Mary, like many teachers, hopes to affirm her students' cultures and backgrounds, and she works hard to consider how the differences between herself and her students influence her teaching and her students' learning. She strives to develop an ethos of "mutual accommodation" (Nieto & Bode, 2008) in her classroom, in which she and her students work together to ground learning in students' backgrounds, previous knowledge, experiences, and identities. Mary does not attempt to escape her positionality of whiteness; instead, she strives to develop a classroom where differences are identified and respected and where she and her students all bring positive elements of their separate cultures to the learning process.

Mary's experiences studying race and culture with her students have made her aware of the importance of building trusting classroom environments that will allow her students and herself to safely and comfortably explore various elements and meanings inherent in their identities. She recounted a past attempt to explore American race relations with her students that produced racial conflict between herself and a small group of black students and parents. While teaching an elective course on film and media, Mary showed Spike Lee's feature film *Bamboozled*, a satirical commentary on the American television industry and contemporary race relations between black and white Americans. Mary was humiliated when her students accused her of racism for showing the film and the students' parents called the school principal to make complaints about her choice. Mary felt shamed and embarrassed by a situation she felt arose from a misunderstanding produced by cultural boundaries. Mary did not speak about the conflict at length with her colleagues or students; her shame prompted her to try and distance herself and her class from the situation:

> I totally clammed up. I didn't want to talk about it. I couldn't talk about it with
> the kids. I just couldn't do it...I had them do a lot of writing because I just felt
> like the situation was so inflammatory...And I was so terrified of just being
> accused of being racist by them in this big confrontation in front of the class that I

kind of avoided it at all costs. And I realized that I just really didn't have any kind of classroom community there (Interview, 2.25.13).

Mary's experience did not become an opportunity for collaborative exploration of diversity issues in her classroom or school building. Mary's response to the conflict sheds light on the lack of space and time for trusting professional dialogue about how to bring issues of race and culture effectively into the classroom as a white teacher. Mary has these conversations with only a small number of her colleagues (Interview, 2.25.13). Presumably, there are no spaces for collegial conversations about race and diversity in the school building and professional development activities rarely explore such issues.

Chris recalled an uncomfortable experience hearing racial labels and slurs between two Asian students in a predominantly white classroom where he served as a substitute teacher. As a white teacher with very little knowledge of the classroom dynamics and no previous interactions with the involved students, Chris was unsure how to approach a situation he felt was problematic. Chris was uncomfortable with his students using derogatory racial labels jokingly, but did not want to take away their freedom of expression or their right to appropriate language in ways they felt were culturally appropriate or uplifting. Chris wanted to make sure that his students were respected and valued as minorities in the school building, but did not want to use his whiteness as an agentive factor of his authority to correct the behavior of the Asian students. Chris reflected critically on the difficulty of this cultural navigation:

> …in an environment where you are the minority, talking within yourself [within
> your minority group] can be potentially very damaging to you in the eyes of the
> majority in a way that's kind of hard for a high school student to predict. But it's
> hard to communicate that very quickly in a classroom environment. I'm still kind
> of working out ways in which I can really deal with that as a white teacher,
> particularly if I'm the only white person in the room. It's hard for that [white]
> person to step in and say, "Oh, this is how you should be dealing…this is how you

should be treating each other within your own group." And like, that's a really fucked up power dynamic (Interview, 2.25.13).

These teachers struggled daily to reflect on their positionalities as white educators in urban schools and to consider how their race affected their relationships with students. Each teacher struggled to discern ways to teach, relate to, and discipline students of color without compromising democratic classroom cultures, students' freedom of expression, and cultural validation and respect. The ability to construct these strong classrooms and cross-racial relationships, however, rests on white teachers' access to critical conversations about the salience of race in their schools. These conversations are most likely to be educative and empowering for white teachers when they happen in collaborative spaces (with dialogue occurring among teachers, students, and administrators) and when they happen frequently. Scholars note that without such intentional dialogue, white teachers serving diverse students will not necessarily experience changes in their awareness of racial issues and they will be unlikely to deeply question the effects of their privilege on their teaching (Groff & Peters, 2012; Tatum, 2007, Howard, 1999).

