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Redirecting the teacher's gaze: Teacher education, youth surveillance and the school-to-prison pipeline

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Abstract

This article addresses an apparent contradiction in American teacher education that results in conflicting goals for educators. It asks: How do we prepare teachers to interrogate their inherited professional roles in the surveillance and disciplining of youth? How might teacher education inspire pre-service teachers to care more about youth who belong to populations that have been deemed “undesirable” and expendable? We critically examine the role of teacher education in contributing to the criminalization of certain youth in urban communities and the resulting school-to-prison pipeline crisis that leads too many students from the schoolhouse to the jailhouse.

Keywords: Teacher education, schooling, prisons, youth, school-to-prison pipeline, incarceration

It seems to me that whether the prisoners get an extra chocolate bar on Christmas ... is not the real political issue. What we have to denounce is not so much the “human” side of life in prison but rather their real social function—that is, to serve as the instrument that creates a criminal milieu that the ruling classes can control

—Michel Foucault interviewed by Roger-Pol Droit, 1975

Deciding exactly what social roles the young should be encouraged to play remains highly contested in the socio-political context of education. Particularly in the American context, social institutions such as child welfare, juvenile justice, and schooling—and by extension, the field of teacher education—reflect the unfinished ideological struggles between social and political forces that advocate competing visions of democracy and the related agendas of state agencies that enable different futures for particular children. Although our practice as teacher educators lies in the United States, we can point to certain eerie parallels in other industrialized nations, particularly in societies with similar histories of settlement by European colonial powers and subsequent patterns of widespread immigration. While our concern for the burgeoning problem of incarcerated youth stems from our positions as critical researchers working in the field of multicultural teacher education as it is practiced in the United States, we believe that teacher educators who work

in other contexts can benefit from—and contribute to—the perspective advanced here.

As we shall argue, we have found an under-examined link between the surveillance role played by many teachers in public schools and the over-representation of youth of color in the U.S. penal system. We surmise that similar links can be made in other societies with visible minority populations. For example, Aboriginal or First Nations people in Canada account for only 4% of that country's population but comprise almost one-quarter of the population in provincial/territorial custody (Landry & Sinha, 2008). Similarly, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2009), the imprisonment rate for indigenous Australians is 14 times higher than that of non-indigenous prisoners (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2009). Given similar social dynamics between majority and minority populations across the globe and the historic uses of schooling to manage minority populations (see Spring, 2004), our colleagues outside the U.S. should be able to contribute research that uncovers the connections between schooling in their own societies and the over-representation of minority and immigrant populations in the penal system in their local contexts.

1. Teaching teachers to resist youth surveillance

This article addresses one of the profound contradictions in teacher education that results in conflicting goals for educators who

work with the young. It asks: How do we prepare future teachers to interrogate their inherited professional roles in the ongoing surveillance, management, and disciplining of youth? How does teacher education move students to care about youth who belong to socio-economic and racial subgroups that have been deemed problematic and “undesirable?” How can teachers resist the urge to collude with the institutional processes that help to create the criminal milieu as described by Foucault in the opening quotation?

To begin to answer these questions, we critically examine the role of teacher education in exacerbating what has come to be known in the U.S. as the school-to-prison pipeline, that combination of personal and institutional failures that leads too many students on a trajectory from the schoolhouse to the jailhouse (Brown, 2007). We begin by addressing ways in which teachers are encouraged, most recently in the name of accountability, to become principally agents of surveillance and behavior management. We also explore the potential for teacher education to serve as a site of resistance to heightened surveillance, particularly of youth from dominated, marginalized communities, and possibilities for providing a counter-narrative to the “expectation of incarceration” (Meiners, 2007) for youth that have been effectively written off as problem children. In raising these questions about our field, we aim to redirect the gaze of educators away from a simplistic concern for “deviant” youth (and their management) as the problem, to a more comprehensive understanding that accounts for the intersections between state institutions, including schools, prisons, and colleges of education, and the discourses that create certain views and understandings of the roles of teachers and students. Finally, we call for renewed attention to our collective professional responsibility to promote social justice in and through education.

2. The disciplinary gaze as school tradition

As alluded to in our opening quote from Foucault (1975), we wonder about the frequently unmentioned yet powerful collusion of teachers with a broad system of youth surveillance and regulation. How might teachers more effectively resist pressures to label, discipline, and, as we shall argue, eventually contribute to the process of criminalizing certain segments of school-age populations, namely students from poor communities of color? In recent years, we have become concerned by shifts in popular views of children and youth in general. In our view, the growing presence of police and metal detectors in U.S. schools, and increasing reliance on medication to manage student behavior, suggest that the experience of school, and indeed of childhood itself, may now be understood in radically different ways compared to during previous generations.

