

Race, Social Class, and Educational Reform in an Inner-city School

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Drawing on an assessment of reform efforts in one school in an urban ghetto in a large district in the Northeast, this article describes processes and events that illustrate how social manifestations of racial and social class status can combine to vitiate efforts at school reform. I argue that three factors—sociocultural differences among participants in reform, an abusive school environment, and educator expectations of failed reform—occurring in a minority ghetto where the school population is racially and economically isolated constitute some of the powerful and devastating ways that concomitants of race and social class can intervene to determine what happens in inner-city schools, and in attempts to improve them.

It has become increasingly clear that several decades of educational reform have failed to bring substantial improvement to schools in America's inner cities.¹ Most recent analyses of unsuccessful school reform (and prescriptions for change) have isolated educational, regulatory, or financial aspects of reform from the social context of poverty and race in which inner-city schools are located.² This article will discuss failed school reform from a somewhat different perspective. Drawing on an assessment of reform efforts in one school in an urban ghetto in a large district in the Northeast, the article describes processes and events that illustrate how social manifestations of racial and social class status can combine to vitiate efforts at school reform.³

I will first describe how sociocultural differences between reformers and the parents and teachers, and between reforms and the student population, created distrust among participants as well as inappropriate curriculum and instruction for the students. These sociocultural disjunctions made the successful implementation of change extremely difficult. A second factor I will discuss is the relationship between educators and students in the school. The lived professional culture of many teachers and the administrators in this school (for thirty years one of the poorest in the city) has deteriorated into a dehumanizing, abusive stance toward the student population, whose families lack the clout to ensure better treatment. This professional culture, and the students' active opposition to it, also contributed to the failure of attempted improvement projects. The final phe-

nomenon to be discussed is the expectation of school staff that educational reform was not going to succeed. Almost all staff members felt that reform efforts were futile; most also felt that even if the reforms could be made to work, the resulting changes would have very little impact on the children's lives or futures.

I will argue that these three factors—sociocultural differences among participants in reform, an abusive school environment, and educator expectations of failed reform—occurring in a minority ghetto where the school population is racially and economically isolated constitute some of the powerful and devastating ways that concomitants of race and social class can intervene to determine what happens in inner-city schools, and in attempts to improve them.

BACKGROUND

During the first two decades of the twentieth century, the schools in the city in which the research site is located (Newark, N.J.) were nationally recognized for their innovative attempts to serve an urban clientele, which included children of the industrial working class, the middle class, and the business elite as well as the poor.⁴ However, in the early 1920s wealthy families began moving to the suburbs, followed in the next forty years by most of the city's middle class. Between 1917 and the early 1960s rural blacks, most of them with no financial resources and little formal schooling, moved up from the South and into the city. By 1961, the district schools were majority black and poor.

Until 1971, with the election of a black mayor and a black city council, the schools continued to be staffed by white administrators and teachers, and the city government was composed primarily of white ethnic personnel. No major educational initiatives were taken by government or educational leaders between 1922 and the 1971 election of the first black mayor. The system deteriorated. A 1940 assessment of the district schools noted that low achievement and dilapidated schools were common, and that measures to meet the needs of the city's poor (most of whom in 1940 were still white working-class ethnics) must be taken.⁵ By 1968, a state-sponsored citizens' report found that the school system was in "an advanced state of decay," and advised that the state run the city schools and provide massive assistance.⁶ No such action by the state was undertaken.

The state did, however, begin to closely monitor the continuing decline of the schools in its largest city. A series of state-sponsored evaluations was undertaken, and in 1984 the state mandated that the district administration take action or the district would lose its accreditation.⁷ In 1989, in response to a state threat of takeover, the district's leaders initiated a four-

year program of reform in eight schools in the central section of the city, including the school that was the focus of the research to be reported here.

There were reasons to hope that this reform effort would bring some success: Millions of dollars had been donated by major corporations and foundations for projects in the eight schools (seven feeder schools and one high school). Twenty-five corporate, higher education, and local citizen groups provided plans and personnel.

Moreover, the reforms were organized and directed by representatives of the city's majority black population. In 1989 (as now), the superintendent was African-American, and the board of education was African-American and Hispanic; the assistant superintendent with responsibility for the reform initiatives (who is no longer with the district) was black, and her staff consisted of two blacks and a Hispanic. Then as now, African Americans were the majority of significant players at most levels of the school system and in the city government.

It was possible that local control by blacks would be a catalyst of change, making the schools more responsive to black students: The administration could, for example, choose reforms that empowered members of their own constituency—significant parent involvement if not community control could be a focus. A celebration of minority cultures could infuse the curriculum. Or the district could, given the studies that show black students' difficulty with standardized tests, present a serious challenge to government reliance on these tests as measures of achievement and funding.

