

Where Have All the Urban Minority Educators Gone and When Will They Ever Learn?



OFELIA GARCÍA, LONG ISLAND UNIVERSITY, BROOKLYN CAMPUS
JESSICA TRUBEK, LONG ISLAND UNIVERSITY, BROOKLYN CAMPUS

■ *Introduction*

The title of this paper, slightly altering the focus of this journal, points to the greatest problem that urban education has ever faced. The move toward higher standards has decimated the minority teaching corps and will eventually leave poor urban communities with few qualified teachers. The second part of the title suggests the efforts that must be undertaken to transform teacher education for linguistically and culturally diverse students, but it also points to the continued lack of societal understanding of the valuable knowledge and skills that these teachers bring to urban classrooms.

This paper introduces *Educators for Urban Minorities*, as it explains the context in which the journal was conceived. The journal becomes a vehicle to mobilize ideas and research on how to develop excellent educators for urban minorities. But the journal also serves as a platform to enlist understanding and commitment to continue to educate minorities as teachers of urban minority children.

This introductory paper starts out by explaining the crisis that is looming in urban education, as teacher shortages increase, and academic and professional standards for teachers are raised. It does so within the context of New York City, and most especially by presenting the challenge faced by an urban campus with a large minority population, where we work as Dean of the School of Education and Faculty Coordinator of the Childhood Education Area. The paper describes for readers efforts made by the Brooklyn Campus of Long Island University to help their linguistically and culturally diverse student body meet the challenge of the New York State Teacher Certification Exams, as they become better teachers.

■ *The makings of a crisis*

As more rigorous learning standards are demanded of all students in U.S. schools, elementary and secondary schools across the nation are rapidly revamping their curricula and teaching practices to help students meet those standards. In particular, urban schools with large language minority populations — whether speakers of second languages or second dialects of English — are meeting their greater challenge by engaging their faculty in large-scale professional development activities.

An important aspect of today's educational reform involves improving the preparation of teachers. Most States now require students to pass teacher certification exams in order to be certified to teach. And Schools of Education are being evaluated on their pass rates on certification exams. But language minority students do poorly on such tests, and urban Schools of Education with large numbers of such students are faring poorly. Faced with being de-registered, most urban Schools of Education have done exactly the opposite of what elementary and secondary schools are doing. Instead of reshaping their curricula to meet the needs of those students and moving the faculty to work in different ways, many Schools of Education have stopped admitting the very students who, if prepared appropriately, would make a significant difference as teachers in urban schools with large minority populations.

Linguistically and culturally diverse students generally have deep knowledge of

their community and its use of language and culture, needed assets in teaching poor urban children. The linguistic and cultural resources these minority teachers bring are valuable in establishing meaningful relationships with parents and community, tapping into the community's "funds of knowledge" (Moll 1992), and identifying the students' strengths, all useful in promoting student learning. But although this teacher knowledge is used extensively and valued in urban schools, teacher certification exams seldom test for this knowledge.

A crisis in urban education is looming, with New York City magnifying the seriousness of the problem. Presently the New York City Board of Education cannot meet its teacher needs, and hires teachers with temporary licenses, especially in shortage areas such as Special Education, Bilingual Education, and Math and Science Education. In 1996-1997 there were approximately 9,100 New York City teachers with temporary licenses, most of them minority teachers (NYC Board of Education, Office of Recruitment 1998). These teachers are given five years to complete certification requirements, including a graduate degree in education and passing scores on certification examinations. It is these temporarily licensed teachers, many with less than average skills upon admission, that have made up the bulk of the graduate students in urban Schools of Education.

2

The teacher shortage in New York City can only become worse. The New York City Board of Education projects that by 2003 the system will need 37,550 additional teachers. This number does not include the 9,600 teachers who will be needed for Universal Pre-K and the Early Class Size Reduction Programs (NYC Board of Education, Leading Edge Task Force). Teacher salaries have not increased, with the base initial salary for New York City teachers at approximately \$30,000.

In July 1999, the New York State Board of Regents issued a new policy document, "Teaching to Higher Standards", calling for changes in the preparation of teachers and increasing standards for teacher education programs. Among its most challenging policy for Schools of Education serving large number of temporarily licensed minority teachers is the following:

Beginning in 1999, teacher education programs will be subject to deregistration if fewer than 80 percent of their graduates who completed their teacher education programs pass one or more teacher certification examinations (New York State Board of Regents, 1998, p. 19)

At present, all teachers are required to pass two New York State Teacher Certification Exams (NYSTCE) for provisional certification — the Liberal Arts and Science Test (LAST) and the Assessment of Teaching Skills-Written (ATS-W). The two tests consist of multiple choice questions that mostly test ability to solve content-based problems embedded in reading passages, as well as a written essay. It is the LAST test that is most problematic for urban minority students, mostly immigrants unfamiliar with the ways in which these tests approach problem-solving skills, as well as ignorant of ways of writing culturally appropriate academic essays in standard English.