Given the growing pressures for accountability that influence the daily work of teachers and administrators, which scholars have linked to recent economic trends towards privatization and globalization and the ideology of neoliberalism (Giroux, 2000; Lipman, 2003; Sleeter 2007), our view is that teacher educators must attend more explicitly to the intersections of these issues in our work in K–12 schools and in colleges of education. Alongside teacher educators, pre-service teachers (i.e., those who are currently training to become teachers) must be encouraged to clarify their understanding of the socio-political context of their work and the political nature of the roles they will soon take on while they fashion identities as novice teachers within an increasingly regulated and punitive system of youth-serving agencies that includes schools, law enforcement, the courts, and prisons. We believe that a critical orientation to social justice can facilitate the process of consciousness-raising and role clarification for pre-service teachers and teacher educators alike, thereby improving the chances for future teachers to connect more meaningfully with their students.

It is clear that teachers play a significant role, for better or worse, in the sorting and labelling of young people once they enter school. As Meiners (2007) documents in her recent research, disciplinary action, assessment techniques, pedagogy, and other school practices and policies all too often set in motion a series of actions that “function to normalize an ‘expectation’ of incarceration” for growing numbers of youth (p. 31). In the United States, the cumulative impact of current practices of surveillance that place children at risk for exclusion from school is nothing short of alarming. According to the National Centre for Educational Statistics (NCES, 2003) school officials meted out 3 million suspensions and approximately 1000 expulsions during the 2002–2003 academic year alone. When students disengage from (or are pushed out of) school, many are set up for failure in other ways. Increasingly, youth advocates, educators, prison activists, and others are calling attention to the escalating rates of suspension and disengagement from school in terms of a trajectory that effectively moves students from school to prison.

The discourse generated from research on the school-to-prison pipeline provides a way of framing the larger issues that result in the failure of schools to meet the needs of poor students from dominated communities. Wald and Losen (2003b) aptly describe the metaphor of the pipeline as the intersection of major American institutions that wield enormous power over the life chances of the young, namely education and the criminal justice system. In our view, the current preoccupation of school officials on behavior management and regulation reflects an age-old tension between *disciplining* and *educating* the young, dating as far back as the Enlightenment. The ways in which schools staffed by ostensibly well-intentioned teachers come to support, to actively participate in, and hopefully to ultimately reject such a system of punishment and regulation is the focus of our analysis.

As Foucault (1977) famously observed, social control has been influenced by the model of the panopticon in prominent social institutions, including in schools, mental hospitals, and prisons. Foucault described the panopticon, based on Jeremy Bentham’s 19th century ideas for prison reform, as a central tower around which prison cells would be organized, allowing for ongoing surveillance of prisoners at all times. Key to the panoptic model was the idea that the guards would remain hidden, so that prisoners would never know when they were being watched. In theory, panoptic surveillance becomes highly effective because the prisoners thus guarded—and the non-incarcerated masses that witness from the sidelines—begin to police themselves.

Surveillance and regulation, rather than punishment alone, became normalized throughout western societies as the exercise of power progressed from reliance on brute torture and physical punishment (e.g., public hangings and beheadings) during what Foucault (1975) called the “culture of spectacle” to a more “carceral culture” through which criminals were incarcerated, disciplined, and potentially, even rehabilitated. The implications of the move towards surveillance and behavior management meant, in Foucault’s view, political profit for ruling elites through the criminalization of certain segments of the populace, “political profit in that the more criminals there are, the more readily the population will accept police controls” (p. 26). Importantly for Foucault, the panoptic gaze and its emphasis on regulation influenced multiple emerging social institutions, including prisons and schools.

Educational researchers in recent years have taken up Foucault’s interest in power and disciplinary practices, and have written about the role of surveillance and behavior management in public education. For example, Noguera (2003) draws on social reproduction theory to remind us of the traditional functions of schools under the system of American capitalism, which he

describes succinctly as three-fold: (1) to sort students and determine “who will lead and manage corporations and government, and who will be led and managed by those in charge;” (2) to socialize children into the “values and norms that are regarded as central to civil society and the social order”; and (3) to “operate as institutions of social control, as surrogate parents” (p. 344). Noguera underscores how present-day students’ experience of school can vary profoundly, depending on their socio-economic and racial status. Such variations can be observed in the approaches to school discipline used with students from diverse backgrounds. According to Noguera, in the differential education designed for students *not* tracked to become managers, schools

contribute to the marginalization of such students, often pushing them out of school altogether, while ignoring the issues that actually cause the problematic behavior. Schools also punish the neediest children because in many schools there is a fixation with behavior management and social control that outweighs and overrides all other priorities and goals (p. 342).