The majority of classroom teachers in the district are African-American.⁸ Perhaps these black educators could reverse commonly held low expectations for minority students from low-income households; perhaps they could understand and nurture their charges, laying the educational groundwork for academic success.⁹

However, and conversely, it was also possible that, as Edward Said, Albert Memmi, Frantz Fanon, and others studying oppressed minorities have shown, victims of race and class exploitation sometimes grow to mimic the behavior and attitudes of their oppressors, and themselves victimize others of their own group over whom they have power.¹⁰ It becomes important, then, to note here that some black educators, as products of past racial (and perhaps class) discrimination and exploitation, may have internalized beliefs about their students that mimic attitudes held by the white dominant society but that work to the detriment of children of color from poverty backgrounds.

Before proceeding further, I want to acknowledge the potentially controversial nature of statements by a white middle-class researcher concerning race and the possible effects of race on teaching, learning, and school

reform. Perhaps it appears that I am stereotyping black teachers by asserting that some could excel with their students because they are black. Perhaps to expect a black administration to challenge the white power structure is to misplace the burden and is unfair. It is possible that these and other statements will be seen as racist.

It is important to remember, however, that the meanings or attributions of such terms as *race* (or gender, sexuality, or social class, for that matter) are not absolute. They are socially constructed. Groups and individuals develop from their experience and points of view denotations of these terms that make sense to them. I—as a white professional—discuss race in this paper in ways that may differ from the constructs others with other experiences might use. My interpretation of events, therefore, may differ from those of others: Where I will describe a black teacher, for example, as abusive of black students, others might see culturally sanctioned “strict discipline.”

Moreover, I do not intend to disparage “all black teachers,” “all white principals (or white teachers) in inner-city schools,” “all low-income parents,” “all middle-class consultants,” or any other group, by inferring that all members of any group act in the manner to be described here. I report behaviors that I observed.

MARCY SCHOOL

The research site, a K–8 school, will be called Marcy School.¹¹ Marcy was considered by some personnel to be a good school (“It’s a happening school” [assistant superintendent]; “It’s a very good school—there aren’t drugs all over it like in some of the other schools” [drug counselor]). Others considered it to be “in the middle—not great, not terrible; right at the mean” [school psychologist]. No teacher or administrator considered it among the worst schools. As the principal said, “We may have problems, but we’re no way the worst.”

The student body is 71 percent black, 27 percent Hispanic, and 2 percent Asian and white. All but 3 of the 500 students in the school are from families with incomes below the poverty line, and qualify for free lunch. (In the district as a whole, 63 percent of the students are African-American, 26 percent are Hispanic, and most [78 percent] are poor, and qualify for free lunch.)

The majority of the students at Marcy School live in nearby housing projects. During the period of this study, the school had an official homeless rate that fluctuated between 5 and 20 percent. A recent psychological assessment of a random sample of forty-five Marcy students found that they were plagued by the problems that result from extreme poverty: chaotic lives, neglect and/or abuse, poor health histories and chronic health prob-

lems, emotional stress, anxiety, and anger.¹² Drug use and AIDS have claimed the parents of a large (but uncatalogued) number of the students, and teachers comment that many of their students are being raised by relatives and friends or, as a recent newspaper article stated, are growing up “without any apparent adult supervision.”¹³

During the period of this study, the principal of Marcy School was a white Italian male (a former shop teacher) and the assistant principal was a Hispanic woman. Sixteen (64 percent) of the twenty-five classroom teachers were black and a sizable minority of these stated in interviews they had grown up in poor or working-class neighborhoods of this or other cities. Six classroom teachers (24 percent) were Hispanic, and three (12 percent) were white (almost all of both groups are from working-class backgrounds; all but two now live in the suburbs).

Most (61 percent) of the specialists and nonclassroom teachers in the school (basic-skills teachers, special education teachers, art and gym teachers, psychologist, social worker, learning disabilities specialist, etc.) were white. The rest were African-American. All the teacher aides in the buildings were black (with the exception of several Hispanic) women, and were parents of students or former students; all lived in the neighborhood, most in nearby housing projects. Perhaps half of the aides had themselves attended Marcy School. Almost all janitors and kitchen workers were black long-time residents of the city.¹⁴

SOCIOCULTURAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN REFORMERS, PARENTS, AND SCHOOL PERSONNEL

The following portions of the article discuss ways in which I see the racial-class histories and characteristics of participants in the reform process affecting attempts to change Marcy School. This section describes ways in which the sociocultural distances between reformers and parents and school personnel interfered with the implementation of several projects.

The assistant superintendent in charge of the reform, a black female Ph.D., called occasional meetings of her “collaborators”—twenty-five representatives from groups or agencies with projects in the eight schools. The collaborators included administrators and professors from three area colleges and universities (including me); executive directors of two regional philanthropic foundations; representatives of three statewide special-interest groups (Educate America, Cities in Schools, and One to One—a mentoring program started by a black congressman); the assistant director of a coalition of church groups; members of the city’s chamber of commerce; an activist minister; representatives of three national financial corporations with headquarters in the city; the president and vice-president of a large

consulting firm from a highly affluent suburb; and the director and representatives of the National Executive Service Corps, a group of retired white business executives who volunteer their services in city schools.

