

Chapter 4

Sympathy, Knowledge, and Truth: Teaching Black Children

Other things being equal, the mixed school is the broader, more natural basis for the education of all youth. It gives wider contacts, it inspires greater self-confidence, it suppresses the inferiority complex. But other things are seldom equal and in that case, Sympathy, Knowledge and Truth outweigh all that the mixed school can offer.

—W. E. B. Du Bois

The black child is different from other children because he has problems that are the product of a social order not of his making or his forbears.

—Septima Clark

Being a black teacher during the age of white supremacy demanded faith in the future when the present often seemed hopeless.

—Adam Fairclough

People continue to talk as if there were some great mystery about what kind of teaching would make a difference in urban schools. Actually, we know a great deal about that. No one has done more to broaden our thinking about what children of color can do than Asa Hilliard. One of his essays (Perry, Steele, and Hilliard 2003) gives us a way to organize our thinking about this with his suggestion that researchers need to spend less time worrying about every little thing that has some relation to achievement and concentrate on those things that have potentially large results, on results that smack you right between the eyes, interocular results, if you will. There are lots of things that make a difference, but when it comes to instruction, which have “Big Pop”? What produces large increments in learning, for large groups of urban kids, in a fairly short period of time? Figure 4.1 is one way to think about such differences.

Figure 4.1. "The Big Six"**Characteristics of High-Impact Instructional Programs in Urban Contexts**

1. Instructional time protected or extended
2. Intellectually ambitious instruction
3. Professional community (teachers collaborate, have a collective sense of responsibility)
4. Academic press combined with social support
5. Program coherence (i.e., institutional focus; are we all on the same page?)
6. Teacher "quality" / diagnostic ability

This is just one way to organize our thinking. One could do an equally reasonable list with fewer elements or with more, a sensible list with other elements.¹ My point is that this is one way to think about the problem that is empirically defensible, based on research that offers some grounds for generalizing and for at least rough causal inference. The various studies supporting these ideas use different metrics, but most of them give us reason to believe that each of these when reasonably well implemented can produce learning gains of one month or more. In many of these studies, the biggest gainers are African American or Latino boys, the biggest losers under business-as-usual. If we know a good deal about what would work, what we don't know is how to implement these things with fidelity at scale, within the operative resource limits.

Most of these points were discussed in the previous chapter and need not be elaborated here. With respect to the first element, however, extending or protecting time, let me note that there's growing discussion nationally about extending the school day or year (Schemo 2007), which can be a very expensive pathway to reform, and less discussion, so far as I can see, about making better use of the time we already have. Given our history, I would worry that in some cases, extending instructional time becomes a way of not thinking about the nuts-and-bolts issues of instruction, in which case I suspect its value would be less.

The idea that is new here is the idea of trying to strike a balance between academic demands and social supports. We will have a more extended discussion of this later, but for now suffice it to say that when children encounter classroom contexts in which they feel challenged,

pushed, and simultaneously supported, the results can be little short of dramatic. All I will add here about teacher quality is that as much as I am trying to argue that we can get a lot more out of the teaching force we now have, I am struck by the way improving the teaching force seems to be an all-weather reform. That is, raising teacher quality can make a difference even when other things don't improve, even when leadership or school culture remains problematic (e.g., Boyd et al. 2007). When we don't know what else to do, we should be trying to put the best people we can find in front of poor children.

If this is true with the weak measures we ordinarily base discussions of teacher quality on, what would happen with more sophisticated measures? One important, and underdiscussed, theme in the literature concerns the power of teacher diagnostic ability. Paul Black and his associates (Black and William 1998; Black et al. 2004) have reviewed an extensive body of research that demonstrates persuasively that when teachers use formative assessments to diagnose student learning problems and adjust instruction accordingly, the effect is consistently large across different types of learners and situations. Effect sizes range from 0.4 to 0.7. These are whopping improvements. At the lower end of that range—the lower end—we are saying that diagnostic teaching moves the average student to the level of performance of the top third of students. Similarly, the Bay Area School Reform Collaborative has done an analysis of achievement patterns in 32 schools with comparable demographics, trying to understand why some of them were closing achievement gaps by race while others were not (Walsh 2003). They concluded in part that in the gap-closing schools, teaching was much more diagnostic, with teachers constantly assessing students and adjusting their instruction accordingly.²

We already know, then, quite a bit about what kind of instruction and what kind of organizational context can make a large difference. What we don't know is how to do these things at scale, with fidelity, given the social, organizational, and political deficits under which our schools labor. Still, we should be aware that all this reflects a fairly narrow, technical conception of what teaching is. Underlying much of this kind of discussion is the assumption that teaching can be reduced to the delivery of information and the development of skills. That way of thinking reflects little sense of teaching as a social activity. It may well be that in the grip of test-score hysteria, we have begun to think of teaching too narrowly, giving short shrift to its social dimension. That social dimension may be more important than we think and more important to some populations than others.

In her remarkable book on New York City high school students, Cristina Rathbone quotes a principal as saying, "You know as well as I do that the issues here are not academic, the issues are social and emotional and mental and spiritual" (1998: 145). The thought should give us pause. To the extent that the problems we are trying to solve are problems of connectedness, a strictly academic approach may not take us all the way.

Because this is a problem that I think needs to be framed historically and because different racial and ethnic groups have different relevant historical trajectories, I want to think about this problem primarily as it applies to Black students. One way to get at it would be to ask, when teaching worked for Black people, what was that teaching like? If you forget who you are, Bernice Johnson Reagon of *Sweet Honey in the Rock* once commented, you need to go back to where you were the last time you remembered.

Teaching with the Authority of the Race

However ironic it may seem, there is considerable nostalgia just now among Black Americans for the kind of education they had during the good old days of legal white supremacy. It is not hard to find Black people who think school desegregation was a deliberate plot to break the will and spirit of Black communities or others who think that, no matter what was intended, desegregation, when it occurred at all, almost always occurred on white folks' terms, which led to the undermining of an educational culture that Black people had been shaping since before the end of slavery (Anderson 1988).