Presently over one third of the teacher candidates in New York City fail the examinations that qualify them to teach, as compared to one-sixth overall in the State (New York State Board of Regents, 1998, p. 2). The higher failure rate of New York City teachers precisely reflects the linguistic and cultural diversity of the city, since Asian, African American and Hispanic candidates fail the certification exams at a much higher rate than whites. In 1996-1997, the pass rate of the various ethnic groups was as follows: 92% of white teacher candidates, 50% of African American candidates, and 47% of Latinos. A multiple regression analysis conducted with LIU/Brooklyn Campus graduate teacher candidates who took the exam in 1997-1998 (270 students) yielded that after controlling

all other variables, including GPA, Asian students scored 45% worse than white students, Hispanics 41% worse, and African Americans 25% worse (Red Owl 1999).

The numerous minority and immigrant population of New York City, coupled with the social conditions in poor urban communities, makes it unlikely that sufficient numbers of white middle-class New Yorkers would be attracted to teach in those communities of the city. In 1990, almost half (46%) of households in New York spoke a language other than English, and 28% of the population was foreign born (For more on this, see García 1997). The population of New York City is increasingly minority and foreign born.

The State Education Department's mandate that 80% of teacher candidates must pass their examinations has moved Schools of Education, including the public system of City University of New York, to stop admitting those students who cannot meet the challenge of the certification examinations up-front. Faced with the challenge, these colleges require passing the Liberal Arts and Science Examination before admission to their graduate programs. As a result, many of these temporarily licensed teachers, most of them minority candidates, are not being educated or prepared, although they can continue to teach in New York City public schools for five years.

It is clear that neither the old alternative that did not prepare urban minority teachers to meet the challenge of the examinations, nor the new alternative of keeping them out, can be sustained. The first one is partially responsible for the inferior education that poor urban students have received in public schools. The second one will eventually cause the demise of urban public education as we have known it in the United States. The children of the poor will either be taught by those who are, and will remain, unprepared since they cannot further their education, or there simply will not be any teachers for them.

3

■ *Challenge to the LIU/Brooklyn Campus*

The Long Island University/Brooklyn Campus is transforming its teacher education program to respond to the State's higher standards and to the City's greater need for teachers, but also to meet the different needs of the linguistically and culturally diverse student body it serves.

The LIU/Brooklyn Campus School of Education is committed to educating all temporarily licensed teachers, mostly older and minority, regardless of passing scores on the NYSTCE. This rests upon its mission to open "the doors of the city and the world to men and women of all ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds who wish to achieve the satisfaction of the educated life and to serve the public good." Whereas other urban universities have closed their doors to many minority students who want to be teachers, LIU has reaffirmed its commitment to these very same students and to their education.

As with other New York City Schools of Education with significantly large minority enrollments, our failure rate on the LAST exam is abysmal. In 1997-1998, only 40% of students who claimed to be LIU/Brooklyn Campus' students passed the LAST. Our high failure rate reflects the non-traditional nature of our student body, that is, students who are practicing teachers on temporary licenses, minorities and speakers of other languages, and students who are older.

Almost all of our graduate students are practicing teachers, most with temporary licenses. These temporarily licensed teachers are required to take the NYSTCE every time it is given in order to keep their jobs. The test can be taken not only repeatedly, but also at any point in the students' education. Thus, employment considerations require teachers to sit for the tests, although not pass them, before they're ready. The LIU Brooklyn Campus is unjustly penalized for trying to educate unlicensed teachers who face poor urban children every day.

The failure rate of graduate students at LIU/Brooklyn is also much higher than that of undergraduate students. This reflects that graduate students have taken their liberal arts and science coursework as undergraduates in other institutions or other countries, and that their graduate preparation with us only consists of courses in Education. But in addition, the Brooklyn Campus has a much larger graduate than undergraduate program, again reflecting our ability to serve New York City's temporarily licensed teachers. Yet, the Brooklyn Campus is evaluated on equal footing with institutions that have a more traditional student population.

