Beliefs: Perception vs. Reality

By Courtney Glavich

Educators often are misguided by students' actions and do not always understand that their perception of these actions is not always reality. The following is an example that I have witnessed between educators and students in urban settings:

Scenario: Teacher A had a student who was constantly disengaged in class. According to Teacher A, this student consistently had his head down during instruction, avoided classwork, and did not participate in class discussions. Even though he was not a disruptive member of the classroom, he was not contributing member either. He appeared checked out, disengaged, and to this particular teacher unmotivated and apathetic towards school.

Perception: Teacher A had the perception that this student did not want to learn, was disrespectful and preferred to not be at school. She was constantly correcting his seemingly apathetic behavior down during her class, and explained to him it was disrespectful and that it would benefit him to pay attention in class. She perceived this child as unmotivated and soon began to ignore his behaviors in class since they were not distractive behaviors. Ultimately this child started to fall behind in this particular class, and received failing marks on his assessments and report cards.

Reality: After learning more about the child’s background, it was revealed that this particular student lived in a one-bedroom apartment with his mother and 8 other siblings. His mother worked 2nd shift, and as one of the oldest siblings, he had to watch his younger siblings, one of which was a baby. He was not getting the proper amount of sleep at night, and therefore could not stay awake in class.

According to the hierarchy of human needs outlined by Maslow (1943, 1954) there are five levels of needs: psychological needs, safety needs, needs of love, affections and belongingness, needs for self-esteem, and needs for self-actualization. This particular student was not having his psychological needs i.e., food, sleep, oxygen, etc. Upon further inspection, this student in fact wanted to learn but was consumed with effects from his home-life to do so. When this particular student was made aware of what was going on with the student, she was able to assimilate her beliefs, and started to change her perception of this particular student.

Not all teachers are willing to change their perception or beliefs of their students based upon new found knowledge. This particular teacher demonstrated cognitive advocacy as described by studies conducted by Crocker, Hanna and Weber. Cognitive advocacy is the changing and questioning of an individual’s native knowledge when they are exposed to other cultures. These individuals are also likely to produce an understanding and empathy towards these particular students and may change their views on stereotypes and preconceptions (Hutchinson 2011).

References


By Rebecca Kavel

Most educators would agree that effective teaching requires the mastery of content knowledge and pedagogical skills. However, as Gay (2002) suggests there seems to be a disconnect with regard to the delivery of instruction when teachers are inadequately prepared to teach in urban settings. As noted by Worthy (2005), there is often a chasm between what is learned in a teacher education programs and what novice teachers face when they enter the classroom (Worthy, 2005). Hundreds of millions of dollars are spent preparing approximately 200,000 new teachers each year while very little is known about the cost effectiveness of the different approaches to teacher preparation (Ingersoll, 2001). One thing is certain, higher education and alternate programs combined are not supplying teachers in sufficient quality or quantity where they are most needed. Darling- Hammond (2010) reiterates this notion claiming that many urban schools with high teacher turnover rates also have limited funding, high poverty, and a staff of teachers who have different linguistic and cultural backgrounds than their students.

Teacher turnover in any school is problematic but is most daunting in urban schools where consistency matters. One proactive solution for this perilous problem includes additional field experiences for pre-service teachers both within schools and their local communities. Exposure and communication with families and schools of various cultures involves purposeful planning. This time can yield positive results. Universities have the resources needed to plan such events by partnering with local schools. Successful teachers in urban settings need a strong knowledge base regarding the student population, communication with families, and the lack of resources and services. Field experiences offer the needed interaction. These critical elements also form the basis for current legislation designed to remedy inequities in educational opportunities. In today’s standards-based accountability environment, where schools are categorized as effective based on their test scores, it is even more vital that teachers in urban settings be well prepared (Darling-Hammond, 2010).

Unless universal changes are made within teacher education programs, students of urban populations will not receive the education that they deserve. One possible solution starts with face to face field experiences. Retaining quality teachers who serve our most diverse populations of students is a critical need that deserves immediate attention.

Changes are needed and time is of the essence.

References


By Rebecca Kavel

The oppressed by the bourgeoisie, prevents the proletariat from accessing the natural resources of the land—which are tied (owned by) to the straps of the bourgeoisie—for their own upward mobility.

Note: This drawing was produced in Dr. Greg Wiggan’s Social Theory and Education course at UNC. Doctoral candidate Kyle Kester facilitated the discussion and assigned the activity. The artist, John Williams, III is a doctoral student at UNC Charlotte.
For-Profit Colleges and Universities: Their Markets, Regulation, Performance and Place in Higher Education

By Dymilah Hewitt

For-Profit Colleges and Universities: Their Markets, Regulation, Performance and Place in Higher Education (2010), edited by Guilbert Hentschke, Vacene Luchuga and William Tierney is an informative book that focuses on a growing sector of higher education. These institutions primarily enroll non-traditional adult students seeking career advancement and better economic opportunities. The book focuses on their marketplace influences, policy considerations and how the institutions are positioned in the overall context of higher education. Some of the issues this book addresses are the current target market of for-profit colleges and universities (FPCUs) and the shift to: focus more on the needs of the employer; compete with traditional colleges and universities (TCUs) for the same students; partner with traditional colleges; extend the market to include high schools; and knit together fragmented student coursework.