Nostalgia is necessarily selective. The first chapter of Richard Kluger's *Simple Justice*, his history of *Brown v. Board of Education*, draws portraits of two South Carolina Black principals. One is the kind of dedicated, rooted-in-the-community educator around whom current nostalgia centers. The other is craven, incompetent, a servant of the white power structure, as corrupt as the day is long, stealing funds that should have been going to the children. The current longing for the good old days forgets the second type of Black educator—the people Du Bois (1935) called "ignorant placeholders." We can forget, too, that at times and places the sheer lack of resources must have overwhelmed good intent. The South, through the first half of the twentieth century, generally spent on the education of Black children about one-third what it spent on whites. Fairclough (2007) reminds us that some schools were theaters of class antagonisms, and in others the kind of treatment children got

could depend on their complexion: many used a level of physical discipline that is discomfiting to read about, even now.

That said, there is still something about the education they received under these circumstances that many Black adults now wish they could give to their own children, and it clearly has to do largely with how they experienced teaching. Nostalgia should not be confused with history, but collective memories tell us much about how people understand the limits and possibilities in their environment, about what they think made a difference for them, and that can serve as the basis for hypothesizing, at least, about how teaching matters.

Vanessa Siddle Walker's (1996) rich and evocative portrait of North Carolina's Casswell County Training School reflects the themes one typically finds in these discussions. She sees the school as an example of institutionalized caring, caring that went beyond how any one individual felt about any other individual, caring that was reflected in high expectations and strict standards—teachers "didn't play," would "bless you out" if they caught you wrong. There was a heavy emphasis on extracurricular activity, with as much as 90 percent of the student body participating in something, as the school recognized the need of students to "learn to speak, to think, to perform" (204) as well as their need for explicit moral instruction. They were, as the principal liked to say, "building men and women" (204). Among other things, they took that to require implicitly and explicitly challenging notions of racial inferiority; they offered a counter-narrative, in Theresa Perry's terms (Perry, Steele, and Hilliard 2003). For them, "Teaching could not be reduced to a job or an occupation; it was a mission" (206). Apart from academics, as two other students of these schools have noted, the best of the segregated schools "addressed deeper psychological and sociological needs of their clients" (Irvine and Irvine 1983). One wonders how many of those clients had to memorize Paul Laurence Dunbar's "Encouraged" (Dunbar 1915):

Because you love me I have
 much achieved,
 Had you despised me then I must
 have failed,
 But since I knew you trusted
 and believed,
 I could not disappoint you and so
 prevailed.

The poem captures much of what seems most important about Black schools in the South. Figure 4.2 is another way of summarizing collective memory.

Figure 4.2. Traditional Black Teaching Remembered

Thomas Sowell (1974, 1976)

- Schools were a blend of "support, encouragement, and rigid standards."
- Parents thought "The teacher was always right."
- The school "could do no wrong in the eyes of the parent."
- School "Would not let [them] go wrong."
- Teachers were demanding and took "personal interest" in students, often outside of school.
- "Some have a warm 'human touch' and others would have failed Public Relations I."

Faustine Jones-Wilson (1981)

- Teachers didn't give a choice between "learning and not learning."
- Failure "unacceptable to teachers, family, peers and the community."

Siddle Walker (1996)

- The segregated school is most often compared with a "family" in which teachers and the principal, with parentlike authority, exercised almost complete autonomy in shaping student learning and ensuring student discipline.

David Cecelski (1994)

- Teachers in Hyde County, North Carolina, created a "caring environment" and a "familial atmosphere."

Adam Fairclough (2007)

- "Many of those teachers [in Texas] taught with a zeal and commitment . . . as though they felt a personal mandate to compensate for the areas of lack in the lives of the students."
- Teachers in Columbia, South Carolina, "shared their lives with us, they made us feel like we were the most important people in the world, and they taught us pride and tradition."
- "For many women, teaching became a kind of sacred calling, rather like that of the celibate priest. . . . Either way, they acted as if God had called them to teach and expected their husbands to either help them or not interfere."

In many ways, this sounds like what we know about Catholic schools, just interpreted through a different historical experience. Teachers are seen as having a broad interest in children, in their character and in their future. There is a sense of mission, a moral compact between children and teachers. Children felt pressure to succeed; whether or not they are going to take school seriously is a choice that has been made for them by adults. They felt pushed cognitively and socially. There is some disagreement about whether teachers were warm and friendly but an overwhelming consensus that adults were all on the same page; teachers had the authority of the whole race behind them. If we were to abstract a teaching model from this, we might get something like figure 4.3.

Figure 4.3. Authoritative-Supportive Teaching

- High level of intellectual / academic demand
- High level of social demand
- Holistic concern for children and their future; sense of a larger mission
- Strong sense of teacher efficacy and legitimacy

Calling this model authoritative-supportive teaching would seem to capture its most salient aspects. If this is the kind of teaching that Black people remember as having worked for them, is there any reason at all to think it transfers to the contemporary ghetto? Actually, there are several interesting lines of thinking in contemporary research to suggest that a model of teaching very close to this can have unusually large positive impacts, even among today's rowdy youth.

One very instructive study tried to assess the relative impact of social support as against academic pressure (Lee et al. 1999), surveying 28,000 Chicago sixth and eighth graders and more than 5,000 teachers in 304 elementary and middle schools. To measure social support from teachers, students were asked whether their English and math teachers;

- related the subject to their personal interests (which, of course, implies that teachers know what students are interested in)
- really listened to what they say
- knew them very well
- believed they can do well in school

To assess support from parents, students were asked how often their parents or other adults in their household:

- discuss school events and/or events of interest to the student
- help with homework
- discuss with them things they had studied in class
- discuss homework with them

To assess social support from peers, students were asked whether most students in their classes:

- treat each other with respect
- work together to solve problems
- help each other learn

Academic press, as the study calls it, was measured by both teacher reports and student reports. The questions asked of teachers included whether their schools:

- set high standards for academic performance
- organized the school day to maximize student learning
- focused on what is best for student learning when making important decisions

The questions for assessing student perception of academic press asked students whether their English and math teachers:

- expected them to do their best all the time
- expected them to complete their homework every night
- thought it very important that they do well in that class
- encouraged them to do extra work when they don't understand something

This is very close to the authoritative-supportive model, capturing elements of social and intellectual demand, of holistic concern, of adults being on the same page. The main message from the study is that social support and academic press each independently made a meaningful difference, but when both are present at high levels, the results can be striking. In reading, children experiencing low levels of both support and press averaged a gain of 0.56 Grade Equivalents a year in reading, but students exposed to high levels of both improved 1.82 GEs, almost two years' growth in a year. Now that's interocular. The numbers in

math were even more pronounced. While low-support, low-press students improved 0.63 GEs, high-press, high-support students improved an eye-popping 2.39 GEs. The distribution of high-press, high-support schools is very much what one would expect. Racially integrated schools are three times more likely to exhibit both characteristics than predominantly minority schools; schools serving the highest-income-level students are four times as likely to exhibit both aspects than schools serving the poorest students.