Several teachers discussed the lack of time and space for discussing diversity issues in their classrooms and during faculty meetings. Where opportunity is afforded for such discussions, talk about race is sometimes silenced or avoided. Sometimes these conversations do not arise because the teachers simply do not know how to approach the issues with colleagues or do not consider initiating conversations to be necessary or part of their professional responsibilities. For example, Olivia often sees and hears about her students' and colleagues' experiences with racial conflict in Philadelphia (usually being subject to racial slurs). However, conversations on race almost never occur between white and Cambodian faculty at Mission School. Olivia has never discussed with her colleagues of color how race (or whiteness) may

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affect students and their learning. She also does not know how her whiteness impacts her relationships with the Cambodian teachers and how race influences the collegial culture at Mission School: "I don't know what they think about us being white and coming into this inner city, being clearly suburb kids coming into the city and teaching here, I don't know what they think of that (Interview, 1.24.13). Olivia is unsure how she would approach a conversation about the significance of race with her colleagues. She assumes that her Cambodian colleagues would be reluctant to engage in such conversations and would likely speak "respectfully" and thus not honestly. Olivia understands Cambodian social culture as strictly polite and cordial: "…they're not going to say anything offensive or controversial…I think just out of respect for me as a person and as a colleague, they would never say something that they thought might undermine me or be negative" (Interview, 1.24.13). Olivia seems to assume a conversation about racial dynamics in the school and the effects of whiteness on teaching would be a controversial and possibly offensive dialogue in her professional community. While she regards the conversation as a potentially interesting one that would likely bring up challenges for the faculty and school culture, she is unsure how to approach such a collaborative, cross-cultural discussion with colleagues effectively. She also does not name the conversation as a necessity for the success of the school or the students.

Lydia occasionally encounters conversations about race among school faculty, particularly between black and white teachers. Racial tension sometimes arises during faculty conversations when black teachers voice their desire to see more black faculty in the school building and white teachers become uncomfortable as they are confronted with the idea that their whiteness potentially disables them from serving every need of their students of color. Lydia struggles with her approach to this conversation: "I believe that what [the black teachers] say has

many valid points. I want my students to have black role models, I want them to see that our teachers are just as good whatever color their skin comes in, but at the same time, I think I'm a good teacher, and I think I really deserve to be there and I think that I do a great job for my kids…" (Interview, 2.12.13) Lydia implicitly equates diversifying faculty with devaluing white educators. Ideally, access to a more open and critical professional dialogue would reveal the necessity and value of having more teachers of color without compromising white teachers' commitments to their schools or their willingness to be vulnerable in professional communities. While the professional culture at International Charter is strong enough so that these issues are voiced, the school does not afford time or space to fully engage in collaborative conversations about the significance of race for teacher identity and student success. Consequently, teachers cannot consider ways to remake their curricula and pedagogies to better serve the needs of diverse students and bridge cultural and racial gaps between people of color and white people in the school community. Indeed, part of Lydia's frustration with the black teachers' concern stems from her assumption that these issues can only be discussed, but not acted upon:

> It's very hard for me to have these conversations…I guess it's because I'm an action-oriented individual…the problem is for me, a lot of the work that can happen there comes from the discussions that we have, but the real actions that come from it, it's like, I'm either going to stay as a teacher or not be a teacher, and I'm going to stay as a teacher… (Interview, 2.12.13)

While Lydia recognizes the need for such professional dialogue, she also realizes the lack of opportunity for broad professional development focused on race and education, particularly in underserved schools. Throughout her time serving as an elementary school teacher in a district public school, Lydia spent almost all of her workday in her classroom and rarely interacted with colleagues. Her black colleagues at the district school shared similar concerns as Lydia's black colleagues at International Charter, but the professional culture at the district school thoroughly

suppressed these discussions: "You'd hear these sort of side comments [from black teachers] at meetings that you knew were happening but they were never put out in the open to either deal with or dismiss..." (Interview, 2.12.13). Professional community and culture suffers when teachers cannot trustfully and openly approach difficult conversations on race and diversity. As professional community suffers, student achievement declines and teachers cannot fully meet the needs of diverse learners. Scholars have noted that without access to open collaborative dialogue on the significance of race in the school and society, white teachers will not be able to develop positive antiracist identities that inform and benefit their interactions with students, pedagogies, and curricula (Rosenberg, 2004; Tatum, 2007, Groff & Peters, 2012; Nieto & Bode, 2008). As long as teachers do not have opportunities to explore the meanings and implications of teaching from privileged social positions, they will continue to perpetuate color-blind discourses, school policies, and curricula and thus detract from the quality of the education they offer to students of color (Sleeter, 1993; McIntyre, 1997; Groff & Peters, 2012; Revilla, Wells, & Holme, 2004). Tatum argues that the necessity of collaborative explorations of race and diversity in schools requires a fundamental restructuring of institutions. She declares that cross-racial friendship requires a connection that

> depends on frankness, and a willingness to talk openly about issues of race...In a society where residential segregation persists and school segregation is increasing, familiarity and contact across racial lines requires intentionality...As educators we need to find our way into such conversations, not only because they benefit our communities but because they strengthen our capacity to help our students have them. We, whether White or of color, need to deepen our understanding of the systemic nature of racism, its impact on each of us, and how to interrupt it. Such a shared understanding not only creates common ground for the cultivation of friendship, it also is a prerequisite for the transformative education we need for a more just society (Tatum, 2007, 102).