The race and social class of many of the students who obtain degrees from FPCUs is striking. FPCUs initially focused their recruitment efforts on people who were less represented at TCUs. Many of these students are low income and first generation. In the 2005-2006 school, 37% of students enrolled in FPCUs were from underrepresented groups compared to 20% in private, non-profit TCUs. Data from 2008 shows that underrepresented students at FPCUs made up as much as 43% of the total student population. These numbers show that many students who were not served well in high school, graduate underprepared for higher education. As Kassie Freeman’s African Americans and College Choice uncovered, there is a lot that high schools can do to help create a culture of success. Sometimes it takes years for students to get all of the lies out of their head that they cannot be successful in college. This is one of the reasons so many nontraditional students start school many years after high school.

For the most part the authors use data from other scholars and organizations to explain issues related to FPCUs. One study that shared original data can be found in Chapter 3, “Who Are They? What Do They Do?” The researcher focused on the dynamic nature of faculty work at FPCUs. This particular study examined the various roles and responsibilities of faculty at FPCUs. This qualitative research study included 52 faculty members (22 part-time and 32 full-time) from four different FPCUs (which offered certificates, as well as associate’s, bachelor’s, master’s and doctorate degrees). The key findings of this study were that the faculty on each campus was very diverse with respect to their level of education and professional experience in the field in which they taught. He also found that many faculty were contract hires so there was very little job security beyond the contract. At two of the FPCUs fewer than 5% of the faculty were full-time. The other two institutions had mostly full-time faculty. Faculty typically had limited control over the curriculum. The researcher found it ironic that most of the faculty at the FPCUs (all but two) received all of their education from TCUs.

The authors attempt to present an unbiased picture of FPCUs, but in their attempt at fairness, they fail to really expose some of the more egregiously negative practices of FPCUs. It was recently reported in the Los Angeles Times that the Pentagon has temporarily barred the University of Phoenix from recruiting students at United States military bases and halted tuition assistance for new active duty troops as the result of inquiries from the United States Federal Trade Commission and the California Attorney General Kamala Harris. This does not affect the GI Bill, but between 2009 and 2014, FPCUs received 40% of the 8.2 billion GI Bill dollars going to higher education institutions. In 2014 alone, the industry took in 46% of the $38 million in tuition assistance dollars. This book could be more informative if it did a better job of following the money trail where these colleges are concerned. This book paints a very non-controversial picture of a very volatile issue in higher education. Low income, first generation and people of color are being targeted, and many of the schools are not delivering on the promises made during recruitment.

Hentschke, Luchuga and Tierney emphasize the growth in student population and the evolution of FPCUs as they adapt to meet industry and student demands. Even though they face a lot of scrutiny, many FPCUs utilize a very profitable and effective business model. They are in the business of education but due to the absence of resources like endowments and major gifts, they must take the business side of the venture very seriously. Even though FPCUs are very aggressive in their recruitment of individuals like military veterans who have tuition assistance in the form of the GI Bill and vocational rehabilitation, struggling HBCUs could learn a few things from them. The nontraditional adult student population is growing very fast and many of them have access to grants and loans. It is negligent on the part of struggling institutions to ignore these potential paying students and future graduates.

School Library Media Specialists: Essential Personnel

By Tracy D. Creech

School library media specialists’ positions have been either eliminated or decreased in recent years. School districts across the country often point to budgetary concerns as an explanation. It seems as if eliminating or reducing school library media specialists’ positions is the most cost effective route; however, there has been documented evidence that school media specialists actually have a positive impact on student achievement (Kachel & Lance, 2013; Lance, Schwarz & Rodney, 2014). In the absence of a qualified school library media specialist, schools have to allocate other resources in order to improve literacy. This may cost school districts more in terms of finances and student achievement in the long run.

According to a research study implemented by Kachel and Lance (2013), reading and writing scores were higher for students whose school is staffed by a full-time certified school library media specialist. They also found that minority and economically disadvantaged students benefit substantially more than general students when their school is staffed with a full-time certified school library media specialist. Because of the positive benefits that school library media specialists provide, they should be considered integral in the arena of education. The following recommendations can ensure that school library media specialists are always considered essential personnel.

Require all schools to have a certified school library media specialist. Having a qualified school library media specialist (especially in schools with a high poverty rate) is essential to increasing student literacy, student research and student technology skills.

Mandate that all certified school library media specialists have at least one continuing education credit in technology to renew their license. Technology has become an integral component of the profession and as such, school library media specialists must be able to keep track of current trends.

Provide on-going professional development for certified school library media specialists. Because the field is ever changing, school library media specialists must have the opportunity to keep their skills intact.