These would be impressive numbers under any circumstances, but they are even more impressive considering the population under study—sixth and eighth graders. That's a tough crowd. By that age, many students have essentially given up on schools, and schools have given up on many of them. Something like that Old Time Religion, something like the traditional model of Black teaching, supportive but authoritative—still seems to work for a great many children. One might have expected that the sheer magnitude of the results would have attracted a great deal of attention, but this has actually been among the least requested of the studies done by the Chicago Consortium. We can only speculate as to why, but it is at least possible that the emphasis here on teaching as having an important component of social support does not fit comfortably with much contemporary discourse, with its emphasis on teaching as being about the delivery of material, the development of skills, and so forth.

Still, there is a growing research base on various aspects of the supportive-authoritative balance problem. For one thing, it helps us understand more precisely the nature of African American educational disadvantage. In Chicago, students attending predominantly African American schools are much less likely than students in integrated schools to be in environments where teachers trust parents (about 42 percent of teachers in predominantly African American schools report strong trust as against 72 percent of teachers in integrated schools) and less likely to be in places where teachers feel a strong sense of collective responsibility (Easton 2006). I think we can assume that in environments where adults are less cooperative with one another, they are less likely to be effectively supportive of students. Another Chicago study shows that in high schools where student-teacher trust is high (taking that to be an analog for teacher support), students average 2.3 percent fewer absences per term, essentially one additional week of attendance over the school year. In schools

with the highest levels of academic press for the future, students averaged just under two fewer absences a year (Allensworth and Easton 2007).

At the elementary level, Ron Ferguson (2006) has found a relationship between how supportive the experience is for children and how they treat one another, taking us back to a theme in Helen Gouldner's (1978) work. If children don't think the teacher both enjoys helping them and holds them to a high standard—what he calls a “high help/high perfectionism” classroom—their engagement and behavior deteriorates, which includes children treating one another poorly.

There are some national data that reinforce the importance of social supports. Woolley and Bowen (2007), using a sample of over 8,000 middle school pupils, many of them with significant risk factors in their lives, have demonstrated that of the various variables they examined, social capital—the number of supportive adults in students' lives—had the strongest relationship to school engagement. Again, it is important that students have support across the various settings of their lives. Woolley and Grogan-Kaylor (2006), using a nationally representative sample of middle and high school students, have found that teacher support had the strongest association with academic performance, followed by neighborhood safety, followed by home academic culture. Significantly, when African American and Latino students received the same kinds of support across domains as others, they had similar academic performance.

Clearly, we want to think of support and demand in tandem, but my guess would be that demands are especially important for Black students and for any others who have been branded intellectually inferior. Part of my work at Westside High School involved trying to understand how students there understood their teachers and how that shaped student behavior. Thus, among other questions, I was asking, “What would a teacher have to be like before you said, ‘That’s a really good teacher’? How can you tell if a teacher is really concerned about students learning something in the course?” In response to the “really concerned” question, students stressed two things: The really concerned teacher works hard to make the material clear, and, less intuitively, the really concerned teacher is demanding. Clarity meant that the teacher should check notebooks, encourage questions, ask questions to see whether students understand, provide students with some indication of their progress. This is again a conception of teaching reminiscent of our authoritative-supportive model; it sees the good teacher as aggressive, as actively making

sure students are learning, not just leaving it up to the students. Pedro Noguera (2005) found the same thinking among a group of students in Berkeley:

They look first for people who care. . . . Second, they respect teachers who are strict and hold students accountable. Third, they like teachers who teach them something. When they found a teacher who was caring, strict and challenging, they responded really well [despite the fact that] some of these students had criminal records or missed more days than they attended. (17–18)¹

When students at Westside said that the concerned teacher is demanding, they meant that the serious teacher will make students walk the straight and narrow, stay on their backs about homework and attendance, stop them from fooling around and wasting time in class. Even some shouting and cursing seem okay with the kids, but only if it is clearly related to getting students to do their best. Students talked in some detail about what made them think a teacher was “nice,” but they clearly separated that from what made a teacher effective. In fact, when it comes to misbehavior, students thought that the teachers who were “too nice” were going to catch more than their share of trouble.

Asked to explain why they cooperated more with some teachers than others—worked hard, paid attention in class, came to class—about half the students said it didn't matter, they put out the same level of effort in all classes. The other students overwhelmingly saw themselves as working harder for those teachers who were both more serious about teaching and more insistent on appropriate behavior. It was clearly the perceived quality of teaching in combination with demanding behavior that had the most impact on student behavior. When demands were separated from good teaching, when poor teachers tried to put pressure on, that could be interpreted as a put-down. Students may respond to demanding teachers, but only if they have somehow legitimated their right to demand.⁴

Theresa Perry has provided what I think is the best context for thinking about this: “The task of achievement . . . is distinctive for African Americans because doing school requires that you use your mind, and the ideology of the larger society has always been about questioning the mental capacity of African Americans, about questioning Black intellectual competence” (Perry, Steele, and Hilliard 2003: 5).

Kids understand the Master Narrative; they know they are supposed to be dumb. In this sense, demanding behavior from a teacher, when it is understood as being for the student's own good, when it is legitimated, constitutes a counternarrative.⁵ Whatever intellectual demands mean to everyone else, they mean something more to Black kids and other stigmatized populations because they are in dialogue with a different history. Demanding behavior, properly couched, welcomes you to the table; it signifies your membership in the larger moral community. Like the rest of us, kids may enjoy an undemanding environment if they can get it; once they get accustomed to it, it can be a real project to change their habits. At the same time, they can be sophisticated enough to understand, at some level, that it means somebody thinks they can't do better.