There is no doubt that the teachers I interviewed desire to serve their students of color as effectively as possible, in ways that celebrate multiculturalism and privilege the voices and experiences of all students. The following chapter explores my teacher interviewees' visions of professional communities that will empower them to more critically examine and reinvent every aspect of their teaching.

<u>Chapter IV</u>

Envisioning Community: The Promise of Professional Community and Teacher Leadership

for School and Student Success

The previous chapter examined ten teachers' workplace conditions and experiences that

compromise their efficacy and professional morale. These teachers (and educators across the

country) are constantly challenged by workplace solitude, the high demands of urban schools

combined with lack of adequate collegial support, and disparities between their own goals and

pedagogies and the expectations of administrators. My data demonstrates that most teachers do

not want to work in schools where they are separated physically and intellectually from their

peers and school leaders. Instead, they seek to develop their expertise and efficacy with frequent

and consistent support and critical feedback from colleagues. The following theoretical

framework and data highlight three central themes that characterize teachers' hopes and visions

for their profession. First, *teaching must be practiced communally in ways that provide frequent*

opportunities for collaboration and dialogue between and among faculty, administrators, and

students. Second, *teachers must be regarded and respected as a community of learners with the*

skills and competence to make decisions and influence policies at all levels of the educational

system. Third, *teachers must have space, time, and power to take on and initiate leadership*

roles in a variety of contexts. These three themes (and their current absence from many urban

school communities) speak to the sustainability of the urban teaching profession. In order for

teaching to be regarded as a sustainable and satisfying endeavor, these three elements must be

incorporated into the structure of the profession.

Scholars agree that teaching requires collaboration and dialogue to effectively produce

professional growth and satisfaction among teachers and positively affect students' learning

(Nieto, 2003; Rosenholtz, 1991; McLaughlin & Yee, 1988; Lieberman & Miller, 1991; Little, 1988; Wasley, 1991). Several factors must be present within school culture to make teachers feel secure in seeking collegial counsel and collaboration. Teachers will not be incentivized to work dynamically with their peers if they do not feel supported, trusted, or respected by other teachers and administrators. Rosenholtz (1991) identifies several key workplace conditions that affect teachers' decisions and abilities to practice individually or communally. First, teachers will seek assistance from colleagues when they feel confident in their own pedagogy and when they are aware of common goals and technical cultures within their department and school. Second, teacher collaboration occurs when teachers have the opportunity to influence their schools' technical decisions, because such opportunities necessitate faculty interaction to examine common teaching problems and needs. Through these interactive processes, teachers and administrators become aware of communal and individual skills and can more effectively and efficiently make school decisions. Finally, opportunities for team teaching necessitates reorganizing schools such that teachers are required to work collaboratively in order to coordinate, plan, and evaluate instruction (Rosenholtz, 1991).

McLaughlin and Yee (1988) identify two critical factors of school culture that significantly affect teachers' professional satisfaction, effectiveness, and potential for growth: their level of opportunity for dynamic professional development and level of capacity or power to control their daily tasks and influence school-level decision-making. Level of opportunity refers to the extent to which schools and school districts enable teachers to develop and facilitate their professional competence and mastery. Teachers name several specific contexts, programs, and activities that would ensure higher levels of opportunity for professional growth: attending conferences, having access to informal mentors and support teachers, sharing ideas with

colleagues, observing other teachers and having colleagues observe their own teaching, and changing subjects, schools, or grade levels. Level of capacity or power comprises teachers' access to various professional resources and tools and their ability to influence the goals and direction of their schools. Teachers who feel power in these ways exhibit high professional satisfaction, are generally more effective instructors, and remain committed to their careers. Unfortunately, the "traditional hierarchical nature of decision making in schools" conveys to teachers an attitude "that devalues their ability to determine what they need for professional improvement…Such assumptions and attitudes seriously restrict teachers' ability to engage in meaningful professional growth" (Wasley, 1991, 179). Schools where teachers have high levels of opportunity and capacity have the following qualities: they are resource-adequate; faculty and administrators share a unity of purpose, clear goals and guidelines, and a common sense of responsibility; teachers interact often and are expected to be regular sources of feedback, ideas, and support; the school culture focuses on solving problems collaboratively rather than hiding problems or solving them individually or episodically; teachers are motivated by investment in professional growth rather than payoff for individual success and are rewarded for taking risks, flexibility, and openness to change rather than for successful past practice (McLaughlin & Yee, 1988).