Noguera’s analysis begins to connect the dots between discipline practices in modern-day schools, teachers’ surveillance of youthful behavior, and the increased chances for involvement with the criminal justice system for students who refuse to conform to school norms and who subvert the official agenda of conformity, accountability, and control.

3. From surveillance to incarceration

As of 2002, the USA—which prides itself on serving as the alleged beacon of liberty for the free world—incarcerated 2.1 million members of its population, by far the highest rate of incarceration of any nation on the planet (Bohrman & Murakawa, 2005, p. 112). Families in poor urban communities—especially among African Americans and Latinos—bear the brunt of the spreading grip of the prison-industrial complex. Over the last two decades, observers of the “new penology” have documented the ideological “shift from rehabilitation and reform to incapacitation and mass warehousing of surplus populations” (Feeley & Simon, 1992; cited in Sudbury. J. [ed.], 2005, p. xvi). In our view, this represents the latest phase of Foucault’s carceral culture. Others have noted with concern the unforgiving, punitive assault that specifically targets “dangerous” working class minority children (Lipman, 2003) as “public enemies” in need of containment (Meiners, 2007), positioning minority youth of color particularly as what we refer to as “undesirables.”

The origins of the governing elites’ antipathy towards racialized undesirable populations have been articulated recently for teacher educators by Noguera (2003), who draws from the insights of sociologist Wacquant (2000). In Wacquant’s analysis, lingering hostility towards undesirables can be traced to the quandary faced by ruling elites over the fate of African Americans once the institution of slavery ended. Wacquant has argued “that in the current period, the melding of ghetto and prison through various carceral strategies is the latest method devised for achieving these long-standing objectives” (p. 15), namely of creating and maintaining a pool of exploitable, cheap labor, on the one hand, and on the other, of curtailing growing demands for black inclusion in the rights and privileges of citizenship.

This history of ambivalence, if not outright hostility, towards a socially undesirable but economically useful population for American capitalism grounds our view that certain populations have come to be represented as threatening, and therefore in need of increasingly stringent degrees of social control. In the case of African Americans, once slavery was abolished and the economic

justification for the presence of huge masses of Africans vanished, the problem for governing elites became what to do with (and how to manage) the surplus population. Based on his analysis of the status of African Americans, Wacquant argues that African Americans now occupy “the first prison society of history” (p. 121), which represents the fourth phase of the U.S. social order, following from the first phase of slavery (from 1619 to 1865, respectively the year of the first importation of Africans to the end of the Civil War), through the Jim Crow era of legal segregation (1865–1965), to the third phase of the urban hyperghettos (1914–1968).

Similarly Latinos, who, combined with African Americans, account for one-quarter of the U. S. population and more than three-quarters of incarcerated persons in American prisons, have experienced similar phases of repression throughout history. For example, inter-country relations in the western hemisphere have been characterized by American domination, including genocide, territorial encroachment, and colonization in Mexico and Puerto Rico (Acuña, 2000; Fernández, 1996). Moreover, there exists a historic legacy of rounding up and removing Latinos from the USA. One million Mexican Americans were deported during the 1930s, blamed in the American popular imagination for the misery of the Great Depression (Cockcroft, 1996; Durand, Massey, & Zenteno, 2001; Kanellos & Esteva-Fabregat, 1994). More recent manifestations of anti-Latino sentiment are evident in the proposal to construct an imposing two thousand mile wall (euphemistically referred to as a “fence”) along the USA–Mexican border. The presence of military personnel and private militia along the American southern border ostensibly prevents admission or reentry for so-called “illegals” and others while restrictions at the northern border with Canada are significantly more lax. Importantly, containment—including the use of detention and incarceration—have always been used to control dominated communities labelled as undesirable, whether they are African American and Latino, or American Indians who were historically relegated to reservations, and Asian Americans, as evident in the case of the internment camps for Japanese Americans during the Second World War (Spring, 2004; Takaki, 1993; Zinn, 1995).