If data from Chicago can be generalized, youngsters in the inner city may have more trouble finding someone at school who will insist that they do their best than finding someone who supports them. Low-performing Chicago elementary schools in the mid-1990s were not much different from other schools in the level of teacher personalism that students reported. They were significantly lower in academic press (Sebring et al. 1996). This isn't to say that the number of caring adults isn't a problem; rather, in the lowest-performing schools, finding teachers who will insist on an appropriate level of demands is even more of a problem. Judging from my own experience, one part of the problem may be that some younger teachers—some young, white teachers in particular, I suspect—have a kind of “niceness” ideology. They think that what these kids really need is someone who will be “nice” to them. That's a poor (but unsurprising) reading of how the lives of urban children are constricted. I would ask them to see the problem through the eyes of W. E. B. Du Bois, whose first teaching experience came in rural Tennessee in the 1880s while he was still an undergraduate at Fisk. The students he taught there “found the world a puzzling thing: it asked little of them, and they answered with little, and yet it ridiculed their offering. Such a paradox they could not understand, and therefore sank into listless indifference, or shiftlessness, or reckless bravado” (1961: 60).

One of the most interesting groups of young teachers I know are the members of the Baltimore Algebra Project, a group of high school students who have been running a very successful afterschool program in which they tutor middle school students in mathematics. Researchers

and adult teachers can only envy the level of knowledge they have about their clients, and we can be sure they bring all the determination of idealistic youth to their work. It is instructive to think about the kind of teaching styles they evolve. In the following interview excerpt (Payne, forthcoming), Mahogany Bosworth, Charnell Covert, Channell Parker, and Michele Shropshire talk about what they've learned about working with difficult clients:

BOSWORTH: At Lemmel [School] I had eighth graders. . . . They came when they wanted to. . . . They really didn't want to be there. I mean they learned. They sat there and listened but they really didn't want to be there.

SHROPSHIRE: The problem with the clients at Lemmel is that the clients that we got . . . were from a different program. And before we got them, they were working on easier math. So when they came to us, they didn't want to—really want to challenge themselves, so they were kind of reluctant to come to us. And that's why they were coming when they felt like it, or whenever.

COVERT: Anybody would have an attitude if they come from Baltimore City public schools. From my experience, it tends to be one or two attitudes: an attitude of, “Yes, I go to Baltimore public schools, but that doesn't determine my future. And I'm going to maximize that.” Or it can be an attitude of, “Yes, I go to Baltimore City public schools, and that does determine my future. So I don't really care about learning because nobody cares about learning for me.” Now, the people who are on the latter end, I think you just have to be understanding of where they're coming from. . . . I had some clients who had some real serious home issues. Like one of my high school clients was going in between homes. And it wasn't that he couldn't get it. He just was going through some things. And it was always that he would get put out of class and they would send him. And he would be upset because he needed to go to work because he needed to provide for himself. But he never felt comfortable telling his teachers because he felt like they were being sort of like, why sympathize with him? And he never really went to talk to them.

So he would like try to use that time as more of a venting time, which was fine. . . . And it would be fine for him but not so much pressure.

Where I'm not just like, sit down, do your work. . . . Who can do their work or focus on their work when you don't have anywhere to live? And he did make a choice to stay in school and he graduated and did fine.

But then also knowing, too, when people are trying to get over. Because there were a lot of people who would just say like, "Oh, my stomach hurts." And you'd be like, "Okay, well go home for today." And then you'll leave and see them in the parking lot with their girlfriend or something. And you're like, "Grrr, you tried to get over me." So it's just being stern and knowing, using judgment. Knowing what is what.

PARKER: I worked with these three boys and they were—they were like in fifth or sixth grade. . . . I wouldn't call them bad but it was really difficult. They were really difficult. And I would come in and they'd be like [in a disgusted tone], "Oh, here comes Channell." Because they worked with another guy who didn't really challenge them.

When I came and they knew that they were about to have a drill, a test, a quiz. And they knew they were about to work and they would come. And I would get there and they would be so mad at me. [But] after a while, it was to the point where, "I want to work with Channell. I want to work with Channell." And everyone would look at them as the bad boys. And that made them want to come to work even more.

These are Black Baltimore city kids and nobody believes in them. And they're all going to get in trouble every single day. I used to have to wait like ten minutes because they had been coming out of detention or whatever. And that made me want to come to work. Because I knew that they were smart. These boys were smart. I would, like, pull out my notebook and I would teach them some of the stuff I was learning [in high school] because it had to do with what they were learning. And they would learn it. And I knew they were smart and I knew they tried and they understood it. And I knew they was also the bad kids or whatever. . . . I'd be like . . . "I'm going to call your parents." And they would get their self together. Or, "I've got a dollar for the first one to get this question right." And they would get their selves together. I had to start pulling quarters out of my pocket and bring in [candy bars]. But it was worth it, because at the end of the day they understood what I was teaching them. . . .

They want to be big and bad. They don't want to learn. Treat them like you care—I would give them hugs and tell them I'd see them tomorrow, at the end of each session. After I treated them like I care, they'd start caring. And they wanted to come back. And they would go, "I'm working with Channell. Hey, let me work with Channell. You've got any candy today?" And everything made it worth it after that. So with difficult kids, treat them like you care and they'll be there every day. And they will want you to be there every day. . . . Challenge them. You've got to challenge them. Because if you don't challenge them they're not going to challenge themselves. And no one around them is going to challenge them. Not only do they score high on their MSA [Maryland State Assessment], but after a while—when I got there—they already had their books and pencils out. They already had their calculators and their blocks and all that. So after a while it wasn't me waiting for them. It was, they were waiting for me. It was to the point where I was meeting with their teachers, meeting with their parents, meeting with their friends who wanted to come in. They weren't getting in trouble. I want to see them in about five years, see what they are doing. Their friends were coming, I started with, like, two boys, and I ended up with, like, five. . . .