Teachers must be regarded and respected as a community of learners with the skills and competence to make decisions and influence policies at all levels of the educational system. Teachers are intellectuals and researchers who continuously seek to improve their practice by reflecting on and revising various aspects of their teaching styles, curricula, classroom and school cultures, and professional development activities (Nieto, 2003; Little, 1999; Elmore & Burney, 1999). Learning is inherently social and communal, "an evolving, continuously

renewed set of relations," (Lave & Wenger, 1991, 50) and effective teacher learning consequently must occur within strong professional and school communities. Learning, thinking, and knowing are not static or individualized processes of professional identity formation; rather, they are

> relations among people in activity in, with, and arising from the socially and culturally structured world. This world is socially constituted; objective forms and systems of activity, on the one hand, and agents' subjective and intersubjective understandings of them, on the other, mutually constitute both the world and its experienced forms (Lave & Wenger, 1991, 51).

All aspects of teaching, including pedagogy, curricula development, research, and advocacy, are inherently intellectual, *and thus social and cultural* processes. The continuously shifting nature of the sociocultural context of teaching necessitates collaborative learning and community for greater teacher efficacy. Moreover, opportunities for collaborative teacher learning are indispensable because such professional growth directly affects the quality of students' learning experiences (Nieto, 2003; Rosenholtz, 1991; Little, 1999; Elmore & Burney, 1999). Lieberman and Miller characterize teacher development as inquiry-based essential learning for both teachers and students: "Through reflective practice, teachers use methods of disciplined inquiry and informal research to reevaluate their values and their actions" (Lieberman & Miller, 1991, 107). Teacher preparation must be restructured and understood as a process that follows teachers into urban schools, rather than as a process that stops at graduation or upon receiving professional credentials. Teachers are by nature *learners* and thus schools must provide time, space, and support for teachers to research, reflect on, and practice as a community.

Teachers must have space, time, and power to take on and initiate leadership roles in a variety of contexts. Teachers leading all aspects of educational reform – curriculum development, policy, assessment, and teacher evaluation – will have significant benefits for the

improvement of schools and student achievement (Lieberman & Grolnick, 1999). My teacher interviewees, particularly the members of Philadelphia Teacher Advocates, highlight the importance of their (currently limited) opportunities for teacher leadership and involvement with educational reform. They desire hybrid teaching positions that will allow them to remain in the classroom and simultaneously take on a variety of leadership responsibilities such as advocacy, research, networking, curriculum development, and professional development. Some research on teacher leadership regards time as the most valuable (and misused) resource for schools and teachers: "Questions regarding teacher participation in reform and change over the career of the classroom teacher are fundamentally a matter of time…the cost for school reform is not about dollars but about extra time taken from the lifetimes of teachers" (Bruno, 1997, 39). Importantly, Wasley (1991) notes that structural constraints on teachers' ability to take on hybrid positions limits the effectiveness of individual teacher leadership, because there is not enough allotted time for many teachers to take on added responsibilities and there are not enough avenues for teachers to communicate the purposes and promises of leadership to other educators. Schools that offer opportunities for teacher leadership exhibit two important aspects of social organization and cohesion. First, teachers can develop strong knowledge of their colleagues' teaching based on observation and in-depth discussion. Second, teachers will respond positively and productively to leadership initiation by teachers recognized as "master teachers" within the school (Little, 1991). Collegial classroom observation helps teachers develop as strong practitioners and leaders because they are able to see effective curricula and teaching strategies at work. Importantly, Little notes that classroom observation alone "is not an adequate avenue by which to expand a school's influence on teaching. Its most fruitful ground is the entire pattern of

shared professional tasks, which give larger purpose to time spent in classrooms" (1991, 93).

Thus, teacher leadership and professional collaboration are mutually necessary and inclusive.

The following chapter depicts real and envisioned models of effective professional

collaboration and teacher leadership both within and outside schools. These depictions come

from the voices of early career teachers and experienced teachers who are members of

Philadelphia Teacher Advocates.

Models of Collaboration and Leadership

Scholarship has characterized teaching as commonly individualized and isolating work.

However, the majority of teacher in my study explicitly stated their desires for teacher leadership

opportunities, professional collaboration, and stronger school communities. Some teachers had

the privilege of working in schools or belonging to teacher networks where such teacher

leadership, collaboration, and community were present.