All who attended these meetings, and who took part in projects in the schools, were professionals; five (in addition to the assistant superintendent) were African-American and the other twenty were white. The field notes that follow are excerpted from a meeting that suggests how sociocultural differences between two of these reformers and low-income minority parents at Marcy School manifested themselves.

Two retired white executives from the National Executive Service Corps have been brought in by the assistant superintendent to advise parents at Marcy School on how to collaborate. The men are meeting with the Parent Corps in the library. Mrs. Betty Williams, a black woman of about sixty, former parent and student at Marcy, head of the Parent Corps, and a community leader in the housing projects where she and the four other parents (four black women and one Hispanic male) live, are sitting around a rectangular table. On the other, far side of the room, around a smaller table, sit the two executives, wearing expensive-looking suits, smiling across the room at the parents, and holding pencils above long yellow pads.

The five parents are seated so that only Mrs. Williams faces the two men across the room. At no time during the discussion does she or any of the other parents look at the executives.

One executive smiles broadly and asks the group: "We each had our own company. We've had a good deal of experience. What problems do you have that we—with our background—could help you with?"

Mrs. Williams responds, "Maintenance are our only problems. We've gotten everything done except the bathrooms. And we're fighting for equipment. I fought for two years to get a gym floor. I went to this school. We had all kind of equipment here. Now the kids don't have nothing to do in the gym. [Several parents nod.] We're going to send letters to parents so kids'll wear uniforms for gym. We go to the board meetings. The eighth graders don't know how to play kickball! We got taught that in gym. We were so amazed. They didn't know how to play kickball, so we teach them."

Retired white executive, "But [pause]—if there's anything we can do for you, we'd like your suggestions."

Mrs. Williams ignores his question and says to the parents, "I'm going to the dentist—to get me some teeth. And then I'm *really* going

to eat!” (She then talks to the parents about an upcoming assembly in which she will give certificates to parent volunteers.)

Retired white executive intercedes: “What are your plans for getting more parents [referring to the fact that the Parent Corp has only eight parents]?”

Mrs. Williams says, “We *have* a lot of parents. We found that this is the way we get parents: In the morning I stand by the door and tell them they can talk to me about anything.” [She again speaks to the group at her table about the upcoming assembly.]

The retired executives look at each other, smile again at the parents, and stop asking questions. They sit quietly at the back of the room during the rest of the meeting and Mrs. Williams does not acknowledge them again.

The social gulf between the parents and the reformers that appeared to me to impair communication and joint planning at this meeting was never breached. During the subsequent months neither the white executives from the corporate world nor the black and Hispanic parents from the projects were able to utilize each others’ skills. Commentators have long pointed to the fact that differences between social backgrounds and language can impair interaction and trust.¹⁵ Other factors (such as inexperience) certainly contributed to the executives’ lack of expertise in working with the parents, but even this lack of experience can be attributed in part to the enormous social and cultural gulf separating the two groups. Nothing came of the executives’ attempted involvement in the parent group, and they terminated their visits after several months.

A similar social distance separated many teachers (most of whom, as noted above, were African-American, and who stated in interviews they had grown up in poor or working-class families) from the two consultants directing the largest reform project, “Training in Shared Decision Making” for school-based management. This project was run by two blond, expensively dressed consultants based in an exclusive suburb twenty-five miles away. In part because of their blond, suburban “look,” the consultants were called by teachers “the all-American kids.”

On several occasions these consultants complained to me that the teachers and administrators in this district “are just like the kids. They don’t even know how to *talk* about collaboration. And they want immediate gratification. If they don’t get it, they want to quit.” The teachers also complained to me that they thought the two consultants were “too suburban”: “They have no idea what city schools are like. They don’t know what we’re up against.” “They don’t know the kids!” A number of teachers complained

to the assistant superintendent that the consultants were racist, and had made racist comments. The assistant superintendent told me she had agreed with the teachers, but that she had counseled the teachers, "We have to work with them despite the racism. They have a lot to teach us [about cooperation]."

The professional development project was resisted by both teachers and administrators as "too abstract," and "not geared to city schools."¹⁶ In part because of teacher complaints of racism and the perceived inappropriateness of the consultants for the city's schools, the board of education rescinded permission for the consultants to continue the project in shared decision making after the second year, and it was never fully implemented in the eight schools.

Middle-level management employees (both black and white) from the nearby headquarters of two national corporations in town participated in a tutoring program at Marcy and two other elementary schools. In two schools the administration refused to cooperate with them, saying they were not equipped "to deal with the kids." In Marcy School the tutors quit because they said "nobody was interested in the students getting any tutoring" from them. Referring to middle- and upper-middle-class helpers in the reform effort (such as the groups of executives, as well as graduate students from a university in New York City), a Marcy teacher stated: "They come in the schools and they can't handle the kids. We have to train them and monitor them. It takes too much time." Another said, "They have no idea of the *situation* we have here! They just get in the way."

