African Americans in Schools: Tiptoeing Around Racism

CAROL ROZANSKY-LLOYD—UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA

Abstract

This qualitative study describes the perspectives of teachers, administrators, and students as they experienced a project intending to improve the mathematics and science achievement of African American students in an urban school district. Using interview data, I examine and share instances, both explicit and implicit, of educational racism that hindered improved academic achievement of these students. These include a focus on retention, rejection of the project since it only focused on black students, the expectation that previous educators do a better job, a deficit model of students, and systemic educational issues. The current national increased focus on the standardization of curriculum and assessments is described as naïve within this context.

Introduction

"If you look for African American students achieving low, you may see that. But maybe you're expecting them to achieve low, too. It's like writing a detention or referral beforehand. You're just assuming that kid is going to be bad that period or day. You can't do that." (Middle school math teacher)

An African American high school student explained that when her cousin received an A on a test, the teacher accused her of cheating. "The teacher was kind of racist." (S–10–07–F)

These are quotes from informants participating in a funded project designed to increase the achievement of African American students in mathematics and science and reduce the significant achievement gap between them and all other groups of students. Though there were positive changes over the duration of the project, these changes were small and did not seem to permeate the entire district. Informal conversations with participants suggested that tensions related to the project's goals existed.

Theoretical Perspective

When particular groups of students are disenfranchised by a school system, integrating them into an existing system is inadequate (Lloyd, 2003). Likewise, merely applying teaching methods emanating from "scientifically based research" as outlined in No Child Left Behind (U.S. Department of Education, N.D.) is a naïve solution to the economic and educational disparities present in this and other school districts across the United States. Freire (1993) explains, "The solution is not to 'integrate' them into the structure of oppression, but to transform that structure so that they can become

Dr. Carol Rozansky-Lloyd is a professor of education at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. She teaches classes in literacy education, urban education, and critical pedagogy. She has collaborated for several years with an urban school district to improve the teaching and learning of marginalized students.

'beings for themselves'" (p. 55). First, however, we must know what that structure is. "To exist humanly, is to *name* the world, to change it. Once named, the world in its turn reappears to the namers as a problem and requires of them a new *naming*" (p. 69).

In this paper, I *name* educational attitudes, beliefs, and practices that have contributed to the disenfranchisement of African American children in a Midwestern school district. The *name* that identifies these attitudes, beliefs and practices is *educational racism.*

The focus of this paper is on some of the obstacles to the success of African American students by exploring this educational racism. Specifically, I examine teachers' beliefs related to African American students' mathematics and science achievement through their descriptions of themselves and colleagues, through their students' eyes, and through the perspectives of others involved in the project. This is essential because teachers' beliefs about the subject matter, about teaching, and about student learning have a profound effect on their instructional practices and thus their students' achievement (Thompson, 1992; Tobin, 2001).

Beliefs about struggling students and related educational practices that result in such gaps in opportunities and therefore achievement are indicative of a deficit ideology, the notion that when students do not demonstrate the same types of achievement as the "norm," they must have some deficiency which requires remediation (Ladson-Billings, 1995). It ignores inner-city African American children's "learning in order to survive the cruel and stark reality of their community" (Macedo, 1994, p. 141) and the rich and abundant funds of knowledge in their families and communities (Moll, 1993).

An aside...

Macedo and Bartolomé (1999) make the point that identifying gender, race or ethnicity as "monolithic identities" obfuscates the dominant white ideology that results in "asymmetrical distributions of power and privilege among different ethnic and racial" (p. 5) and socioeconomic groups. My focus on African Americans as an entity reflects the focus of the project. However, the project administrators believed and tried to convey the message that if educators altered their beliefs about children and teaching in the ways the project was designed to accomplish, then *all* children, regardless of race, ethnicity or socioeconomic status, would be positively affected.

Methodology

The context

This school district includes the urban areas of a Midwestern city, with African Americans comprising as much as 90 percent of some of the city's neighborhoods. At the time this data were collected, voluntary bussing was in place to desegregate its schools. (Though court-ordered bussing had ended, this school district had continued bussing to maintain desegregated schools.)

There are just over forty-five thousand students enrolled in prekindergarten through twelfth grade, with African Americans comprising the largest minority group, 31.2%, in the district. African American students are overrepresented in the special education population and are underrepresented in advanced placement classes: Only 9.7% of students in these upper-level classes are African American. These trends are consistent with those found nationally (e.g., Clewell, Anderson & Thorpe, 1992; Sable, 1998).