SHROPSHIRE: Sometimes [we gave out] candy or we'd throw a party and they weren't informed about it ahead of time. We would throw a party if like everybody did like super across the board . . . the incentives really helped out a lot. And for people I tutored specifically, like tutoring girls who wanted to talk about boys or anything else—well, once you develop a relationship with the client, it's like if you just look at them a certain way, they're like, "Okay, okay. We'll get back on task," or whatever. And that's all it really had to be. . . . Establishing the relationship is really just working with them every day. And when they come in, if there's like time between when they come in and when you start . . . you get them to talk about their friends or some boys. Or any other thing that's on their mind so you kind of know about them. And it builds on it like every day. So it's that in-between time. . . . And it kind of goes back to the conditions of the city schools. If you have 30 kids in class and one teacher, a teacher is not going to possibly be able to build a relationship. . . .

For a group of young people, this sounds pretty Old School, very much like what we are calling the authoritative-supportive model of teaching. There are differences of emphasis—one cannot imagine that many traditional Black teachers put this much emphasis on kids having fun—but the core themes of the model are here: Understand the social context of negative behavior. Push kids intellectually, challenge them. Be stern about the things that matter most. “Recognize” kids as persons. Convey a sense that they count too much to be allowed to mess up their own education. In the raggedy schools of contemporary Baltimore, a group of young people are evolving a style of pedagogy that would have seemed familiar to generations of African American teachers before them.

Reproducing Race

Suppose you live in an intensely anti-Semitic country. You yourself are not anti-Semitic at all, however. Indeed, you’ve never met a Jew, have no feelings about them one way or the other. Of course, you’ve heard what people say about them, that they are sharp, grasping, prone to cheat in business transactions. That’s just stuff you’ve heard, not anything you personally believe. Still, those ideas are pervasive in your society. When you finally do meet a Jew, can you ignore them completely? Can you afford to, especially if the meeting is a business transaction? As you interact with the person, won’t the things you’ve heard be in the back of your mind? Aren’t you likely to watch the person just a little more closely, just in case? And isn’t it possible that the other party will notice that, perhaps becoming more withdrawn and reserved, which you, of course, might interpret as a sign of his being up to something? If any little thing isn’t exactly right, the saturation of negative ideas throughout the culture gives you an explanation ready-to-hand. We can get the beginnings of a negative spiral without anyone bearing anyone else the slightest ill will.

That example is from Gordon Allport’s *The Nature of Prejudice*, first published in 1954. In some ways, that book reflects a more sophisticated understanding of race than does much contemporary commentary, scholarly and popular alike. We tend to reduce race to its more extreme interpersonal manifestations; that is, “racism” exists when a prejudiced person discriminates in some fairly explicit way. We want a smoking gun, somebody with a sheet and a hood. The privileging of this kind of overt discrimination paradigm over structural interpretations of race is one

reason many Americans can think of racial problems as a thing of the past (Wellman 1977; Bonilla-Silva 2004). The idea that race isn’t real because it is, after all, just a social construction, is another variant of that. The early- and mid-twentieth-century scholars who developed the ideas we now think of as the social construction of race—W. I. Thomas (1928), Robert Merton (1948)—were in fact trying to establish the utter reality of social constructions. The fact that their thinking has been turned on its head says something about the depth of contemporary confusion about what race is and how it reproduces itself.

This kind of confusion is so pervasive that it has come to affect the way we frame educational issues. One example is all the head-scratching over the poor educational performance of middle-class Black students, especially middle-class Black students in clearly liberal and progressive environments (as these things go), university towns like Evanston, Ann Arbor, or Chapel Hill. The assumption, of course, is that the social meaning of race lies largely in its connection to poverty; absent poverty and overt discrimination, Black students are pretty much the same as anyone else. That world doesn’t exist yet. In this world, a world where ideas about Black intellectual inferiority are pervasive, shaping our behavior irrespective of whether we believe them, race presents barriers to development that may have nothing to do with either poverty or crude racism. Race is a social location, and where one is located socially determines how one experiences and interprets the world.

Consider something as basic as the capacity for trust. We have many years of data that suggest Blacks are less generally trusting of others than are whites. One recent study (Taylor, Funk, and Clark 2007) found 32 percent of whites in the lowest trust category as opposed to a full 61 percent of Blacks (and 53 percent of Hispanics). This has frequently been understood to be a function of vulnerability; the world over, more vulnerable populations are less apt to trust. “In virtually all societies, ‘have-nots’ are less trusting than ‘haves’” (Putnam 2000: 138). The folklorist Zora Neale Hurston used to say that the motto of the rabbits is always “Make no mistake—Run every time the bush shake.” At some level, the capacity for trust is a luxury attendant upon having a favorable social location. Those without power or resources cannot afford the consequences of misplaced trust, so they trust more sparingly. In schools, we have good reason to think that one of the ways we can rebuild trust is to reduce vulnerability (Bryk and Schneider 2002).

This research is about trusting other people, but it is also clear that Blacks have less trust in the future as well or, more precisely, less trust in their own capacity to shape the future. In many ways, the work that inaugurated systematic empirical analysis of educational inequality was James Coleman's mammoth *Equality of Educational Opportunity* (1966), at the time the second-costliest social science research project ever conducted. Some of his most instructive findings had to do with what he called *fate control*, an individual's confidence that he or she has some control over his or her own destiny. Students were asked whether they thought hard work or luck was more important for getting ahead; whether they agreed that every time they tried to get ahead, something happened to stop them; and whether they thought that if they really wanted something, they could get it. Fate control turned out to have a stronger relationship to achievement than all school-related factors put together. With the exception of Asian students, minority pupils had less confidence than whites in their ability to affect their own futures. Having that sense was especially important for Black students, accounting for three times as much of the variance in achievement among them as among their white counterparts. Glantz (1977) has confirmed both the strength of the correlation between fate control and achievement and the tendency of Blacks to have a weaker sense of their ability to control their environment. Kerckhoff and Campbell (1977), trying to explain levels of educational ambition among twelfth-grade boys, find that for Black boys the educational attainment of the head of household matters much less and the perception of the opportunity structure matters much more.⁶ In some respects, then, it seems that Black students are more prone to seeing themselves as objects rather than subjects, a mind-set which militates against academic development.