It is worth remembering, too, how education has historically played a prominent role in various responses to the social problem thus defined. While space constraints do not permit a detailed examination of the contentious history of schooling for African Americans and Latinos, suffice it to say that education has been championed as the liberator and equalizer for communities of color, at the same time that it has been used as the mechanism for their assimilation and social control, depending in large measure on *who* controlled the schools set up for the descendants of slaves, colonized communities, and immigrants (Spring, 2004).

Moreover, we note that students and their families are not merely passive victims of processes of control done to them by others; dominated communities of color have always attempted to resist, subvert, reform, and in some cases take over those processes and institutions which impact the conditions of their lives and their chances for survival (Spring, 2004). These countermoves against social control reverberate in contemporary classrooms and, in our view, should also be taken up in teacher education programs if teachers are to address effectively the real lives of students; hence, our call for increased attention to issues of social justice in teacher education.

4. Confronting the school-to-prison pipeline

As teacher educators, we share with other educational researchers an interest in issues that link minority youth and schooling, such as gaps (i.e., in achievement and opportunity) and drop-out rates, sorting and “tracking” students by their perceived ability, and the

over-representation in special education classes of youth from poor and dominated communities. Nevertheless, our view of youth has expanded to consider the fate of school drop-outs once they leave school, and even more importantly, what happens to them *during* their trajectories away from school participation while still in attendance or at least on the official school enrolment rosters.

In May 2003, the Civil Rights Project at Harvard University convened a conference for researchers and youth advocates on the School-to-Prison Pipeline (see Wald & Losen, 2003a). One finding from that conference indicated that “racial disparity in school discipline and achievement mirrors racially disproportionate minority confinement” in the larger society. Our interest as researchers in the school-to-prison pipeline arises from our drive to understand our own complicity, as teachers and teacher educators, in positioning certain students on previously unexamined trajectories. We are confronted with such questions as: What roles do we play, perhaps inadvertently, in the school-to-prison pipeline? How might we as teachers transform those roles to take up work that more actively counters negative student trajectories? What do teacher educators need to understand in order to cultivate an awareness of and commitment to interrupting pipeline dynamics among pre-service teachers? How can the field of teacher education advance counter-narratives that resist the criminalization of youth from dominated communities? How might we more clearly connect the stark parallels between the over-representation of students of color in special education classes, school discipline cases, the child welfare system (e.g., in foster care and other out-of-home placements), juvenile justice cases that result in detention, and the ultimate confinement of imprisonment?

As Wald and Losen (2003b) have pointed out, the same punitive mentality that results in the over-representation of youth of color who land in trouble at school extends to the juvenile justice system. African American youth are six times more likely to be confined than white youth for the same offence; Latino youth, more than three times (p. 10). Beginning in the 1990s, nearly all (i.e., forty-five of the fifty) American states passed laws to make it easier to try minors as adults. According to Wald and Losen, between 1983 and 1997, four out of five youth confined to detention or correctional facilities were minority youth (*ibid.*). In our view, the growing reliance on zero-tolerance approaches to discipline (i.e., no second chances for youth offenders) translates into diminishing adult understanding of and patience for the mistakes and unwise choices made by the young. The combination of the racism that sustains a view of certain segments of the populace as undesirable, combined with adult ageism towards youth in general coalesces in collective fears that target youth of color in particular.

The 2005 report of the Children's Defense Fund on “Dismantling the Cradle to Prison Pipeline” identified three major risk indicators that set poor young Americans on the trajectory to incarceration: (1) early involvement in the child welfare system, (2) educational failure, and (3) involvement with the juvenile justice system (Murray, 2005). By linking the treatment of minority youth to recent concerns in the U.S. over increased efforts towards racial profiling (the practice of targeting visible minorities for scrutiny by police or security officials at airports), Meiners (2007) flags the complicity of schools in facilitating the transition of certain students into the school-to-prison pipeline:

Clearly, the grotesque over-representation of youth of color caught up in school discipline policies and in the category of special education illustrates that educators and educational institutions are not exempt from a kind of “racial profiling” endemic to our police systems. Rather, racialized surveillance *prefigures* the practices undertaken by police, customs, and other punitive institutions, and I

argue that the establishment of these practices in schools functions to seemingly launch, for individuals caught in these punitive practices and for those who participate and observe, the processes of racial profiling (p. 41).

Without question, schools play a significant role among an array of adult interventions into the dire circumstances facing youth in the USA. The contradiction is that such well-intentioned interventions too often exacerbate the problems faced by youth rather than provide solutions. For example, in their study of the intersections between high-poverty high American schools and the juvenile justice system, Balfanz, Spiridakis, Neild, and Legters (2003) documented ways in which youth-serving institutions frequently work at cross purposes. Ironically, in an era of cutbacks in social services for those most in need, rather than easing their transition to productive and responsible adulthood, “incarceration has become America's social program for troubled youths” (Murray, 2005).