As these examples indicate, social distance arising in part from lack of mutual experience and knowledge of each other in people of different class and racial backgrounds can impair communication, trust, and joint action between reformers and school personnel, can foster an incompetence that arises in part from this lack of knowledge, and can in these and other ways hamper the implementation of educational improvement projects. In the examples presented here, teachers and parents resisted the efforts of reformers, and several improvement projects were vitiated.

SOCIOCULTURAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN REFORMS AND THE STUDENT POPULATION

I asked the assistant superintendent who had decided which projects would be part of this reform effort. She said that she, members of the board of education, a union representative, and a parent representative had taken a weekend retreat together in June of 1989 and had chosen the projects that would be attempted. I asked whether what she and they chose differed in any way from what the state had mandated in recent regulations. "No, we

chose the exact same things,” she said. “We chose what is raising scores across the country: school-based management, ungraded primary, all-day kindergarten, departmentalization of the middle grades, programs like whole language and cooperative learning. We ordered all new textbooks in math, science, reading, phonics, and a whole language series.”

I asked if any of the reforms responded to the fact that most of the school children were African-American. “No,” she said, “although the superintendent and I are black nationalists—well, I was a pan-Africanist, but we chose what was fundable.” I asked if any of the reforms responded to the poverty of the children. “No,” she stated again, “just the parent forums [informational meetings]. A lot of our parents are young, and disenfranchised.” I then inquired if any of the reforms had anything to do with the students’ black dialect (or, more accurately, “inner-city dialect,” since all the students seem to speak it—blacks, Hispanics, and the few poor whites as well). “No—but that does get in the way. They can’t express themselves.”

I press, “Why not choose reforms that respond in some way to the children—at the least a multicultural focus to curriculum, for example?” She responds, “It wouldn’t be politically do-able. Education is as much about politics as it is about kids. You have to be aware of the larger bureaucratic system you’re working in. The old-boy network, they’re white men, and that’s where the money is! You have to go to them for money to do things. What you do has to be acceptable to them.”

What I would like to suggest is that these and other reforms that were chosen (see below) have little if anything to do with this district’s students and the cultural and economic realities of their lives, and in part because of this sociocultural inappropriateness, the reforms actually impede the students’ academic progress and thereby preclude reform success.

One of the reforms initiated by the board of education in 1989 was an attempt to enforce teacher accountability by mandating that instruction be based on the new textbooks, and that these texts were to be used “on grade level”—for example, fifth-grade texts used with all fifth-graders, despite the fact that the majority of students in most classrooms are reading and computing well below grade level. A recent state report directed district teachers to adhere closely to those texts. Both state and district mandates include directives that teachers are to reteach and retest students on any skills not passed on the quarterly tests devised by the publishers of the reading and math series.¹⁷

Teachers complain bitterly about the “on-grade-level” policy, stating that it is impossible to teach students from textbooks they cannot understand. “They can’t read the books and they’re labeled failures before they even try!” was a typical complaint.

There are additional ways in which this reliance on mainstream texts and workbooks to teach students marginalized by poverty and race interferes with their achievement. An examination of the texts revealed that despite an occasional story featuring a minority character, the texts are a microcosm of white middle-class interests and situations. Teachers state that the stories in the reading and language series, for example, “have nothing to do with the kids, they hate them, they think they’re boring and stupid.” Exclusive use of these texts and the continual testing and retesting of the skills in them mean that there is no room for (for example) curriculum about black and Latino history (although the district has produced excellent curriculum guides in this area). No teacher of the twenty-four in the school I queried supplements the written curriculum with black studies in a systematic way except—to varying degrees—during black history month. Two years ago high school students at two city high schools demonstrated (unsuccessfully) to get a black studies curriculum in use at their schools.

The children I interviewed at Marcy School knew very little about black history. I interviewed twenty-five nine- to thirteen-year-olds at the school, and only eight knew who Martin Luther King, Jr., was. Of these, five stated they had heard about him or other figures in black history from family members. More knew about Malcolm X because of the recent movie (“they have T-shirts and hats about that,” said one twelve-year-old).

However alienating a curriculum that does not concern them may be to students, and however frustrating trying to study a book that is too difficult for them may be, there is another way in which the curriculum impedes the progress of the students. This is the fact that the texts are written in standard English, a dialect that, because of their extreme marginalization and isolation from the mainstream, almost none of the students speak.¹⁸ As Joan Baratz argued in 1970, the fact that the texts continually reject nonstandard dialect as inferior provides a continual insult to nondialect speakers.¹⁹

Not only is the standard English in written materials an insult to nonstandard dialect speakers; according to a large body of research it also interferes in important ways with reading achievement.²⁰ This interference is caused in part by the subtlety of the differences between standard English and nonstandard English. Joan Baratz and others demonstrated that it is extremely difficult to learn to read a language you do not speak, and that reading achievement can be significantly retarded by a reliance on texts whose syntax and phonetic structure differ from the structures of one’s own language. Conversely, reading comprehension increases significantly when one learns to read from texts printed in one’s native tongue.²¹

In 1987, Eleanor Orr demonstrated fundamental ways black dialect can interfere with mathematical thinking in educational contexts, where math-

emational thinking is governed, in textbook and in most pedagogy, by standard English language and forms of thought.²² She argues that not only do the subtlety of differences and the lack of familiarity with terms impede mathematical understanding, but that outright conflicts of black dialect terms with standard English terms also interfere. Orr demonstrates that the grammars are distinct, the lexicons overlap; and—significantly—the unconscious rules that govern syntax in black dialect often conflict with and cause interference with standard English, which uses different rules.