Failure rates per ethnicity at the Brooklyn Campus, especially at the graduate level, reflect the disparity given earlier Statewide. At the graduate level, the pass rates were 68% of white candidates, 30% of blacks, and 17% of Latinos. But especially at the graduate level, 86% of the population tested was either Black or Latino, making our position even more vulnerable. Our large number of minority candidates, coupled with the uneven performance per ethnic group in the NYSTCE, also points to the injustice of evaluating institutions with large numbers of minority candidates on equal footing with those that don't.

4 Age is another factor that makes the LIU/Brooklyn Campus position vulnerable. Seventy percent of graduate students tested were over 31 years old. And yet, our results show that 86% of graduate students 31 and over failed the LAST. Our large number of older students, coupled with the uneven performance of older students in the NYSTCE, is also partly responsible for our large failure rate.

Finally, our results per academic major show that students in bilingual education, whether in elementary education, secondary education, or guidance, have abysmal failure rates, as do students in special education. Again, this unjustly taxes LIU/Brooklyn for educating teachers for shortage areas in New York City. In the case of bilingual education, the candidates are understandably speakers of other languages and most often immigrants, since our school system rarely produces bilingual individuals. These students, with little practice in taking this kind of standardized test, and often reflecting in their written English traces of their other language, fail the NYSTCE at much higher rates than native-born English speakers. Likewise, special education shortages have driven the Board of Education to hire teachers who need consistent development.

■ *The need for an educational program for urban minority educators*

Teaching has historically been the stepping-stone to professional status for many women, minorities, and immigrants. And still today, many immigrants and minorities are interested in pursuing teaching careers. But the preparation of teachers has been generic, with little adaptation made for meeting the needs of teacher candidates who come from different sociocultural and sociolinguistic backgrounds.

Studies by Lisa Delpit (1995), Shirley Brice Heath (1983), Maria de la Luz Reyes (1991), and Guadalupe Valdés (1996) among others, have shown that adapting programs and instruction to meet the needs of minority students may indeed be essential. In *Ways with Words* Heath shows the different ways of using language in a white and black community, pointing to adaptations that schools must make in teaching those children. Likewise, Delpit and Reyes have shown that "scaffolding" instruction for minority students is necessary in process writing and whole language instruction. Although language minority students need to be engaged critically with authentic written texts, they need more guidance and support from teachers.

These important pedagogical lessons have generally not been learned by teacher education programs preparing linguistically and culturally diverse teachers. It is clear that these programs need to provide students with the best instruction and pedagogical practices for all teachers, but there are three issues that are important to prepare linguistical-

ly and culturally diverse teachers:

- Critical Literacy
- Inquiry
- Assessment

Urban Schools of Education need to bolster their minority students' critical literacy, especially in the use of standard written English and critical reading, for life and for standardized tests. The critical literacy skills needed by second dialect and second language speakers cannot be acquired when faculty simply lecture, a favorite form of pedagogical instruction in higher education. Minority students need to be provided with meaningful opportunities to read authentic texts and write extensively in and out of class. Often these students live in communities where standard English is rarely heard, where English mainstream media, including newspapers, hardly makes an appearance, where written English is often not used in billboards, businesses, and even churches and public agencies. Although students may be native English speakers, school may be the only context where they might continue to develop English literacy. It is up to the universities that work with these students to provide the context where English literacy is needed and used.

5

There are two ways of using literacy in the college classroom that are important for these students. Although our schools have made much of reading extensively, these students need practice in reading intensively. The use of authentic primary sources with difficult language, rather than textbooks with simplified language is important. Instead of a watered-down curriculum with easy readings, these students need to be confronted with very difficult texts in depth, with the instructor mediating meaning for the students.

Likewise, writing instruction at the university level generally emphasizes fluency and development of ideas. Yet, linguistically and culturally diverse students also need a good dose of what we call intensive writing instruction, with a focus on giving students the metalinguistic tools they need for analysis of their own written texts and that of others.

Today, the Internet's ways of accessing factual knowledge have significantly altered our current conception of knowledge, with added value given to analytical knowledge and the inquiry-based and problem-solving approach to teaching that develops it. Although middle-class and elite children most often go to schools that use inquiry-based educational approaches, these strategies are seldom used in the remedial and reductionist curricula to which urban poor children are exposed, with factual and superficial knowledge still stressed. Most urban teacher candidates have been products of these schools, with little experience in problem-based approaches to teaching. Urban Schools of Education need to pay particular attention to inquiry-based teaching.