5. The role of teacher education in the school-to-prison pipeline

The links between schools and the prison-industrial complex are becoming increasingly clear. Thus far escaping the inquiry of many educational researchers is the role that teacher education plays in legitimating and reifying the school-to-prison pipeline. Although there are positive aspects of teacher education that do effectively prepare teachers to serve poor students and students of color, there are three detrimental aspects that, from our perspective, contribute directly to the school-to-prison pipeline: the lack of student diversity in U.S. teacher education programs; the over-emphasis on classroom management and control, particularly when it comes to urban youth of color; and the superficial treatment of issues of diversity within American teacher education.

As the American school-aged population has become more racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse, the population of pre-service teachers enrolled in traditional teacher preparation programs has become increasingly monocultural and monolingual. Currently, 85% of all teacher candidates in the USA are white women, and the composition of teacher education programs can best be characterized by an “overwhelming presence of whiteness” (Sleeter, 2001). Moreover, the majority of pre-service teachers comes from suburban communities and from middle or upper middle-class families (Chizhik, 2003). As a result, pre-service teachers are often disconnected from and unfamiliar with the sociocultural realities of the urban poor. We do not argue that white, middle-class, female identities are a problem *per se*. However, research suggests that many women in U.S. colleges enact and actively try to preserve identities as “good girls” (Galman, 2006; Holland & Eisenhart, 1992), which often revolve around conforming to traditional Western gender norms that maintain the status quo, as opposed to challenging injustice and oppression based on age, race, gender, or social class. Despite the highly politicized nature of schooling, American teacher education programs have continued to primarily attract conformist “good girls.” At the same time, they have created curricula and experiences that, for the most part, reinforce mainstream identities while failing to help students to develop more critical stances regarding education, particularly for populations that have been traditionally underserved by schools. Moreover, U.S. teacher education has done relatively little to help these pre-service candidates become more critical consumers of educational policies (i.e. high stakes testing or scripted “teacher-proof” curricula) that impact their work in classrooms. This is not to say that men or women of color in teacher education programs are necessarily more critical or make better teachers. Nor do we

deny that everyone in the academy, regardless of background, has been socialized to perform racialized and gendered identities in ways that tend to reinforce unequal power relations. However, it is imperative that teacher education as a field addresses the intersections of race, gender and class, and how these are manifested and reproduced in schools of education. “Good” girls (and boys, too) in pre-service programs need encouragement to interrogate conformity to dominant oppressive norms, and to understand, if not identify with, students often represented as “bad,” that is, as dangerous, deviant, and undesirable.

Pre-service teachers often enter higher education with preconceived notions about poor students of color; teacher education, for the most part, does little to change those limited perceptions. In fact, there is evidence to suggest that field experiences and coursework devoid of a systematic analysis of race and class may do more to reinforce stereotypes than to challenge them (Melnick & Zeichner 1995; Vavrus, 2002). Commenting on the influence of teacher education on pre-service teachers, Banks (2006) notes,

Educational reform is impeded by the misconceptions and lack of knowledge about ethnic and racial groups that teachers learn in the wider society. Much of the popular knowledge that teachers acquire is either reinforced or is not challenged by the mainstream knowledge they acquire in their undergraduate university education and in teacher education programs. Educators often accept mainstream knowledge and resist other knowledge forms because it reinforces the social, economic, and political arrangements that they perceive as beneficial (C.E. Sleeter, personal communication, 2003). The assumptions and values that underlie mainstream academic knowledge are often unexamined in the school, college, and university curriculum (p. 769).

When unchallenged, these dominant “good” identities allow teachers to continue to see themselves as the norm and construct student diversity as a problem (Achinstein & Barrett, 2004), thus resulting in the hyper-surveillance of poor, deviant students of color that can lead to school exclusion, and, as data have demonstrated, set them on the pathway to prison.

A major emphasis within the literature regarding teacher education for diversity in the USA has been to prepare teachers to more effectively educate students of color (Dilworth, 1992; Grant and Sleeter, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Vavrus, 2002). As teacher educators who lead courses that address issues of diversity, we (the authors) have struggled in our own work with the challenges posed by helping pre-service teachers who are often disconnected from, and unaware of, the socio-cultural realities of communities of color, and who, at times, appear resistant to acknowledging the roles they play in perpetuating, let alone combating, oppression. Nevertheless, we have through our teaching and research encountered rare individuals, particularly white women, who perform their identities in ways that allow them to meaningfully connect with, learn from, and teach people of color from dominated communities (see Raible & Irizarry, 2007).