Ron Ferguson (2006) notes that in his surveys of suburban students, Black students all through school are particularly worried about whether people think they are smart. It doesn't stop when they get to college. In the thirty or more years that I have been advising Black college freshmen, the most persistent difficulty has been getting them to seek help when they need it. Too often they are afraid that admitting they need help will reinforce whatever stereotypes the teacher or other students hold of them. The work of Claude Steele and his colleagues (summarized in Pery, Steele, and Hilliard 2003) has done much to help us understand the importance of stereotype threat. The work involves constructing experi-

ments in which subjects, mostly college students, are led to believe that they are in danger of reinforcing some stereotype. Black students are led to believe they may be reinforcing notions of Black intellectual inferiority; white males are led to believe that they may be about to reinforce the idea that white males have less mathematical talent than Asians; white females to think they are being scrutinized for their mathematical ability compared to men; and, my personal favorite, white athletes are made to think that the activity they are about to engage in tests "natural athletic talent," something popular thinking sees Blacks as advantaged in. Even though the groups being tested have been matched for actual ability, the experiments reveal that stereotype threat consistently has a dramatic negative impact on intellectual performance. When a test is introduced in such a way as to get Black students thinking about notions of racial inferiority, for example, they will do less well than white students of equal measured ability. It proved to be very difficult to turn the tables and convince Black students that the tests they were about to take were "race-fair." What worked was implying that the research generating the tests had been done by Black scholars. When they believed that, "they performed well regardless of whether we had weakened their self-confidence beforehand. And when they didn't feel trust, no amount of bolstering of self-confidence helped" (123).⁷

It is important to note that the impact of stereotype threat seems to be greatest among the most achievement-oriented, most skilled students. Steele hypothesizes that one has to care about a domain of performance in order to be worried about the prospect of being stereotyped in that domain. Less successful students can protect themselves by withdrawing from academic competition, by deciding that it isn't important to them—which, again, presumably means they are more likely to seek their badges of dignity elsewhere (Sennett and Cobb 1972). This is a useful way to think about underachieving middle-class students. However much the ghetto may function as a tool of racial stratification, its very isolation also offers a measure of protection against some of the ways race can express itself. Where the White Gaze is more constantly present for students in integrated contexts, race and racial stereotypes may be more often consciously salient for them, and in a form against which it is particularly difficult to protect oneself.

It is not, to paraphrase Lorraine Hansberry, that Black youth got up one morning and decided they couldn't trust their environment. These

predispositions are based on how they and people they identify with experience the broader society. They reflect real vulnerabilities. Black youth do not experience society as racially egalitarian and open in the way that many Americans assume it to be. Consider what we know about discipline patterns (H. Witt 2007). According to data collected by the U.S. Department of Education for the 2004–2005 school year, African American students nationally are suspended or expelled at nearly three times the rate of white students. In Minnesota, Black students are six times as likely to be suspended as whites, but that seems downright friendly compared to New Jersey, where they are almost 60 times more likely to be expelled. In 21 states, the percentage of Black suspensions is more than double their percentage in the student body. These disproportions affect middle-class as well as working-class Black students, and there is no reason to believe that they can be reduced to actual differences in student behavior. At least some of the discrepancy seems to be about teachers interpreting similar behaviors differently when they come from students of different races. Hispanic students, who also have to negotiate stigma in a variety of ways, seem to be suspended or expelled roughly in proportion to their population. We should think of teacher expectations as a stratifying device in themselves, a major part of the machinery by which social inequality is reproduced. Recall that Ron Ferguson's (2003) review of the literature concludes that race, ethnicity, and class all affect teacher perception and all affect teacher behavior.

We shouldn't be surprised to learn that African American students perceive school climate less favorably than white students or staff. A West Virginia study (Education Alliance 2006) of 2,900 middle and high school students found African American students gave their schools significantly lower ratings on seven of the eight dimensions of school climate examined, including academic expectations, quality of instruction, counseling about educational options, respect, mentoring and caring relationships, and fairness. Even when student academic performance and school demographics are controlled, Black students see themselves as being in environments where less is expected of them and fewer people care about them or treat students fairly.

At a broader level, we can assume that students understand the flow of resources to be racialized; ghetto students know their schools look like they do for a reason; they know that certain kinds of classes are reserved for them, they know that certain kinds of neighborhoods are reserved for

them. Students in desegregated environments know that there is a reason so few people like them get the best teachers or wind up in the AP classes. They may not have a very precise analysis, but they know that access to resources and status honor are correlated with race. (And to focus on the fact that sometimes they will see race where something else is in fact operative misses the point entirely.) They cannot *not* see race in their lives. That this can be true and that we can still construct a national dialogue premised on the idea that middle-class Black youth underachievement is a great mystery can be regarded on the one hand as yet another testament to the power of self-serving thought or, on the other, as an indicator of how little weight the lived experiences of Black youth has in the national imagination.

Rumors of the death of Jim Crow are premature. What we know about the operation of race in our schools (and elsewhere) does not lend itself to either/or explanations. Again, it is not that Black students are coming to school with a bunch of negative attitudes that they just made up. I once heard John Hope Franklin, after one of his speeches, respond to a questioner who was bemoaning the terrible criminal behavior from young Black males by trying to get the questioner to see that youngsters like that had never been allowed to have a sense of equity in this country. That's a good metaphor for thinking about race outside the context of overt discrimination. There is a kind of mutual disinvestment going on, in which youth who are not made to feel that they are valued and welcomed members of the institution respond by disinvesting themselves in that institution and whatever it symbolizes, with ample room for misunderstanding and self-fulfilling prophecies on both sides.

Institutional disinvestment can take the form of outright and deliberate discrimination and its consequences, but it is more likely to be expressed in low expectations, low demands, listless teaching, and inequitable distribution of resources, human and social. We have already said that African American students in Chicago, for example, typically attend schools where there are lower levels of collective responsibility among teachers and much lower levels of teacher-parent trust. Add to that, those schools are less programmatically coherent, less safe, and teachers in them say they see less innovation going on (Easton 2006). (In all these respects, Latino students are in better schools, on average, than African Americans, but not as good as the schools serving more integrated populations.) That is, these institutions are just not making the level of effort

we see in schools for other people; it's not the same level of investment. If the students are frequently lackadaisical and unfocused, they are only mirroring the institutional stance toward them. Everybody's half-step-pin'. Saying that is not at all to deny that kids are bringing a whole lot of problems with them that have nothing to do with the school. It is merely to repeat Gouldner's point; by disinvesting in the child, the school exacerbates any preexisting problems and creates some new ones.