Finally, there is a greater need to evaluate urban teacher candidates, not only with assessment instruments that reflect certification exams so that they can become comfortable with this type of assessment, but also in ways that give us greater understanding of their strengths and weaknesses over time. Ways of using portfolio and video assessments with minority teacher candidates need to be developed, and assessment needs to be deeply connected to the curriculum and to practices of effective teaching. Descriptive processes such as those used by Pat Carini at Prospect Archives to study children must be used in assessing the development of these students.

■ *The makings of a transformation*

Despite continued difficulties in reversing the failure rate on the New York State Teacher Certification Exam, the School of Education at LIU/Brooklyn has made great strides in the past year and a half. The School was restructured around a KEEPS Mission that reaffirms the commitment to develop urban Educators who are:

- Knowledgeable and intellectually inquisitive
- Enquiring and comfortable experiencing and pursuing inquiry
- Empathic and interested in the human capacity to develop
- Pluralistic and knowledgeable of and connected to communities
- Socially committed and working to build a just, pluralistic, democratic society

Eight new faculty members were hired in fall 1998 to help implement the mission. We hired faculty who understood the crisis we faced, and were committed to working with urban minority teachers to create equitable schools for poor urban students. Our commitment was to hire for philosophical redundancy with our mission and to increase the diversity of the faculty.

The program that we're building stems from the best practices for all teachers, but is particularly sensitive to the three issues that were identified above as critical in preparing linguistically and culturally diverse teachers:

- Critical Literacy
- Inquiry
- Assessment

6

One of the consequences of having a mostly immigrant population (from the Anglophone Caribbean, the Hispanic Caribbean, and Russia) is that many of the students lack familiarity not only with standard written English, but also with the culture of the new wave of standardized tests, emphasizing problem-solving ability. A massive effort has been mounted to assess all students in Reading/Writing and Math upon admissions. Students not meeting the minimum reading-writing and Math criteria are given a non-credit course in Textual Strategies, emphasizing the intensive reading and writing practices that were outlined above. These students are also registered for the Writing and/or Math Center. In addition, a semester-long non-credit New York State Teacher Examination Preparation course is now required.

Throughout the academic year 1998-1999, we have worked with Cecilia Traugh, a seasoned progressive educator, to create a community of inquiry with the faculty. Through our conversations with her, we are articulating our goals for our students and for ourselves. By building a common language for our work, we are making it possible for us to convey and enact our philosophy with our students.

Because we believe that reflection, research, and practice is a most important component in teacher urban education, a Family Service Center opened its doors in March 1998. The Center offers opportunity for students to engage in practice, while serving the community. At present there is a Director and three Faculty Principals, each responsible for a component: an Early Childhood/Family Education component, a Reading Clinic component, and a Speech Clinic component.

Presently, we're identifying and imagining the organizing principles and structures that are needed to support our work to prepare effective educators for urban minorities. A combined B.S./M.S. program in urban bilingual/multicultural inclusive education is being developed, reflecting our commitment to prepare teachers for *all* children in the complex diverse cities of the 21st century.

■ *The makings of the transformation of practice*

We have paid particular attention to practice, as do all good teacher education programs. Precisely because we believe that urban minority teachers need to be exposed to the best teaching practice available, we have revamped the student teaching experience around a partnership with District 15, a neighboring Brooklyn school district in a culturally, linguistically, and socioeconomically diverse area. The partnership was designed to ensure

quality placements for our student teachers, and to improve teaching practice in the District 15 schools. Our goal was to create a conversation between the schools and the university about how to educate preservice urban teachers, and how to facilitate the development of inservice urban teachers.

We began the partnership in the fall of 1998 by placing cohorts of student teachers in five schools in the district. Five full-time faculty members, the Practice Team, spend one day a week in a school supervising student teachers and developing collaborative relationships with cooperating teachers. The sustained time in the school allows university faculty to provide not only regular support to their students, but also to get to know the teachers, the principal, and the culture of the school. Each of the faculty will continue working in the same school over time, eventually becoming a member of the school community.

In addition, spending regular time in a school allows the faculty members to keep the memory of life in schools alive. The members of the Practice Team work with the faculty in the School of Education to make sure that our theoretical and practical courses relate to school reality. Our next step is to create an advisory board of cooperating teachers who help us develop new teacher education programs.

Working closely with the schools in District 15 immerses their principals and teachers in the dilemmas we face as we work to create quality teacher education programs for urban minority teachers. The partnership strengthens our efforts, and allows school personnel to be an integral part of the reform process.

7

■ *Conclusion*

A lot has been said about urban education and the needs of those children. But little has been researched about the kinds of educators needed for that population, the resources minority teachers have and those they need to develop, and the ways in which this development might take place. This paper sets the stage for further research and discussion on this topic, crucial to the survival of our nation, and especially of our cities.