At the same time, we advocate for teacher education programs to more accurately mirror the demographic characteristics of American society at large and the school-aged population in particular. If the national cohort of pre-service teachers and teacher educators were to more accurately reflect U.S. society’s demographics, approximately one in four individuals participating in teacher education programs would be people of color, and one in five would come from a home where a language other than English is spoken. While it is important to educate all pre-service teachers to develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to work effectively with students of color, we believe that teacher

education would be significantly enhanced if, paraphrasing the words of former U.S. Secretary of Education Richard Riley, “our teachers looked more like America” (Riley, 1998). That is, given the increasing diversity among public school students in the USA and the shortage of teachers of color and multilingual teachers, it behooves our profession to pursue diversity within its ranks with a renewed sense of urgency and vigor.

The ability of teacher education to prepare educators to improve the school experiences and outcomes for students of color is predicated partly on its ability to recruit and prepare a more diverse cadre of teachers. At the same time, it is imperative that we recruit individuals from a variety of backgrounds who have connections to individuals and communities of color. We call for the recruitment of pre-service teachers who demonstrate a vested interest in restructuring schools so that they can become spaces where students and teachers engage in a process of liberation, as opposed to the reification of hegemony. Today’s students need teachers—from all backgrounds—who understand the dire stakes involved in liberating communities from rigid domination and state control. We emphatically do not argue for only minority teachers for minority students. Instead, we call for teacher education programs to better prepare *all* teachers to participate in community struggles for self-determination and survival, for family preservation rather than separation of families (for instance, through detention and foster care), in direct opposition to the prison-industrial complex by deliberately interrupting the school-to-prison pipeline.

Second, as a consequence of soaring teacher attrition rates in urban districts, city schools in the United States tend to have a disproportionately high percentage of novice teachers, and are more likely to feel the adverse impacts associated with the national teacher shortage (Howard, 2003; Ingersoll, 2001). Research conducted in the 1980s in the area of new teacher development posited that many novice teachers cited classroom discipline as their most pressing concern (Veenman, 1984). Approximately a quarter of a century later, novice teachers continue to cite classroom management as their greatest weakness (Wang, Odell, & Schwillie, 2008). Recent literature suggests that teachers’ struggles with classroom management may in fact be a result of problems with curriculum and pedagogy and the challenge to engage learners of diverse backgrounds (Feiman-Nemser, 2003). This perceived need to gain control of the classroom may be exacerbated by the presumption among many teachers in impoverished schools that urban contexts tend to be more violent, chaotic, and dangerous places in which to work.

Representations of communities of color as inherently problematic are often reinforced in teacher education programs through formal experiences, such as coursework and internships in actual classrooms. In our own work with pre-service teachers, we have become aware of instances where faculty and mentoring teachers have warned pre-service teachers of the potential dangers that may await them in urban schools. For example, on several occasions, students in our programs have reported receiving negative messages from faculty prior to entering their urban field placement sites to “travel in groups,” “leave by 3:00” and to “protect your belongings.” Pre-service students may enter diverse settings with an array of unexamined stereotypes, for which they then seek—and often find—validation, failing to acknowledge the more hopeful counter-narratives that also exist in these settings. Thus, many field placement experiences may do more to reinforce stereotypes about racialized others than to improve teachers’ ability to work in cross-cultural contexts (Sleeter, 2001).

We assert that the day to day struggles of teachers to effectively work with students of color in urban settings are constrained under a framework that reflects an official discourse of accountability, and are further compromised by teachers’ inability to reconcile egalitarian notions of schooling (e.g., schools as the great equalizer) with actual institutional structures that reflect a legacy

of racism, classism, ageism, and other forms of oppression that impact their work. For example, many pre-service teachers articulate an intellectual appreciation and respect for diversity, yet still refer to members of diverse cultural groups as culturally deficient or inferior. Gaertner and Dovidio (1986) refer to this phenomenon as aversive racism. Quite simply, aversive racists firmly believe they do not discriminate against others on the basis of race while simultaneously unconsciously bearing feelings of uneasiness towards people of color. Moreover, aversive racists often adopt ideologies that “justif[y] group inequalities [and] reinforce group hierarchy,” thus “producing and justifying discriminatory behavior” (p. 619). This is particularly troublesome because, since pre-service teachers may uncritically believe that the proverbial playing field is level, they may fail to implicate themselves in their own ineffectiveness in the classroom. Additionally, there may be no incentive for pre-service teachers to change their beliefs or practice without carefully guided and facilitated opportunities for critical reflection.