One of the many kinds of mathematical problems encountered by the black dialect speaker involves the conflicts among standard and nonstandard English expressions used to compare parts of objects or amounts (partitive comparative expressions):

<i>Standard English</i>	<i>Nonstandard English phrases used to express the standard English expression</i>
half of	two times less than
half as large as	two times smaller than twice as small as half as small as
half as much as	half less than
half as fast as	twice as slow as half as slow as

In some cases, the terms in which black dialect speakers think are the inverse of what they read in the math textbooks. For example, in an expression like “half as much as,” the expression is in the vocabulary of both languages—the students’ language and the language of the texts—but with opposite meanings. The confusion that can occur is substantial. Orr demonstrates how such confusion over the meanings of standard English mathematical expressions can also affect scientific reasoning:

In a chemistry class a student [who speaks nonstandard dialect] stated that if the pressure was doubled with the temperature remaining constant, the volume of a gas would be “half more than it was.” When I asked her if she meant that the volume would get larger, she said, “No, smaller.” When I then explained that “half more than” would mean larger, one and a half times larger, indicating the increase with my hands, she said she meant “twice” and with her hands indicated a decrease. When I then said, “But ‘twice’ means larger, two times

larger,” again indicating the increase with my hands, she said, “I guess I mean ‘half less than.’ It always confuses me.”²³

When the teacher attempting to teach speakers of nonstandard dialect from books written in standard English is also a speaker of nonstandard dialect, as many teachers are in the district under discussion here, the confusion can be compounded.²⁴

Despite the curricular reforms—new textbooks, departmentalization, mandated instructional changes, and state and district regulations that attempt to align instruction with basals and other textbooks—the children’s achievement scores have not increased. The standardized scores of the students at Marcy School (and at the other seven schools in this, one of the poorest wards of the city) are (as they have traditionally been) among the lowest in the district, and they declined between 1988 and 1992. District achievement scores are among the lowest in the state, and are considerably below national medians.²⁵

The teachers, black and white, are in the unenviable position of being asked to impart a white, middle-class curriculum, written in a language that differs from and interferes with the students’ (and many teachers’) own language and that in most cases is presented to students in textbooks that are too difficult for them to fully comprehend. The situation certainly fosters student failure, and—consequently—the failure of reform to raise achievement. Moreover, the frustration engendered by the students’ low achievement has the potential to worsen classroom relations between teachers and students.

RELATIONS BETWEEN TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

Teachers face an extremely difficult pedagogical situation at Marcy School. In addition to the curricular and instructional mandates and circumstances discussed above, teachers confront classrooms full of anxious and angry students. The desperate lives most of the children lead make many of them become restless and confrontational; many are difficult to teach, and to love. This section first discusses interactions I observed between black personnel and students, and then those of white staff.

It was apparent to me that some black teachers care deeply about their students: For example, one young teacher at Marcy School prays over her class every morning and evening, and prays each day for each of her students. Another teacher in the building takes homeless students home to live with her whenever she can. Another coordinates a clothing drive in the spring, and food baskets at Thanksgiving.

Most African-American teachers I interacted with during my work in the school also, however, expressed deep frustration in dealing with their stu-

dents. Perhaps fueled by this frustration, these black teachers are—to varying degrees—abusive of their students. (I will argue below that most white teachers also exhibit—to varying degrees—systematically abusive behavior toward their students.)

During the ten months in which I spent a full day each week working with teachers and their classes, I heard a tirade from black teachers of what seemed to me to be verbal humiliation and degradation, directed at students. For example: “Shut up!” “Get your fat head in there!” “Did I tell you to move [talk; smile]?” “I’m sick of you.” “He’s not worth us wasting our time waiting for.” “Act like a human being.” “I’m going to get rid of you!” and “Excuse me!” said with what sounds like withering contempt. I heard one particularly abusive black male teacher tell a girl her breath “smelled like dog shit,” and her clothes “smelled like stale dust.” A sampling of other, not atypical, comments I overheard includes:

You’re disgusting; you remind me of children I would see in a jail or something. (Black teacher to her class of black and Hispanic first-graders.)

Shut up and push those pencils. Push those pencils—you borderline people! (Black teacher to his class of black and Hispanic sixth-graders.)

Your mother’s pussy smells like fish. *That’s* what stinks around here. (Black teacher to black fourth-grade girl whose mother is a prostitute.)