When one of the states' U.S. Senators learned of the large achievement gap in mathematics and science, he mobilized the school district to apply for external funding. The resulting funded project achieved its goals of increasing African American achievement in mathematics and science, and enrollment in upper level courses in these disciplines (Mitchell, Nichol, & Flowers, 1998). However, after the completion of this five-year project as well as four years of a subsequent funded project also focusing on mathematics and science, there continues to be a wide gap between African American students and their Caucasian counterparts: A lower percentage of African American students enrolls in the mathematics or science pipeline to upper-level/college preparatory classes than white students, and, of those who do enroll, a lower percentage finishes with a grade of C or better.

The research

This research is part of a larger qualitative study that investigates some of the complexities related to differential mathematics and science achievement that is highly correlated with students' race. I use a phenomenological approach (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992) through interviews with several different participants in the educational setting, attempting to understand the meanings of this achievement disparity through the

subjectivities (Holstein & Gubrium, 1994), or multiple perspectives, of my informants. I do not assume to provide representations of all stakeholders here, but rather a sampling.

Informants

I interviewed four project administrators; the U.S. senator who played a major role in bringing this issue to light and obtaining funding; twenty-seven elementary, eleven middle, and sixteen high school teachers; and twelve high school students. Teachers were employed in three high schools, three middle schools, and seven elementary schools. All students were enrolled in summer mathematics courses at one high school. Some were taking an accelerated course to get ahead or make-up a poor grade; others were taking a review course to improve their chances of success in their fall semester mathematics class. (See Table 1.)

Table 1. Demographics of Informants

Pool of Informants	Total	Race*	
		White	African American
U.S. Senator	1	1	
Project Administrators	4	3	1
Elementary Teachers	27	20	7
Middle School Teachers	11	10	1
High School Teachers	16	11	5
High School Students	12	0	12

*Informants were either white or African American; no other racial group was in this sample.

The first group of teachers I invited to participate in this study came from project administrators' suggestions. Because of their frequent interactions with teachers, they were able to provide names of teachers who were supportive of the project as well as some who were not. I did not know which teachers fit into which category. I met with all I could reach and who agreed to meet with me. At the end of each interview, I employed snowball sampling (Cresswell, 2005) by asking for recommendations of other teachers to talk to if they had not spontaneously suggested someone. When the data became repetitious, I stopped seeking new informants (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992).

Data collection

I conducted all interviews, using a set of questions that addressed similar issues but had slight variations depending on the group. I asked open-ended questions about student success in mathematics and science, and specific questions about African American low achievement. Depending on the nature of their responses, I would probe for more information or clarification, or skip prepared questions when their replies had already addressed a subsequent question, employing a semistructured format (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992).

I met with most teachers individually in their classrooms after school or during planning periods. Two high school teachers and two middle school teachers were interviewed in pairs. I interviewed a few teachers over the telephone. I met with one project administrator at his home; I met the others in their respective offices. I met with the Senator in his local office. All of these interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed.

I interviewed high school students in groups of two or three in an empty classroom. Though some students' responses were more elaborate than others, I easily elicited responses from each by asking a reluctant participant for his or her ideas (Fontana & Frey, 1994). I took notes during these interviews and later transcribed them.

Focusing on racism

One recurring theme that many informants talked about was racism in the school setting. Some informants used the term "racism" or "racist" almost immediately. Others waited until the end when I asked if they had other ideas to share. Some would describe words or actions that *I* believed were racist. Since this was one recurring and important theme (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), I decided that racist practices in these educational settings would be the focus of this analysis. I did not want to tiptoe around racism, but, rather, expose it, *name* it, so that we could work to eradicate it.

(Please know, however, that there are several examples from the larger study that demonstrate cultural sensitivity and pedagogy that resulted in the success of some teachers' African American students.)

Findings: Racist Educational Practices

Identifying racist educational practices

I read the transcripts several times, looking for instances that could be construed as indicating educational racism. I began asking myself, "What are racist practices?" Some are blatant, such as when teachers talked about counselors who would not consider black students' classroom success but would only look at standardized test scores, or when teachers accused colleagues of having lower expectations of black students than they had of white students. But what about high school teachers blaming elementary teachers, suggesting that the project should not have included the high schools until students were ready for high school curricula? As one administrator told me, "You don't see institutional racism happening. It's like a cancer and it's difficult to indicate to people that they are ill" (Admin 1).