In sum, because comprehensive, anti-racist multicultural education is marginalized within teacher education programs, often taking the form of an individual course that is disconnected from internship experiences, and because multicultural education is rarely infused throughout the curriculum (Vavrus, 2002), there is as yet untapped potential for teacher education programs to do much more to transform teachers’ ideologies and pedagogy in meaningful ways (Ladson-Billings, 1999). Too many teachers leave colleges of education ill-prepared to meet the challenges of successfully promoting the academic, linguistic, and personal growth of students from diverse backgrounds. Under-prepared teachers may in fact do more harm than good, particularly by adopting uncritically the roles and practice of surveillance and behavior management that bolster the school-to-prison pipeline dynamic.

6. Tapping the potential for a more critical teacher education

As they are currently constructed, teacher education programs do little to prepare teachers to respond to the educational crisis that results in the school-to-prison pipeline. The crisis, of course, is bigger than the pipeline. In fact, from a Foucauldian perspective as noted earlier, colleges of education often prepare teachers to become agents of state-sponsored youth surveillance and managers of deviant behavior, which effectively shapes the educational experiences of students, especially poor students of color, in ways that may serve to push them away from engagement with school. Nevertheless, we hold onto hope that schools can become sites of anti-racist resistance where critical pedagogy moves from rhetoric to practice, resulting in the establishment of multiracial and intergenerational coalitions for social justice based on genuinely caring relationships between teachers and students. Given the far-reaching influence that educators potentially can have on future generations, teacher education potentially has a significant role to play in this transformation of schooling. Key to activating this potential is a commitment to developing a more comprehensive analysis of the role of race, gender, and other differences within the field, and how these dynamics play out in the intersections between institutions such as education, law, child welfare, and the juvenile justice system.

Turning again to the work of Meiners (2007), whose insights illuminate the connections between race and gender in schools, we find support for our view concerning the twin tasks for teacher education. The first addresses the dwindling number of teachers of color in the field, and the need to recruit pre-service students from the very communities from which urban public school students come. The second is developing a comprehensive approach to expanding the ranks of pre-service students currently predominating in the field (namely, white women), so that more teachers come to self-identify as allies in the struggle against racism, and make

explicit connections between the work of teaching and ongoing community struggles for social justice.

Regarding the latter task, the multicultural education and racial identity development of white educators have been written about extensively in recent years. Nevertheless, the work of Meiners (2007) is once again pertinent to the present discussion. Meiners draws on the racial contract theory of philosopher Mills (1997) to suggest ways in which educators might interrogate race in order to develop clarity about their subjectivity as teachers who happen to be white:

The racial contract constructs an *epistemology of ignorance*, or a deliberate scaffolding to protect white folks from a material awareness of the flawed institutions, discourses, and laws created by white supremacy (p. 95).

Meiners describes how the epistemology of ignorance results in what she calls white cognitive impairment that prevents whites “from knowing the effects of white supremacy they themselves have constructed” (p. 95). Exposing the links between race and gender, Meiners suggests that teacher education can also deconstruct its basic gendered construction, i.e., the “good girl” identities of many teachers. She argues that

shifting the foundational idea of the concept of the teacher, drawing on other archetypes not the lady, and highlighting teachers and educators whose work, identity, and definitions of teaching radically expose the sexual and racial foundation in education, is one possibility. The field can take responsibility for initiating change to actively challenge the archetype that is currently shaping the profession, and to work to recruit new bodies into the profession (p. 53).

Our interest in the multicultural identity development of pre-service teachers reflects one of the field’s primary aims, namely to prepare educators to work effectively in 21st century classrooms. The population of students in the USA has become increasingly more diverse in the past few decades. More than 40% of children enrolled in K-12 schools are students of color, and one in every 5 students comes from a home where a language other than English is spoken (National Centre for Education Statistics, 2007). It is therefore crucial for pre-service teachers to become aware of issues of diversity *before* they enter their multicultural classrooms. For example, addressing the disparities in disciplinary actions taken against students of color, Banks et al. (2005) maintain that teacher education must help pre-service teachers grapple with the inequities they will inevitably face in schools:

If we are to create schools where all students have opportunities to learn, teachers must know how to be alert for these kinds of disparities and aware of how to provide classroom environments that are both physically and psychologically safe for all students (p. 242).