Janice Hale-Benson argues that a cultural norm of harsh discipline exists among African-Americans, and thus verbal expressions that a white observer might perceive as abusive are not so perceived by African-American teachers or students.²⁶ As one black teacher explained to me, “It’s what they’re used to. They wouldn’t listen to us if we didn’t yell and put on a mean face. They know it’s only our school voice.” An older black teacher explained, “You can’t treat these kids nice. They don’t deserve it.” Then, referring to a beginning teacher who had taken her class to the museum and had been asked to leave because the students were “touching everything,” the older teacher said, “Why did she take them on a trip? They don’t deserve to go to the museum! They don’t know how to act!”

On eight occasions when I was working with teachers in their classrooms I saw black teachers, none of whom was considered an unusually harsh disciplinarian, smack a student with some force on the head, chest, or arm as if it were a routine occurrence. On numerous occasions I saw teachers grab students by the arm and shake them. No one reacted to these actions. I also witnessed two severe beatings by parents or guardians while a teacher or the school disciplinarian was present and did nothing to stop the beating.

My experience at Marcy School leads me to believe that the treatment of students by many black adults at this school goes beyond any tradition of

harsh discipline that would be culturally sanctioned among African Americans, and represents, instead, aspects of a lived professional culture that characterizes the behavior of both black and white teachers, and that systematically degrades the children.

Thus, I found many white personnel to be just as verbally abusive as the black teachers discussed above. The following comment is from the white male gym teacher, who refused to give a fourth grade their scheduled gym class because “they’re too rough. They throw the ball, it could kill you!”: “If I had a gun I’d kill you. You’re all hoodlums.” Other white staff:

Stop picking in your ear. Go home and get a bath. (White basic-skills teacher to a black boy.)

Why are you so stupid! I’m going to throw you in the garbage. (Other white basic-skills teacher to a black boy.)

Don’t you have *any* attention span? You have the attention span of cheerios! (White principal trying to quiet a class of black and Hispanic fourth-graders.)

This ain’t no restaurant, you know—where you go in and get what you *want!* [pause] You have no sense! You have no sense! (White teacher reprimanding three African-American girls in the hall outside his door.)

As if in explanation for the way he treated his students, a white teacher stated during a meeting, “When you realize who they [the students] are, you laugh, and you can’t take it [teaching] seriously.” Two white teachers expressed fear of confronting their students. One stated: “I don’t talk to them like I used to. They’ll challenge you now, and you might not win.” I did not see any white teacher strike a student, perhaps out of cultural norms that do not sanction it, or perhaps out of fear of retaliation. As one white male teacher said, “They all have social workers, and the social workers tell the girls don’t let any man touch you. One girl accused me of touching her on the knee—her mother told her to do it, to get [her] out of my class. And it worked.”

The school psychologist alleged that abuse by teachers is “common” in this school. The school social worker told me that she thinks there is less teacher abuse in the last four to five years because the Department of Social Services is “more diligent.” However, the district—which serves only 4 percent of the state’s students, but which itself is 89 percent minority and 78 percent poor—reports over 40 percent of the institutional child abuse reported by school systems to the state.²⁷

Each school is required by the board to post “inspirational sayings” on walls and bulletin boards around the building. The purpose of the sayings

is to motivate the students. The following are sayings the principal and a teacher posted:

If you have an open mind, chances are something will fall into it.

The lazier we are today, the more we have to do tomorrow.

The way to avoid lying [*sic*] is not to do anything that involves deception.

It is easier to think you are right than to be right.

Don't pretend to be what you don't intend to be.

If you can't think of anything to be thankful for, you have a poor memory.

These "motivational" sayings are also instantiations of a lived professional culture that degrades the students at Marcy School. The school staff's abusive, implicitly sanctioned attitudes and behaviors have evolved over time in a situation in which the student population is extremely poor, racially marginalized, of low academic achievement, difficult to motivate educationally, and from families that have little or no social power. The lived culture of the teachers combines with the alien curriculum described above to create a hostile, rejecting situation for the students.

The students in turn describe their reactions. Following are representative quotes from eight of the twenty-five students I interviewed. The students are African-American, unless otherwise noted.

"Tell me about your class," I say to a fifth-grade girl during her interview. "My class stupid. They mentally depressed. They don't want to learn." "Why not?" "They don't like the teachers." "Why not?" "Well, Miss Washington, she assigns all this homework, and she never collect it. Lots of parents puts in complaints about Mr. D., but they don't do nothin." "Do you have many friends in your class?" I ask. "No," she responds, "I'm lonely. I'm a nerd." When asked to explain why her teachers and the principal act the way they do, this girl said, "When they need a low place to come to [teachers and principals] they come here. That the only place they get a job." (Eleven-year-old girl who attempted suicide twice during the year I knew her.)