As I read, reread and thought about this data, I began to add more instances of racist practices. It seemed to me that beliefs, attitudes and behaviors that discounted a particular group of students at any stage of their educational experience were racist in that they denied a particular group of students equitable educational opportunities. In addition, these were practices that abdicated teachers' responsibilities toward these students.

After repeated readings of these interviews, I identified five major categories of educational racism,

after the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). I further divided two of these into sub-categories.

1. The district should retain students who have not mastered grade-level curricula; then I can do my job effectively.

2. By focusing on black students, I am supposed to ignore the rest. Therefore, I reject the purposes of the project.

3. Other people need to be responsible first; then I'll do my part.

   a. Parents are not demonstrating responsibility toward their children; I can't help out until parents do their part.

   b. Previous teachers (mainly elementary teachers) need to make sure students learn what they need to learn before I can be an effective teacher.

4. The child has a deficit.

5. The system perpetuates low expectations.

   a. Students, especially African American students, are often denied opportunities to enroll in high-level, challenging classes.

   b. Teachers have low expectations of certain groups of students (in this case, African American).

What informants said about educational racism

In my identification of educational racism, I sometimes report on what educators or students said about educators. In other words, I use *their* identification of racist practices. But in other instances, I infer racist beliefs, attitudes, or practices on the part of the informants themselves.

The district should retain students who have not mastered grade-level curricula; then I can do my job effectively. This was a repeated complaint of secondary teachers.

When asked for his response to secondary teachers' complaints about social promotion in the lower

grades, an administrator said,

> Do we retain people in life? The school's a microcosm of life.... [R]etention in and of itself is not a good idea. It's pretty typical of the way we deal with a lack of academic achievement at the secondary level; they blame the elementary teachers. The elementary teachers blame the administration rather than taking the personal responsibility to teach children.... We give the child an "F" and require him to take the course over again. That's like saying, "I got hit by a car; I want to go back and do it over again." (Admin 1)

By focusing on black students, I am supposed to ignore the rest. Therefore, I reject the purposes of the project. For the most part, when this was brought up, teachers described themselves as having this attitude, portraying it as reasonable. In contrast, one African American high school teacher saw this attitude as racist. He became more and more frustrated as he described his colleagues' increasingly negative attitude toward the project. I asked him to elaborate.

> [Teachers say,] "Why can't I work with some of the other kids? Why can't I work with the white kids? Why can't I work with the Samoan kids?" It's not a thing about black, white or yellow. It's a thing about, "Are you willing to give time to help educate all kids, including our Afro-American kids? And if you have that kind of attitude about the program, what kind of attitude do you have in the classroom?" There's a straight parallel. At least it speaks to me as, if you're not willing to teach all kids in a program where you're getting paid, what do you do in your classroom? (A–5)

The U. S. Senator found that even though he believed that the program was successful, some of his constituents did not like where the money was being spent. He explained,

> [H]ere it is appropriate to justify what we are doing for the little backlash. We got some nasty phone calls in [this office] after the program was announced. [The calls were from p]eople in general saying, "You're always doing things for blacks." That's because they need it the most.

Other people need to be responsible first; then I'll do my part. It was not uncommon for teachers, especially those in the upper grades, to point to others as having primary responsibility for students' success.

These "others" were usually parents or previous teachers.

Parents are not demonstrating responsibility toward their children; I can't help out until parents do their part. A high school science teacher expressed his frustration about lack of parental support this way:

> There are two groups that aren't being held accountable – parents and kids. Now you [referring to me] raised your kids with certain expectations. "You will go to school. ... And I expect solid grades, ... whatever your academic level might be." And I'm sure that's how you raised your kids and I raised my own kids. And I don't see that. [Not just with African American kids, but] I've got all kinds of students that there is nothing coming from home and there are no expectations and the kid isn't being held accountable. (A–1)

An elementary teacher described why she thought these students were behind the others. Her comments equate readiness for school with typical experiences in white, middle/upper class homes.