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References


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Let Them Be Social

By Laura Handler

Adopting a framework of social capital (Coleman, 1988; Portes, 1998) widens the scope and focus of educational initiatives, permitting outcomes that can be truly transformational for urban populations. Rather than focusing solely on schools as isolated sources of educational attainment, district leaders and policymakers can focus on collaborative efforts with community organizations to cultivate relationships that offer expanded networks and increased opportunities (Warren, 2005). While seeking to understand needs and gaps in access to resources, educators employing an asset-based approach recognize and maximize available student, family, and community networks. The following examples demonstrate a focus, briefly proposing solutions that incorporate ways to enhance social capital through our schools.

First, school and district leaders can become an active participant in the lives of families outside of school property. They can serve as a source of social capital for their respective populations and an advocate in influential circles to communicate perspectives and concerns that might otherwise be ignored (Riley, 2013). Similarly, by creating trusting relationships with students across cultures and demographics, teachers can become a valuable resource for students and their families, especially in connecting them to future educational endeavors (Noguera, 2004). By utilizing pedagogies that foster classroom community, teachers communicate their value of student contribution (Delpit, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 2009), and by employing a curriculum approach such as inquiry or project-based learning, they encourage students to collaborate with their peers and utilize learning resources outside themselves. Projects incorporating relevant issues into learning goals, such as those through service-learning, provide students with opportunities to see the extent of their reach. This promotes agency, empowerment, and engagement with an authentic purpose for learning (Mitchell, 2007). Finally, educators can develop relationships with parents, volunteers, businesses, and community organizations, by seeking their active engagement in meaningful ways. Non-profits or advocacy groups can provide valuable outlets for students and families, especially in communities poor in socioeconomic resources (Menahem, 2011). They can take an active role in uniting participants and helping them navigate the mechanisms for action and change (Bolivar & Chispeols, 2001).

Albeit brief, these examples provide alternatives for policymakers, district leaders, administrators, and teachers which can promote real change in their school communities. When schools serve as a central source for increased social capital, students and families can benefit from the newly accessible resources in order to improve educational outcomes for themselves along with the greater community.

References


Payne meticulously explores factors involved in what he calls the sociology of failure, a framework which focuses on the phenomenon of demoralization, and connects to the dysfunctionality in urban schools. Although Chicago is the main backdrop for this study, the stories and experiences that are mentioned in this book can be readily applicable to other diverse school districts throughout cities in the United States and Canada.

For someone interested in public policy or conducting research, it would seem counter to deeply engrossed in the literature and terminology of education reform; however, Payne refrains from using jargon, which makes it easier to understand various aspects of educational reform. Thus, this simplified narrative is small enough to chew, but dense enough to satisfy a large appetite.

To Reform or Not to Reform? That is the Question

By Tiffany Hollis

Many would argue that there is a crisis in the field of education, particularly in the field of urban education. The crisis lies in fulfilling the promise of educational equity so that all children, regardless of what he or she looks like or where he or she lives will receive a quality education that prepares him or her for 21st century and global competition. Children across America are not getting the education they deserve. Many students are forced to attend chronically under-performing public schools in their communities. Others struggle to fit the mold that was created by left-brained lesson plans, outdate and irrelevant curriculum, unqualified teachers, low teacher expectations, and a lack of pedagogical practices to their experiences nor truly challenge them. In either case, these students are leaving school unprepared for the workforce, for college, and for life in general. So what can be done to find a solution to this crisis? What can be done to improve education and level the playing field?

Despite more than 50 years of reform efforts and policy changes, urban education systems have failed to close academic and discipline gaps among low-income students of color. As a result, ensuring the academic success for students of color in urban school districts in the United States has been the subject of numerous policies, reports, books, and articles. Despite the numerous efforts to bridge the gaps that exist between low-income youth of color and their more affluent counterparts, there is much room for improvement. It is difficult for policy to be created, adopted, and implemented without the voices of parents, children, and teachers that will be impacted by the policy. Consequently, school reform efforts need to include the voices of those who are impacted the most by policies—the students. Student voice is significant because students have been most affected by educational inequality. Reforms and policies are often created and implemented without including the voices and input from the students that are impacted by these decisions. Inviting students to critique the current forms of education and its oppressive impact on their lives (Freire, 1970), will empower them to consider ways to be part of the reform process and encourage student agency.

References

The Youth Engaging in Leadership and Learning (Y.E.L.L.) Conference was led by the University of North Carolina at Charlotte’s Urban Education Collaborative and the graduate student organization, Urban Educators for Change. It was developed to provide a leadership-centered community program for adolescents. This unique skill-building experience helps to promote good character and strong community-based leadership skills: listening, problem-solving, critical thinking, trust, focus, coaching, patience, collaboration, communication, goal-setting, resource management, and planning.

Amber Bryant organized the conference and Tam-era Moore served as the lead facilitator. Other student facilitators included Kathryn Haughney, Laura Fandler, Eunilah Hewitt, Courtney Glavich, and John Williams III. Special thanks to Dr. Lewis, Ms. Deelina and all of the Urban Education Collaborative Staff for their support. The Bruns Academy students were amazing!!! It was our pleasure to spend time with this wonderful group of smart and enthusiastic students. Mr. Bigger, the teachers, the staff and the parents are doing an outstanding job with the students. Thank you for the opportunity. We look forward to the next time.