Consider, as a suggestive counterexample, the interesting research on the effects of small class size in the early grades on Black students (Krueger and Whitmore 2002). Tennessee randomly assigned over 11,000 students to either small (from 13 to 17 pupils) or large classes (from 22 to 25 pupils) for the first four years of schooling, after which the students who had been in small classes returned to regular classes. Smaller classes made a much larger difference to Black students. While they were in them, Black students in smaller classes performed 7–10 percentile points better than Black students in larger classes, while the advantage for white students in smaller classes over their counterparts in larger classes was 3–4 percentile points. When all students went back to normal-size classes, the effects of having been in smaller classes persisted, although it was smaller. When the students got to high schools, Black students who had been in smaller classes were much more likely to take the ACT or SAT, presumably a measure of preparing themselves for college. "Assigning all students to a small class is estimated to reduce the black-white gap in the test-taking rate by an impressive 60 percent" (29). It would be enlightening to know what factors mediated those outcomes (and to what degree they were social in character), but even without knowing that, this is enough to provide another example of how different investments in children can provide different outcomes. Less than 15 years ago, people were still publishing studies wondering if school resources mattered for poor children. We now know what a wrong-headed question that was. If anything, we should regard children from the social margins as being more school-vulnerable than others, more sensitive to whatever the school does or does not do.⁸

While this discussion has been framed largely in terms of Black learners, we could tell largely the same story, with changes of emphasis here and there, about other severely stigmatized and marginalized groups. In her study of West Side High, a school that reflected all of New York City's diversity, Cristina Rathbone (1998) discovered again and again that

these kids, while they strove mightily to project an image of having it together and being above it all, in fact lived much of their lives on the defensive:

Their self-sufficiency had its costs, of course. However much they seemed impervious, the kids at West Side knew where they stood in the general scheme of things. And although the incredibly scintillating, brisk, and charming exteriors they developed allowed them to survive the casual blows of day-to-day life, many kids ended up suffocating in the tiny emotional space they allowed themselves to hold onto. . . . [One teacher] asked her students to describe how West Siders were seen by the rest of the city: "lazy," "dropouts," "pregnant," "Puerto Rican sluts," and "kids who can't make it in the real world because they are too dumb and angry" were just some of the answers they gave. (116–17)

It is one thing to say that students on the margins understand the disregard with which the larger world views them and react to it, another to wonder how many of them internalize that disregard to some degree. Marc Elrich (1994), describing a sixth-grade class in which most students were reading two years below grade level, found that most of his Black students saw Black people as bad people. They saw Black people as dumber than whites or Asians, as not liking to work hard, and Black men as unreliable. "My students had developed a bipolar view of the world with whiteness and goodness at one pole and darkness and badness at the other." We don't know how widespread or deeply rooted such feelings are, but it may be that young people from stigmatized groups have their sense that they can control their environment and have their future compromised at one level by their awareness of the scornful gaze of the outer world, at another by their own capitulation to that scorn.⁹

Black learners have a different terrain to negotiate, terrain whose contours have been shaped by the constant and distinctive "recycling of the ideology of African-American moral, cultural and intellectual deficiency," to use Theresa Perry's words (Perry, Steele, and Hilliard 2003: 9). Many Black youngsters are trapped between what they understand as a history of collective humiliation and impotence and a set of contemporary social images that seem to confirm the idea that there is something fundamentally wrong with Black people. Based on their unreliable sense of history, on their own lived experience, based on how they understand

the opportunity structure for people like them, past and present, Black learners may be prone to distrust, unsure of their ability to shape their own future and unsure of how schooling fits into that, uncertain how to structure the racial presumption they find all around them. Race problematizes the struggle for honor and welcome in ways that have direct implications for social and intellectual development. It robs children of the right to take their relationship to the larger society for granted.

This seems, then, to be an argument for a pedagogy of connectedness, one that in part connects students to a past that they may have rejected, a rejection that leaves them with fewer tools to fight racial stereotype in the present. To whatever extent children don't have confidence in their ability to affect the future, it is all the more important that they be connected to adults who can envision futures the young people cannot and keep them moving toward those futures. To whatever extent young people face more temptation toward destructive identities, they need connections to adults who are authoritative enough to draw some boundaries that take some negative choices away from them. The growing national mantra about instruction, instruction, instruction is a good thing; we need to be encouraging it. Still, we need to be wary of sliding into the trap of thinking that instruction is the whole battle. For some children, the mantra needs to be instruction and connection, instruction and connection.

Thus, extracurricular activities, one of the first targets of cash-strapped urban systems, may be especially critical for the population they serve. A growing body of research suggests that good extracurricular and community-based organized activities are associated with lower rates of academic failure, lower dropout rates, better school attendance, more satisfaction with the school experience, better rates of college attendance, especially for low-achieving children, and lower rates of various antisocial behaviors (Mahoney, Larson, and Eccles 2005; Eccles and Templeton 2002). Some of these effects seem particularly strong for low-income and at-risk youth, and some seem to persist well into adulthood. Of course, the youth who would benefit most are least likely to participate in these activities. Low-income Latino and African American youth have lower rates of participation than other students. It is particularly alarming that the proportion of African American seniors involved in academic clubs declined 36 percent between 1972 and 1992 (Pederson and Seidman 2005) and equally alarming that we have constructed a national dialogue about education that is essentially indifferent to that fact.

One institution that would not be indifferent is the Catholic school, which is probably the closest thing we have to an answer to the question about how one scales up effective education in the inner city. One review of the research on Catholic schools and African American students concludes that

... family background variables such as income, parental educational levels, and parental educational aspirations seem less important in the achievement gains of African American students in Catholic schools than in public schools. . . . Individual characteristics such as intelligence, achievement, motivation, gender, religious affiliation, and race seem similarly less related to African American achievement in Catholic schools. (York 1996: 44)

Whenever one raises Catholic schools as a model, there is the objection that Catholic schools serve a different population and there are too many issues of self-selection for such comparisons to hold water. I don't believe that. Grogger and Neal (2000) have pulled together a good deal of evidence suggesting that that is not the case. I am very much affected by my own experience of talking with kids in Chicago who moved back and forth between Catholic and public schools, depending on the fluctuations in family income, and having them tell me, without exception that I can recall, that they worked harder and took school more seriously when they were in Catholic school. The most memorable was a boy who told me that when he was in Catholic schools, he went to school every day just loaded down with books, but when he was back in the neighborhood public school, "all I bring is my radio." I wouldn't go so far as to say selection effects make no difference, but my experience is that kids themselves describe dramatic changes in their own behavior depending on what they think the environment is asking of them.