> I think that people need to realize that when you are dealing with lower income, these kids don't come to school knowing their alphabet. They don't come to school with a lot of preschool backgrounds. ... [A] lot of them don't come from homes where even the skills that you teach at school like the reason to learn to read or just reading for enjoyment with your family is enforced in the home. So when they come to school, they are behind. ... I think from [age] zero to two, if those kids are not given any kind of basis to learning or even to watch Sesame Street.... You don't hear a lot about Sesame Street or the more academic-based programs. I think that is a key reason why [they are behind]. (I–7)

Project administrators took issue with teachers' parent-blaming. According to one project administrator,

> The educator has a tendency to blame the parent. Attendance? What are you [the teacher] personally doing about it? Have you ever isolated a student who has missed class twenty times and sat down and asked them why they missed class so much? ... You would have to look at yourself as a possible reason [for his multiple absences] and most teachers are not willing to do that. (Admin 1)

Another administrator said that the teachers try to

simplify the issue by saying, "'If the parents would provide support everything would be fine.' That's what the group from [the funding agency] said would happen" (Admin 2).

Previous teachers (mainly elementary teachers) need to make sure students learn what they need to learn before I can be an effective teacher. It was not uncommon for teachers to put the major responsibility of student success on previous teachers. For example, a high school physics teacher said,

> I think programs like [this] are too little too late
> .... You do not take a kid who in seventh grade, has
> a third grade math level, and tell a teacher, "You've
> gotta bring this kid up to snuff in chemistry," be-
> cause the kid doesn't have the skills.... What's
> happening is we're starting with kids way behind
> and not doing anything successful right at the start
> [in elementary school] to get them up to snuff. (A–
> 2)

Another teacher at this same high school expressed a similar sentiment. This chemistry teacher explained her frustration with the project.

> I think the theory is good, but for us to jump in
> when we have these kids that are fifteen, sixteen
> years old, and all of a sudden we're going to work
> miracles and we're going to change their study
> skills? I know you can't give up and I don't want to
> give up on kids. What I'm saying is, I think that
> [this project] should be a project that grows and
> moves with the students.... The district should con-
> centrate on kindergarten, first and second graders
> the most [at first] ... so that by the time we get them
> in high school, ... they will be brought up by [this
> project]. (A–3)

The child has a deficit. Some teachers believed that the problem was that some of their colleagues saw the child as being primarily responsible for his or her lack of achievement. An African American high school mathematics teacher explains,

[A] lot of the staff doesn't buy into [the project]...
[because] ... just that traditional racism.... [I say that]
because they're blaming the child for being behind.
They're not blaming other things.... The situation was
there. I think it should be worked on to correct it and
not try to put the blame on the child because they were
born into the world as it is. ... I think they should ad-
dress it and try to help overcome it. (A–4)

Another African American high school teacher thought that some African American students learn best from a particular kind of instruction because, "Most of them, I think they feel intimidated because most of their classmates and some of the staff, ... not intentionally though, but they kinda like make them feel like they're slow" (C–3).

The system perpetuates low expectations. Teachers, students, and administrators brought up this issue. It showed up in discussions of placement into high-level, challenging classes, and in explicit accusations of teachers having low expectations of African American students.

Students, especially African American students, are often denied opportunities to enroll in high-level, challenging classes. A high school science teacher seemed to contradict herself when explaining whether the African American students were succeeding.

> I think, for the most part, we have created a good
> system of allowing the African Americans to suc-
> ceed in everything – in economics, math, science,
> and so on. There are some elite classes that elimi-
> nate some kids and unfortunately they are in place
> for a reason, but they do eliminate some kids. [There
> are honors and advanced placement] classes....
> [One class] is an English class for only the kids
> who have done well in the past. Those kids have
> chances to get on computers all of the time. We have
> kids in sophomore [low-level] sciences that have
> never used computers much. These kids have just
> one more thing to overcome. (B–4)

An elementary teacher described what happened to one of her former African American students upon reaching high school.