Again, teacher education programs must facilitate the development of critical consciousness, with particular regard to multicultural issues such as race, gender, and class among preservice teachers.

As American society has grown more diverse, the impact of the school-to-prison pipeline has become far-reaching, if not staggering. Between 1980 and 2000, the national inmate population quadrupled, while more than 700 new prisons were built (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2004). The link between schools and prisons becomes more pronounced upon examination of data regarding the educational attainment of current inmates. Approximately three-quarters of state prison inmates, 60 percent of federal inmates,

and almost seven out of every ten inmates in jail have not completed high school (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2006). While it would be inaccurate to assume that all high school drop-outs will commit crimes, it is fair to conclude that, of the people who receive convictions and serve time in prison, the overwhelming majority will not have received an adequate education. Many observers have noted a direct correlation between educational failure and participation in the penal system. As such, with the alarmingly high dropout rates among students of color, it is no surprise that there are now more than three African Americans in jail for everyone in college (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007). The ratio for Latinos is similarly high, at 2.7:1, while the rate for white students is, not surprisingly, inverted, with more than three white Americans in college for everyone serving time in prison (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007).

7. Conclusion

As critical teacher educators working in the United States context, we aim to encourage more pre-service students to effectively connect with, and forge bonds of solidarity with, poor students of color in order to counter the dynamics that result in widespread school failure, which, as we have argued, too often results in incarceration. An explicitly anti-racist orientation among teachers can be cultivated through the transracialization of teacher identities (Raible & Irizarry, 2007). Transracialization may enhance the multicultural development of individual teacher identities. Yet it is important to bear in mind that transracialization only occurs when close relationships between individuals of different races enables genuine relationships of caring to unfold over time (Raible, 2005).

The related development of what Banks et al. (2005) refer to as socio-cultural consciousness can also facilitate closer connections between teachers and students from diverse backgrounds. Teachers who develop socio-cultural consciousness understand that the life experiences of students (and teachers) can profoundly influence their worldviews, which are understood as anything but universal. Banks and his colleagues argue further that teachers not stop merely at greater awareness, but take responsibility for working actively as agents of change within schools:

Teachers need to be aware of how the formal and informal systems of the school operate to construct opportunity and how to participate in school-level change processes that call attention to organizational needs and help develop a supportive culture school-wide (p. 255).

We remain hopeful about the potential for genuine intercultural connectedness to emerge when teachers demonstrate care and respect for students and their lives and concerns beyond the walls of the classroom. We bear in mind the implications of a recent study that found school connectedness, "defined as a student's feeling part of and cared for at school," to be linked with lower levels of substance use, violence, suicide attempts, pregnancy, and emotional distress among young people (cited in Wald & Losen, 2003a, p. 12). We view such connectedness as crucial for success in education, and we seek to help pre-service teachers to value connectedness, and to cultivate strategies that foster mutually enriching teacher-student bonds.

We invite teachers, both pre-service and in the field, along with other teacher educators, to rethink their connections to (or disconnections from) urban poor students and their communities. Teachers can be encouraged to meet students on their own turf, and to see them as partners in the educative process, rather than as passive recipients of charity and good intentions. It is simply too easy for educators to fall in step uncritically with the ideologies

and social practices that feed into the school-to-prison pipeline. For this reason, critical consciousness about our personal roles in larger institutional structures becomes vital to the ongoing struggle for social justice and democracy. In light of persistent racism and its effects in schools during the present era of accountability, our work focuses on how we collectively (i.e., educators, youth, and their families) might effectively develop cross-cultural, intergenerational, anti-racist alliances, in schools, and within and between communities. This, we have come to believe, is absolutely necessary in order to turn present nightmares into more hopeful futures.

Although it has been estimated that African American boys today have a one in three chance of going to jail before they attain thirty years of age, we refuse to abandon these and other minority youth to such a pessimistic foregone conclusion. Given the dire implications of the "cradle-to-prison pipeline" (Edelman, 2007) of which the school phase is but one (although hardly insignificant) link, we anticipate that more and more educators and families will of necessity find ways to work together to counter this dangerous trend. If schools are to become sites of transformational resistance, teacher education can and must insist on personal introspection and critical analysis as key elements of effective programs. Moreover, teachers must learn to redirect their gaze from the hyper-surveillance of poor students of color that results in viewing them problematically, and begin to see the ways in which institutional structures can either facilitate their oppression or support their liberation.

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