The members of Philadelphia Teacher Advocates share similar visions and

conceptualizations of teacher leadership. These educators have developed their own styles of

leadership that ground their professional goals and identities. For example, Linda's

conceptualization of teacher leadership is entirely student-centered: "Teacher leadership really is

about students being first…and giving them a voice through my work" (Interview, 3.16.13).

Linda, an art teacher, exemplifies leadership by finding ways to give her students resources and

spaces for expression that they would not otherwise be offered by their school. She works hard

to build the time, spaces, and resources necessary for her students to grow academically, socially,

and emotionally. Linda took the initiative to make the curriculum at her school more centered on

African-American history and heritage, a change she felt was necessary for the academic success

and engagement of the students. She also gave students a space to express their emotions

through art after the death of a student when she felt the school culture was ignoring students' grieving. Linda also spends times sharing information and research with her colleagues and believes that teacher leaders can take on various responsibilities: disseminating information to peers, advocating for students' needs, and collaborating with colleagues, parents, and community members. For Alice, taking on a leadership role within her school allowed her to assess the overall climate of the school culture and understand the ways in which this climate affected her students and their learning. She believes growing as a professional outside her classroom allowed her to become a stronger communicator with her students (Interview, 3.28.13). Understanding teacher leadership as collaboration characterized the narratives of all members of Philadelphia Teacher Advocates. Mary warns against conceptualizing educational leadership as management, oversight, or command-giving. Such conceptualizations of leadership may deter some teachers from seeking opportunities for leadership and professional growth: "Something that sometimes inhibits teachers from taking on a leadership role is the idea that if you're a leader, you're telling people what to do…I see myself as somebody who asks for people's stories and…feedback and helps to facilitate those conversations and…put them out there in a way that gets people thinking" (Interview, 3.26.13). Janet echoes a similar conceptualization of teacher leadership and notes that leadership roles do not have to entail setting models or examples for colleagues. Rather, leadership requires positivity, collaboration, and constant teacher learning:

> Being a leader in the building means setting a tone, setting a way of being…the
> more positivity you bring, the more collaboration you're going to have, the more
> peer visitation that you're going to do, the more talking, and that is leadership,
> that cross-flow of information, that's how students learn, because teachers are
> constantly improving (Interview, 3.26.13).

At Westside Elementary School, Heather enjoyed a fully supportive and collaborative relationship with her cooperating teacher, Jimmy. Heather and Jimmy worked together to

develop a strong democratic culture in their fourth-grade classroom. They focused their curricula and pedagogy on privileging students' voices and developing lessons into classroom discussions. Their collaboration enabled them to teach and organize their shared classroom in ways that were beneficial for them as professionals and for their students. Heather spoke with pride about her classroom culture: "…student voice matters. The question and answer period is always a crucial part of every lesson…everything that we do is discussion-based. Our kids really know how to ask questions, and really think critically about a lot of things" (Interview, 1.25.13). Such a positive and democratic classroom culture enabled Heather and Jimmy to cultivate their students' enthusiastic attitudes toward learning through speaking and articulating their opinions. Their classroom also functioned as a space in which students could become advocates for the well-being of their community, inside and outside the school building (Interview, 1.25.13).

Grace also enjoyed a mutually supportive relationship with her cooperating teacher, Amy, and valued the contribution the collaborative relationship had on her professional growth as a teacher. She shared a classroom experience in which Amy validated her innovative math lesson plan and stood firm in her support of Grace when the department chair questioned the teaching methods. Grace portrayed the academic culture at her school as one largely committed to "traditional" learning: "There were definitely pressures to be really diligent about following what was in the book and learning how to do math in a very procedural way" (Interview, 1.31.13). Project-based learning and discussion-based math lessons were apparently rarely part of curricula and even the students were somewhat unreceptive to new pedagogies. Grace worked hard to assert her autonomy to work creatively and develop innovative math lessons. However, school culture was positive enough to grant Grace the flexibility to design her lessons in ways that challenged her students and enabled her to develop a communication-based math classroom:

"Ultimately...they definitely learned...they were able to talk to one another about math, or ask really interesting questions about things...by the end, everybody was really into it" (Interview, 1.31.13). Grace also found routes to professional development and teacher networking outside her classroom. Working with the Community-Based Math Project and Teacher Action Group in Philadelphia afforded Grace the opportunity to reflect on her practice, meet new teachers, and talk with other professionals about common challenges and goals.