We don't have enough examples of large-scale successful education in our cities that we can be ignoring any of them. Let's suspend disbelief for the moment and accept for the sake of discussion that there may be something we can learn from Catholic schools about what effective education at scale would look like in the inner city. Anthony Bryk and Valerie Lee (Bryk, Lee, and Holland 1993; Lee 1998) have probably been the two most influential scholars in this discussion. They put considerable emphasis on the Catholic school as an exemplar of the common school model. There is a common course of study that virtually everyone takes,

thus avoiding the situation in public schools where students of color are particularly prone to “choosing” or being counseled into watered-down courses. Cognitive demand is structured in for everybody, which contrasts with public schools, most of which use some form of tracking at the high school, a way of telling students in the lower tracks they are officially stupid. There is a different level of personalism, built in part through shared experiences across the school community and high rates of participation in extracurricular activities. This is facilitated by a different understanding of the teacher’s role:

Rather than defining themselves as subject-matter specialists, teachers in Catholic high schools see their responsibilities as extending to any encounters with students: in hallways, the school grounds, the school neighborhood, and sometimes into their homes. Many teachers define their profession in moral terms—forming character as well as developing skills. (Lee 1998: 7)

Lee contends that the emphasis on moral community and human dignity is crucial to the kind of community Catholic schools form: “Besides imparting technical knowledge and skills to negotiate a complex secular world, students must be pushed to develop a moral vision toward which those skills should be pointed, and a conscience that encourages them to pursue that vision. In this sense, education is fundamentally a moral enterprise” (Lee 1998: 11). The more confused students are about their place in society, the more salient that moral conception of the educational enterprise can be. One can imagine any of the great Black educators of previous generations—a Charlotte Hawkins Brown, a Mary McLeod Bethune, a Benjamin Mays—uttering those words without missing a beat. Surely the hope of the charter school movement isn’t this nonsense about how free-market principles are going to reshape other institutions, nor the idea that removing bureaucratic restrictions will make an enormous difference all by itself. The hope in the charter school movement is that some of these schools are attracting leaders and teachers with a moral fire, leaders who see their work as a calling, not a career, whose commitment to children goes beyond the merely professional.

What York (1996: 43) finds about teaching styles in Catholic schools—“highly traditional, unremarkable and structured”—would describe the teaching in a great many academically successful Afrocentric schools

as well. Too many people cannot see past the racial ideology. If they could, what they would see in the strongest of those schools would be high levels of both cognitive and social demands for students, authoritative adults who also develop very personal relationships with students, a strong sense of a community with a moral mission. One such school in Chicago, the New Concept Development Center, posted very strong test scores for many years despite scraping along on very few resources, and now that it has evolved into the Betty Shabazz International Charter School, it consistently posts some of the highest scores in the city (C. D. Lee 2008).¹⁰

This is not at all to say that we shouldn’t be trying to expose children to the most powerful forms of pedagogy we can identify. It is to say that students don’t have to have that to learn at high levels. When children are committed to the task, they probably have a great many more ways of learning than we have of teaching. When relationships are strong enough, when teachers and students have a sufficient commitment to one another, teaching that is not very fancy may do just fine for a great many children. If the mother of all conservative sins is the reluctance to think seriously about redistribution of resources, the first of all progressive sins may be the fetishizing of pedagogy. Assuming that *how* we teach is the end-all and be-all may prevent us from getting to some of the questions our most marginalized youth are struggling with.

William Peters’ video *A Class Divided* is still one of the best ways to teach what we should mean by “the social construction of race,” both the artificiality of its creation and the reality of it as consequence. In the wake of Martin Luther King Jr.’s assassination, Jane Rice, an Iowa third-grade teacher, wanted to give her all-white students a visceral understanding of discrimination. She decided to create race in her own classroom, dividing the students by eye color and treating them accordingly. “What I mean,” she told the class, “is that brown-eyed people are better than blue-eyed people. They are cleaner than blue-eyed people. They are more civilized than blue-eyed people. And they are smarter than blue-eyed people” (Peters 1971: 21). Whichever group was the superior group for the day was given special privileges—five extra minutes at recess, the right to go to lunch first and have seconds, the right to use the drinking fountain and the playground equipment. She also changed the way she taught:

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When a brown-eyed child stumbled in reading aloud, she helped him. When a blue-eyed child stumbled, she shook her head and called on a brown-eyed child to read the passage correctly. When a blue-eyed boy, tense and nervous, rolled a corner of a page of his reading book into a tight curl as he awaited his turn to read, Jane displayed the book to the class. "Do blue-eyed people take care of the things they are given?" she asked. (23)

Within a few minutes, she has created an ideology of group difference, a system of privilege based on those differences and a system of selective perception and interpretation to justify both the ideology and the privileges. That's pretty much all you need to have something akin to "race." Watching the video forty years later, it is still striking how quickly and thoroughly the superior group buys into its own superiority. At one level, they understand it's a game; at another, it becomes real, real enough to break up solid friendships, real enough that "Blue-eyed!!" becomes a playground epithet strong enough to start fights. It is also real enough to make smart kids dumb. The inferior group had to wear a felt collar to make themselves easier to identify. The class regularly did a phonics drill with flash cards, while Ms. Rice timed them. Consistently, whichever group was the subordinate group for the day took longer. "We couldn't think with those collars on," one boy said. "My eyes just kept going around and around."

Jane Rice's collars are our Third Heuristic. They remind us that racial definitions are real in their consequences, and ignoring that fact only reproduces race. They remind us that race can interfere with the capacity to feel connected to a larger, worthy group, and one's sense of connection can profoundly shape intellectual and social functioning. If part of our job is just making a much higher level of instruction available to poor children, another part is helping them feel reconnected to larger social worlds, and the more stigmatized children have been, the more important and challenging our job becomes.