During another interview a boy tells me, "Teachers throw kids out, say 'I don't want you in my class.' They throw us on the floor and be grabbin us. Teachers too mean. They lie on people." "So what do you do?" I ask. "We make him mad." "How?" "Talk, laugh and have fun." (Eleven-year-old boy)

I ask a boy to “tell me about the teachers in this school.” He responds, “Most teachers here don’t teach us.” “Why not?” “Because of the kids. They runs the halls and makes the teachers upset.” “Why do they do that?” “Um, they think [teachers] just doin the job for money, they don’t care.” [Ten-year-old boy]

A boy tells me, “Most of the kids here don’t do well.” “Why?” I ask. “They fight too much and they don’t feel like going to school.” “Why not?” “They don’t like school. They want to hang out.” “And then?” “Then they’ll drop out.” (Eleven-year-old boy)

When I ask a girl why some kids don’t do well at school, she says, “Kids don’t want to learn. They be playin in the halls. They don’t study.” “Why not?” “It’s boring and they get mad at the teachers.” “How do you think the teachers feel about that?” “They don’t care. [pause] If we don’t learn, the teachers still gets their paycheck.” (Thirteen-year-old girl, one of the three white students in the school)

I ask a ten-year-old girl, “Why don’t some kids here do well at school?” “It’s they fault. Because Mr. Thompson—you saw him teach—he’s crazy, but he’s a good teacher. The kids that don’t learn don’t want to learn.” “Why not?” “They don’t like school. They don’t like Mr. Thompson. They playin so much in school they don’t have time to learn.” [At this point the principal comes over, and pinches her hard on her cheek leaving a red mark. He says, “Mr. Thompson knows what to do with *you*, doesn’t he?”] (Ten-year-old Hispanic girl)

“Tell me about your teacher,” I request of a boy. “He says we’re animals. Hooligans. He said we should be in a zoo. I feel bad when he say that. I get kinda sad.” “So what do you do?” “I put my head down.” (Nine-year-old boy)

A boy walking past us as we sat talking in the hall added, “He treats us like we’re toys. So we make him mad.” “What do you do?” “We run around. [pause] Watch!” This ten-year-old boy proceeded to do forward and backward cartwheels, flipping high in the air off a desk that was in the hall. Several other boys who were wandering the halls gathered around and cheered him on.

Almost all of the students I interviewed seemed to be in an oppositional stance to their teachers; most were aware that they are in a situation in school that is hostile and aggressively rejecting of them.

McDermott argued several years ago that black children who have white teachers may “achieve” failure by rejecting the oppressive definition of them they perceive their teachers to hold, and concomitantly rejecting the

teachers' and schools' definition of success.²⁸ The black and Hispanic children I interviewed apparently feel oppressive rejection on the part of both black and white teachers. In this regard, almost all of the interviewees said it did not matter whether you had white or black teachers ("They all the same"). One student stated that his aunt told him, when he complained about his teacher, "Just be glad you got a black teacher," but another black child said it was better to have a white teacher, "as long as it's a lady."

It may be that the hostile social situation in which teaching, learning, and testing occur in this school has important consequences for achievement on the standardized tests given the students every quarter and every spring, which are the benchmark of success in educational reform. Ernest Haggard demonstrated in 1954 that the social situation made a significant difference in how the 671 black inner-city children he studied performed on IQ tests. The attitude of the student to the tester was the most important aspect in determining how students did on these tests. Significantly, the attitude of the student toward the tester was more important than the content—for example, identifiable cultural bias—of the test items.²⁹

Teachers and administrators at Marcy School wonder aloud why the students "can do all the things in the street they won't do for us. Did you ever see a drug dealer who couldn't make change? They're walking spread sheets!" In the face of intense district pressure on teachers to "get the scores up," teachers convey to their students angry, desperate hopes that students will perform well on the tests. I suspect that, although some children may not be intellectually capable of learning what the school asks, one effect of the hostile atmosphere in the school is that many students may simply refuse to comply. The assistant superintendent told me that one of her biggest problems in the high school was "to get the students to take the [standardized] tests seriously."³⁰

The result of student opposition to the academic demands of the school could be devastating for reform. Standardized tests are almost always the criterion that defines success in inner-city schools. As long as testing takes place in a hostile, oppressive situation, and measures a curriculum that is culturally and linguistically unsuited to the students, I suspect the scores will not rise.

EXPECTATIONS FOR REFORM

Most school personnel appear resigned to the failure of current reform efforts in the eight schools. The principal of Marcy School stated that "nothing will happen. This school was built over a hundred years ago. They just replaced the [original] windows five years ago! With the decades of neglect in this ward, it'll take years to fix it up." Teachers agree: "Nothing

will be left when the money goes home.” “The first year was nice—we were treated like professionals; the second and third year? Nothing.” One teacher stated, when asked what she thought would come from the reform projects: “Maybe I’ll get them [her students] from ‘very low’ to ‘low’ on the [achievement] tests.” Then she added, “But even if they do learn to read and write, there are no jobs.”

A consequence of this resignation is that it is much harder to garner the enthusiasm and energy to carry out improvement projects that most people are convinced will fail. Indeed, most personnel imply that they accept the present situation as “the best that can be expected.” I heard over and over again, “We’re doing the best we can” and “This is the best that can be done with what we have.”