Several members of Philadelphia Teacher Advocates echo the importance of teacher networking and communication within and outside their schools. Ahmad envisions Philadelphia Teacher Advocates as "a communications hub that helps hybrid teachers connect with each other, plan the workshops of Philadelphia Teacher Advocates, research policy to recommend to the district and to colleagues, [and] visit each other" (Interview, 3.7.13). Mary believes networking and communication will help bolster the collective political voice of teachers and combat the negative effects of isolation within their classrooms (Interview, 3.26.13). Janet agrees that an essential component of out-of-school teacher leadership involves "being politically aware...you need to know what's happening in your professional life...[members of Philadelphia Teacher Advocates] talk about the politics, but then we talk about what teachers can actually do, what are the access points into that policy..." (Interview, 3.26.13). Janet has exercised her in-school leadership role by developing close relationships with several colleagues in her building. She has made an effort to reach out to at least two teachers within each grade and she meets with these peers to vent and brainstorm. She is proud that her initiative has encouraged other teachers in her school to build the same kinds of relationships with each other (Interview, 3.26.13). Janet hopes that her style of leadership will be effective and encouraging for her peer teachers when she becomes a principal: "[Teacher collaboration] is something that I

want to set up and show the importance of in my school, coming up with a cohort of teachers, mixed-grade, mixed-ability, and having them collaborate…I think that when you start feeling that level of trust…there's a lot of leadership in that" (Interview, 3.26.13).

Heather appreciated spaces for teacher leadership in professional development meetings at Westside Elementary. Teachers were given direct oversight on curriculum development and shared creative strategies and pedagogies with each other in order to improve instruction and classroom innovation. During Heather's student teaching semester, a group of teachers (including Jimmy) formed a curriculum and instruction committee. The committee facilitated faculty group discussions in which each participating teacher shared teaching strategies or lesson plans that had worked particularly well in their classrooms. Heather described professional development activities as "grassroots from the teachers" (Interview, 1.25.13). At Westside Elementary, teachers are valued and respected as curriculum developers because they have the closest proximity to students and their academic struggles. Jimmy and one of his colleagues took the initiative to revise the math curriculum because they had the ability to directly identify their students' struggles with math that had carried over from previous school years. Thus, teacher leadership and collaborative professional development meetings served as an opportunity for Westside faculty to share their concerns and think creatively about ways to improve math instruction and retention in the earlier elementary grades.

Heather's experience with professional development at Westside Elementary is an excellent example of the stewardship of teaching envisioned by members of Philadelphia Teacher Advocates. Lydia sees teacher leadership inside and outside the classroom as the surest route to student and school success. She believes that teacher power and autonomy to direct academics and school policies will better equip each school to serve its specific community:

"…what happens in one school should be very different from what happens in the next school based on who the kids are in the classroom, who the teachers are, who the parents are, and what the common goals are…" (Interview, 2.12.13) Lydia believes that while non-teaching administrators are necessary for the successful management of school systems, teachers must have stronger representation among school and district leadership so that classrooms and students have the highest potential for success. Ahmad believes that decontextualized policies, mandates, and testing standards are primary obstacles to developing strong teacher leadership within schools: "So much of what we do for children is taken away from us…so the first shift is seeing teachers in their classrooms as the source of the decisions that help children…But we're being bombarded by so many expectations about high stakes standardized testing, prescribed curricula, and all of those diminish our ability to lead" (Interview, 3.7.13). Ahmad believes that the educational bureaucracy currently treats teachers as passive facilitators who are expected to administer decontextualized assessments to their students. He feels that in order for schools and students to be truly and most effectively successful, teachers should have purview and power over curriculum, instruction, assessment, and policy. Linda agrees with Ahmad's conviction that non-localized prescribed professional development programs detract from teachers' growth and compromise the success of students (Interview, 3.16.13). Mary reaffirms that teachers must have the capacity and the opportunity to influence legislation and educational policy because they know best how to meet the needs of their kids. She highlights the importance of teacher-led organizations that advocate solely for the professional needs of practitioners and the learning needs of their students:

> …it's really polarizing when you have the union voice and the district voice, or
> the union voice and the reformers' voice, and I would really love to see
> Philadelphia Teacher Advocates be a third voice that's not constrained by the
> need to represent labor interests or management interests but is just there to

represent teachers as professionals, as practitioners, who know how policy affects the classroom, and who know what kinds of policies are going to best help kids (Interview, 3.26.13).

Alice succinctly points out: "[Teachers] are the front line of learning, of the learning process. If schools are learning institutions, then teachers are the experts" (Interview, 3.28.13). Without teacher input, educational reform policies will be less than maximally effective and they may be counterproductive for students' learning. Alice believes so strongly in the potential of teacher leadership that she envisions the possibility of schools being led entirely by teachers rather than out-of-classroom administrators (Interview, 3.28.13).