As U.S. society becomes more diverse, it is not only imperative that majority educators are cognizant of the linguistic and cultural differences of other groups, but that minorities are educated to be teachers of their own and others' children in the diverse U.S. cities of the 21st century. In the segregated school system before Civil Rights, schools were separate and unequal. But African American teachers figured prominently in poor black schools, even if often their education was inferior to that of white teachers. And in the era after Civil Rights, African American and Latino teachers made a comeback, increasingly teaching in urban integrated schools. The rise of bilingual and multicultural education gave a place to teachers of color, as our society became more open and diverse.

But the situation that we face today promises to radically alter the face of schools and of the teaching profession, with the gradual disappearance of teachers of African American and Latino descent from classrooms. The hard questions have to be asked by researchers: Is it more useful to know American literature or Spanish when teaching recently arrived Spanish-speaking first graders? How important is familiarity with English-based Jamaican Creole when educating a high school junior in a Jamaican Brooklyn neighborhood? And how does knowledge of features of African American English help the writing teacher develop the written standard English of African American students? What about teacher attitudes? Do teacher attitudes matter, and is it possible to teach children of a community that is held in deep mistrust? What is the social effect of taking away professional status from minority women? What does ability to write persuasive essays in standard English have to do with teacher effectiveness? How can the teachers' bidialectism or bilingualism, and therefore their knowledge of ways of using lan-

guage in minority communities, affect their ability to teach standard English and ways of using language in majority communities to minority students? How do we know that the minority teachers' linguistic and cultural knowledge and skill do not matter when teaching minority children and even majority children? Just as minority children need majority teachers, wouldn't majority children need minority teachers and benefit from being taught about the language and culture of other groups? Wouldn't we want more of us to know more about each other? And how can this be achieved if only one group has the hold on teaching and educating?

We propose that these questions have been ignored by research for too long. We are at the edge of a precipice that can sweep us into surrendering all the lessons learned from our Civil Rights struggles, imitating foolishly other countries that have high educational standards only for the elite and middle class, while ignoring the poor and different; countries where only the native born majority teach their own, while ignoring the immigrants and refugees that increasingly cross their borders. But U.S. education is known throughout the world for its tolerance for diversity, its flexibility for differences, its access and ability to give second chances. It is known for its success in educating immigrants, and doing so even in their own languages. U.S. education is fraught with difficulty, with cracks, but as the late Lillian Weber, another progressive educator used to say, the cracks are precisely what allows the escape to create new realities, to educate in different ways, reflecting the diversity of our society. Granted, as we approach the new millennium, we need to rise to new heights, with all students being well versed in literacy, numeracy, and technology, knowledgeable of scientific inquiry and global affairs, but these heights must encompass all of us, must be broad enough to accommodate who we are as a nation, instead of ignoring the diversity in our midst. When will we ever learn that diversity in the teaching profession is a needed societal and instructional strength? And what can we learn from this journal about using our resources wisely?

8

■ *References*

- Delpit, L. (1995). *Other People's Children. Cultural conflict in the classroom*. New York: The New Press.
- Garcia, O. (1997). World languages and their role in a U.S. city. In Ofelia Garcia and Joshua A. Fishman, eds. *The Multilingual Apple: Languages in New York City*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 3-50.
- Heath, Shirley Brice (1983). *Ways with Words. Language, life and work in communities and classrooms*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Moll, Luis C. (1992). Bilingual classroom studies and community analysis. *Educational Researcher* 21: 20-24. Washington, D.C.: American Educational Research Association. Reprinted in Ofelia Garcia and Colin Baker, eds. 1995. *Policy and Practice in Bilingual Education. Extending the foundations*. Clevedon, Avon: Multilingual Matters, pp. 273-280.
- New York State Board of Regents and the New York State Education Department (1998). *Teaching to Higher Standards*. July 1998.
- Red Owl (1999). A preliminary multiple regression study of LIU/Brooklyn teacher education candidates who took the LAST 1997-1998. January 1999.
- Reyes, Maria de la Luz (1991). A process approach to literacy using dialogue journals and literature logs with second language learners. *Research in the Teaching of English* 25:291-313. Urbana, Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English. Reprinted in Ofelia Garcia and Colin Baker, eds. 1995. *Policy and Practice in Bilingual Education. Extending the foundations*. Clevedon, Avon: Multilingual Matters, pp. 200-216.
- Valdés, Guadalupe (1996). *Con Respeto. Bridging the distances between culturally diverse families and schools*. New York: Teachers College Press. ■