> One of my former students that was in senior high
> school said to me that they discouraged [her] from
> taking the higher levels of math and science; not
> the teacher, the counselor, ... because the counse-
> lor didn't think that this child was college mate-
> rial. This child was placed in ... a general science
> class rather than biology or chemistry.... The par-
> ent ... talked to the counselor and told them that,
> "My child is going to college" and they wanted
> their classes that they were placed in to be classes
> that they would need for college. (I–1)

Teachers have low expectations of certain groups of students (in this case, African American students). (The responses in this category connect with the previous one in that they provide some explanations of why students are often denied access to learning opportunities.) Some of the high school students believed that

teachers had lower expectations of African American students than of whites, but this was not a prevalent belief of the students I interviewed. (Most African American students attributed success to parents who cared.) One girl explained low African American achievement by saying that when students hear so often that they cannot do the work, they begin to believe it. Another student, meeting with me in another group, voiced a similar belief. "If people say they can't do something, then they stop and don't try" (S–08–05–F).

One tenth grade student believed that she had the same education as white students. However, she described her cousin's experiences quite differently. When her cousin received an A on a test, the teacher accused her of cheating. "The teacher was kind of racist" (S–10–07–F).

Another girl (S–10–08–F) in the same group also thought that her experiences had been positive, but that there were some teachers who are like "those of the past" who mistreated black students. The third girl in this group explained African American students' low success rate in the following way: When people "see a black person do well, they think something is wrong with them" (S–10–09–F).

A middle school science teacher reminds us that students are children who need to be told that they can succeed. Her high expectations point out her awareness of the existence and negative impact of teachers' low expectations.

> [Students] know very well they can get by with doing nothing. Why should they do anything? They're kids, you know; they're not old enough to make that decision. They have to be simply told, "You will do this." And that's one reason I do have a certain amount of success. I know, for example, my lower level student will work a lot harder for me simply because I don't even assume that they're not going to do something.... I don't ever let them think that there is any other way. "This is just the way it's going to be, you're going to do this assignment just like everybody else." (D–1)

An African American middle school counselor saw low teacher expectations across contexts.

> I think one of the big problems is that science and math are reflections of the overall attitude of the way people perceive our kids, African Americans. Two kids, one black and one white, can be [doing] the same exact thing and nine times out of ten, the African American kid will be nailed for it. It is per-

ceived that the African American kid had to be doing something wrong.... This all has to do with the perception of the teachers that are teaching our African American children. I have a strong problem with teachers that teach African American children who really don't like them. (D–5)

A middle school mathematics teacher explained that the project helped him notice how teachers often had low expectations.

> I never looked at [how African American students had lower achievement.] If you look for African American students achieving low, you may see that. But maybe you're expecting them to achieve low, too. It's like writing a detention or referral beforehand. You're just assuming that kid is going to be bad that period or day. You can't do that. (H–1)

An African American fourth grade teacher also talked about low expectations:

> It starts in elementary school. African American children are not expected to excel in anything, including math and science.... [F]or the average African American ..., the expectations from the teachers are not fair. They are not expected to do well in school; they are not expected to behave properly. They are not expected to show respect. (I–8)

Discussion

In the midst of a project designed to reduce inequitable education for African American students, educators and students described beliefs about these inequities and how they are able to exist. On the one hand, several informants specifically identified and named racist educational practices, contrasting them with equitable educational practices. They described themselves or others as self-efficacious (Tschannen-Moran, Hoy & Hoy, 1998); in other words, they believed that teachers could teach low-achieving children in ways that would increase their achievement. Though they acknowledged the systemic beliefs and practices of low expectations toward African American students, they described ways to teach and counsel students that testify to their high expectations and consequent high student achievement. They identified ways in which educators could build on student knowledge, even if that knowledge were outside the realm of official knowledge (Apple, 1999), to connect to sanctioned curriculum.

Conversely, my interpretation of several informants' beliefs is racist, routine, and a matter of course. Rather than question their responsibilities as educators, they identified causes that were outside of themselves. Several teachers resented having students who lacked the prior knowledge they expected in their classrooms, whether due to district promotion policies or perceived student deficits. Teachers often viewed the project as one that singled out African American students rather than one that encouraged them to critically examine their beliefs and practices. Systemic issues were also identified: African American students were less likely to be placed in high-level classes and teachers had lower expectations of these students.

Conclusions

Denying some students opportunities to learn denies them cultural capital, that which provides access to the knowledge and resources allowing them to reach their goals (Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Without it, they are likely to remain socially, economically and politically subservient to others. Knowledge is increasing at a rapid pace along with an interdependence on science and technology across multiple disciplines. Thus, the paucity of equitable opportunities to learn mathematics and science further disenfranchises those groups that are marginalized (Ladson-Billings, 1997; National Black Caucus, 2001; Williams, 2003). To the Senator whose concerns initiated this project, students' low achievement was "the economic equivalent of a death sentence."