Envisioning hybrid teacher roles characterized several of the reflections of the teacher interviewees. Heather would like to continue to grow as a professional by incorporating classroom research and mentor teaching into her practice. She approaches teaching from a stance of practitioner inquiry and feels that such critical examination and reflection is not valued enough in the profession. She hopes to be able to research the dynamics of the communities in which she teaches in order to bring community values, knowledge, and assets into her classroom. Importantly, all of these goals do not trump her commitment to working with children and remaining in the classroom: "I'm so happy with it right now. I just want to continue to be really grateful for being with my kids every day and having that be what I want" (Interview, 1.25.13). Mary also envisions her ideal teaching career as a hybrid position. She hopes to combine her classroom teaching with political advocacy for teachers and students. Like Heather, she will remain committed to her classroom as long as possible: "I think that [a hybrid position] would be more sustainable for me…But I hope that it will involve being in the classroom. I think that gives me my legitimacy as a teacher and is my lifeblood as an educator…" (Interview, 2.25.13).

Mary notes that privileging and empowering teachers' funds of knowledge will be essential for the retention of talented educators in urban schools:

> [There are] really good teachers leaving the profession because there isn't a lot of room for growth professionally…we really want to see opportunities…where teachers can actually stay in the classroom and continue growing and improving their practice, can mentor other teachers, but can also affect policy, can research and write, can create… (Interview, 3.26.13).

Ahmad also struggles to balance his current teaching load with his goals as a teacher leader outside his school building. He and several other members of Philadelphia Teacher Advocates shared visions of hybrid teaching careers. These positions would keep teachers anchored in the classroom and simultaneously afford them opportunities to be educational advocates outside the school building. They would allow teachers to take on a multiplicity of initiatives and responsibilities: conducting in-class research to individualize their professional development and improve students' learning, serving on in-school leadership teams and mentoring other colleagues, setting up and facilitating communal professional development, serving as community liaisons, developing curricular coaching, and leading funding and budget committees (Interview, 3.7.13, Interview, 3.26.13 & Interview, 3.28.13).

Chapter V

Implications, Recommendations, and Final Reflections

In order for schools and students to be maximally successful, teachers must be afforded more opportunities for educational leadership and professional collaboration. Their working lives must encompass, not only classroom teaching, but advocacy, research, professional networking, mentor teaching and peer observation, and political engagement as well. The models and visions presented above are promising depictions of teacher leadership and collaboration. Implementing similar opportunities within and across urban schools will surely benefit teachers' professional efficacy and students' learning. However, an effective implementation of these professional opportunities will require a fundamental restructuring of the teaching profession and a discursive shift from the current societal dialogue that blames teachers for the underachievement of schools and students.

Ahmad and Mary, two of the leading members of Philadelphia Teacher Advocates, have felt the growing vilification of teachers over the past decade. Rhetoric around educational reform has unduly blamed teachers for school failures. Rather than combating school and student underachievement by affording teachers more power and leadership opportunities within their schools and districts, many educational reformers, administrators, and organizations have continued to advocate for the deprofessionalization of teaching. Thus, societal disrespect for teachers has grown significantly and permeated school and community cultures. Ahmad perceives this disrespect and has noticed a growing sense of antagonism between parents and teachers. He has experienced parents as wary and distrustful of teachers who strive to teach creatively: "If we put their students in a challenging environment…[if] we're asking them to do something unique or take a risk, the kids are saying, 'Well, you did something wrong because I

got a low grade,' and the parents are coming right behind them and saying the same thing" (Interview, 3.7.13). Teachers are no longer trusted to be creative and innovative leaders. Consequently, their funds of knowledge are often wasted, underappreciated, or unrecognized. Mary also feels frustrated and emotionally downtrodden by the widespread devaluing of teachers. She hopes that Philadelphia Teacher Advocates will be able to change negative discourses about teachers: "I'm really interested in reshaping the way we all think about the profession, as something that is intellectually demanding, socially demanding, emotionally demanding, physically demanding, and something that is essentially collaborative..." (Interview, 3.26.13). Such a discursive shift will be initiated and propelled by changing the work conditions and expectations of teachers. As teacher training and early career experiences afford teachers more opportunities for collaboration and leadership, urban schools will improve and student achievement will rise.

Schools and student success will come from teachers having longer and more collaborative training, having access to professional collaboration and community within and outside their schools upon entering the teaching profession full time, and having the opportunity to take on hybrid positions once they have successfully earned master teacher status. Student teaching should follow novice educators into their full-time professions. Early career teaching should take on more characteristics of a professional apprenticeship – close supervision from a master teacher, frequent observation of colleagues' teaching, ample time to reflect on feedback and revise lesson plans, access to new teacher networks and organizations, and frequent interaction and collaboration with peer faculty both within and outside the school building. Teachers' efficacy will grow stronger once these structures are implemented and they will more readily be able to meet the needs of their students. Teachers must enter the profession

understanding that teaching is a learning profession and collaborative by nature. Veteran or master teachers should not be excused from or expected to be absent from faculty meetings and professional development programs. Professional community should characterize classroom, school, and department cultures within and across schools. Professional team building among faculty and administrators will improve the work conditions of all educators and improve the learning experiences of students. Finally, experienced teachers should be able to grow professionally by taking on added responsibilities and educational leadership roles. They should have multiple opportunities to influence educational reform and policy within and outside their schools. Their work day should include time to write, research, consult with colleagues, meet with legislators and policy makers, and facilitate professional development programs and activities. All of these policies will give teachers the power and effective work conditions to improve schools and improve the sustainability of the teaching profession. More teachers will be able to remain in classrooms once their profession has an empowering and sustainable structure. Finally, white teachers will have the opportunity to develop antiracist racial identities and better serve diverse students once they have access to professional integration and communication and begin to build the close relationships necessary for faculty to engage in critical conversations about the salience of race in urban schools.

My reflections on teaching and education have come a long way in the past year. I have come to understand and appreciate the indispensability of teacher leadership and professional collaboration for the sustainability of teaching careers and the success of students in urban schools. Teachers are and are expected to be fully committed to their students, but the necessity of their commitments to each other as colleagues is often overlooked by educational bureaucrats and society. While teachers have historically practiced largely separated from their peers, my

interviews with several members of Philadelphia Teacher Advocates revealed the widespread and desperate desire among teachers to work collaboratively and mutually support one another. Envisioning professional community took on various forms: observing other teachers (and being observed), communal writing and research, collectively raising political voices, and taking leadership over professional development. The most significant takeaway for me was my ever growing commitment to teaching. I realized what teaching can encompass and that the job demands much more than what goes on inside one's classroom. I realized the presence of a strong community of leaders that will surely offer me support, guidance, and avenues to politicize my practice as I become a teacher. Listening to experienced educators narrate their professional identities, experiences, and aspirations fueled my desire to teach and join the ranks of these leaders for social justice.

Appendix

Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your own schooling experience, both in college and before.

2. How long have you been teaching? How long have you been at the current school?

3. How did you think about education and teaching when you entered your teacher training program? Did your training program change these ideas at all? If so, how? Tell me more about your program.

4. Tell me about your process in learning to teach. What have you learned on the job that you did not learn in school and vice versa? Has either experience been more valuable for your growth as a teacher? If so, why and how?

5. Having now spent time in the classroom as an independent teacher, what do you wish you had learned from training?

6. What is your process for lesson planning? What types of activities do you like to do with your students?

7. Do you feel constrained or pressured by particular mandates or policies that are set from the outside? If so, do you work around these constraints? How? If you're required to do or teach something by the school, district, or state, how do you make it your own?

8. Tell me about teaching in this school. Tell me about the demographics. Tell me about the school culture.

9. How similar is the environment at your school to other settings that you have been in? What previous experience do you have working in urban, majority of-color communities?

10. Do you perceive your school as being well organized and having a school culture that is beneficial for students and teachers? Describe particular challenges or positive

experiences you have had in this regard.

11. Describe specific examples of challenges you have faced in your work.

12. What did you predict would be the biggest challenges before you became a teacher? Were these actually the biggest challenges?

13. Tell me about a situation or interaction in which race/gender became relevant or important. How did you respond?

14. Did you talk about this situation with your colleagues? What were their responses?

15. Have you talked about these challenges with school administrators? Tell me about the conversations.

16. Do you participate in any professional development activities or programs? Professional networks? Does your school encourage such participation? Tell me about these experiences. What kinds of topics/challenges/issues were discussed in these programs? Did the programs add to your positive growth and development as a teacher? If so, how?

17. How do you understand your role as a teacher? What are your goals for yourself? For your students? For your school?

18. Do you admire the practice of any of your colleagues? What elements of their practice do you hope to emulate and why?

19. What makes you want to come to work? What makes you not want to come to work?

20. What advice would you seek from more experienced teachers?

21. What advice would you give to younger teachers?

22. Describe your relationships with your students. What are the strong points? What are the weak points? Describe your relationships with your colleagues and school administrators?

23. What is most important to you in terms of your relationships with students? What is your expectation of a "good student?"

24. Are there particular kinds of student who you teach that you get along well with? Are their others with whom you do not connect as easily? Why?

25. Why are you doing this work? What is the meaning you find in your contribution?

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