Viewing blacks as inferior is part of our history. Educational racism is nothing new. But we live in a time in which we often behave as if that racism does not exist. When we still have teachers who do not expect their black students to succeed, when counselors do not encourage these students to take challenging courses, when we segregate through tracking, and when teachers abdicate their responsibility for all students' education until students' previous teachers ensure mastery, then we exclude black students from high-quality education. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) argue that this is analogous to our historical denial of *any* education for blacks. Instead, we must admit to and confront educational racism.

In a conversation with Donaldo Macedo about the "pseudoscience" that attempts to define blacks as inferior to whites, Freire (in Macedo & Bartolomé, 1999) says,

What is needed is not yet another study like The Bell Curve *designed to rationalize the further abandonment of blacks. What is needed is the courage to transcend the deficit orientation supported by a suspect and racist scholarship hidden under the guise of scientism, so we can move beyond the pipe dream of a democratic education and create the reality. However, in order to make education democratic, we must simultaneously make the society within which it exists democratic as well. We cannot speak of democracy while promoting racist policies. (p. 90)*

Children come to school with much knowledge. Many children who do not succeed in schools come with knowledge that is *different* from what educators expect. To move from a deficit perspective, educators must view these students through a lens of cultural difference (Purcell-Gates, 2002). This can be the starting point or the connection to further learning. When educators do not listen to students, students do not listen to educators (Delpit, 2002). On the other hand, there are numerous examples of teachers who effectively teach previously low-achieving African American students (Delpit, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1995). They demonstrate respect for African American culture in general and for their students in particular. They know how to implement effective practices and alter those practices when they are not successful (Ladson-Billings, 1997; Obi & Obiakor, 2001).

Paradoxically, the impact of teachers' beliefs and the presence of educational racism are ignored at a time when the national focus is on improving education. The federal legislation of No Child Left Behind ignores these systemic problems. It sees scientifically based research as *the* solution to students' low achievement. This research is defined as one that adheres to a strict "medical model," i.e., research that is designed as a controlled experiment. All other forms of research are branded as "fads." The U.S. government's website touts the success of scientifically based studies that have proven how best to teach reading as the model for determining the best ways to teach mathematics and science (U.S. Department of Education, N.D.). Yet this model of reading research has been severely criticized by many researchers in the literacy field because it ignores high-quality, rigorous qualitative research; often misrepresents quantitative research (e.g., Allington, 2002); and results in the deprofessionalization of teachers as they become conduits or implementers of prescribed programs or teaching practices (Tierney, 2003).

The urban neighborhoods in which most of these students lived were impoverished; most of these students were poor (based on their qualification for free or subsidized lunches). The focus on scientifically based research and on schools as the major sites of change abdicates our responsibilities as citizens to examine and transform the social, economic and political inequities that exist in high poverty schools.

Fine (1997) suggests that we need to alter our perspective; we need to examine the privilege of whiteness rather than the inequities that result from color. If we consider the hierarchies that are created and perpetuated by and in schools, then the advantage in participating in those highest rungs are relational. In other words, one's value is comparative. Students can only be better than, more powerful than, more worthwhile than others when there is a hierarchy. As long as more African American students are perceived and treated as if they have deficits, are tracked into low-level classes, and are afforded fewer opportunities to learn than whites, then not only will they in fact demonstrate low achievement, but white students will remain at the top: Racism perpetuates the high status of whites.

Final Thoughts

I am left with a gnawing question: As a white woman, did I miss racist practices? I have no choice but to look through my own lens. As I recall how my identification of these practices kept expanding, I began to wonder how African Americans would see these interviews. I invite you, the reader, to consider how our subjectivities as researchers and educators impact where we look and what we see.

The students in this study offer hope. They focused a lot on family, believing that families need to encourage their children. They talked about students needing to select friends who would support their academic endeavors. And they also had suggestions for educators, suggestions supported by extensive research in another inner-city, low-income setting (Corbett & Wilson, 2002). They wanted teachers to be available to help them before or after school because "not everyone can afford a tutor." They suggested that teachers should help struggling students, pulling them aside and taking time with them. Teachers should get to know their students: "Go to their house, see their environment, spend a day with each other." "Teachers need to bond with students and come on as friends first."

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