Many of the district’s administrators, teachers, and principals, as well as the majority of the participating parents (e.g., classroom aides), grew up in the city. They and their children attended the city’s schools. Due in large part to a diminished industrial base (and resulting insufficient employment opportunity) and nine decades of political patronage in the city bureaucracies, the board of education is the largest employer in the city. For the people who work in the schools, this is “their” system; the system provides their jobs, and despite the system’s faults, they defend and support it.

Even I, an outsider, after several months of intense work with the students and teachers, began to think of the school as a good urban school, and I hoped the state evaluators in an upcoming evaluation would see it that way also. From my field notes:

I was very negative about the school when I arrived. Now I find myself thinking, “This is a good urban school,” and hoping the state people will feel that way too. I feel many of the teachers work very hard, and actually teach. I go through the halls—with the doors slamming, adults going in and out of classes, kids roaming the halls, the intercom blaring and crackling, and the teachers shouting and angry—and I have to remind myself that this is an incredibly noisy and distracting place for studying. It is beginning to sound normal to me. So is what goes on in the classrooms. (“Good” is, of course, relative. If I were in [an affluent district in which I have done several district evaluations] what happens here would signal crisis/breakdown of the system. It would never be considered “good.” I must be part of the system now; those who are in an institution have a hard time seeing it from the outside.

Several days later I write in my field notes:

After being in Marcy yesterday where chaos filled the halls, and teachers tried angrily and in vain to get the children to go back in

their rooms, I went into my daughter's class today. [She is in third grade, in a public school in another city in a "model" school. The parents are, for the most part, professionals; 40 percent of the students are minority, but only 10 percent of them are low-income students. It is widely known as a very good school, occasionally being written up in the *New York Times*.]

The contrast was overwhelming. The kids were sitting, doing various activities, all over the room, on the floor, at tables—one black boy was curled up on top of a low book shelf, reading a book. The children were reading, making Father's Day presents from brightly colored materials; they were working with manipulables of various kinds. Materials, books, and supplies were everywhere, and in abundance; the children's work was on display on the walls, hanging from the ceiling, and in the hall. Murals and papier-maché projects decorated the back of the room. The T-shirts they had tie-dyed and silk-screened for their "Olympics" day the next day were hanging from rope across the room drying. The children were working easily, absorbed, in little clusters. Chatter filled the air, and smiles; and—most importantly—they seemed involved and interested in what they were doing. They seemed happy to be there!

It seemed unbelievable to me, how wonderful it was. It made me realize how far I had gone toward accepting the starkness of Marcy's bare and vacant rooms, the angry, wounded-looking children, and the resentful, hostile teachers—as acceptable.

CONCLUSION

The foregoing discussion delineates some of the ways blackness and whiteness, extreme poverty and relative affluence, cultural marginalization and social legitimacy, come together—and conflict—within a school to affect educational reform. The events and behaviors I have described take place when people of low social status—for example, impoverished people of color—comprise the student and parent population and do not have the power to prevent them. Such events occur when the rage and resignation of those in a community and school are so great that no good deeds can overcome them.

Such tragedies occur in a school and district when administrators from an oppressed group (for example) mimic, in educational policy choices, their oppressors, and when teachers from an oppressed group (for example) devalue students of their own group, as does the dominant culture and teachers of that culture. Perhaps most of all, such tragedy occurs when

people in a community and a school confront the workings of a racist, class-biased system without sufficient resources and without hope.

What is to be done? Are the children in our ghettos doomed? I predict that educational change in schools like Marcy will require fundamental alteration of the social situation. First, we must create an alliance of blacks and whites in political struggle to eliminate poverty. A broad redistribution of social and economic resources must take place. In this city, an arts center whose initial cost is estimated at over \$104 million is under construction downtown, less than a mile from Marcy school.³¹ The art center is touted as destined to draw suburban residents to its performances and nearby businesses, thus “revitalizing” the downtown area. However, if the history of Detroit, Philadelphia, Boston, and Baltimore (among other cities that attempted “revitalized” downtown areas) is any indication, this art center will do little if anything for the residents of the surrounding ghettos.³² It would be better to spend money to create meaningful long-term jobs in the locality, to train people for those and other well-paying jobs that may already exist in the locality, to provide adequate health care and housing, and, ultimately, to improve the schools.

Adequate health, personal finance, and social resources bring people a freedom of choice that poverty denies, and bring an end to the debilitating dependency that poverty enforces. A population can then feel hope; and people can feel a sense of agency, rather than unproductive rage and resignation. Students who are less oppressed are easier to teach, and teachers can then more easily excel.

I am suggesting that the structural basis for failure in inner-city schools is political, economic, and cultural, and must be changed before meaningful school improvement projects can be successfully implemented. Educational reforms cannot compensate for the ravages of society.

In the interim, before poverty and racial marginalization can be eliminated, I foresee three possible courses of action, none of which appears to me particularly viable. One possibility is metropolitan-area desegregation, as Gary Orfield and Jonathon Kozol have recommended.³³ For example, schools in this city could be closed, and students and teachers integrated into wealthier nearby suburban school systems—the students to get a better education, the teachers to participate in a professional culture that does not systematically devalue children. Such a solution, however, although it might provide an educational alternative, would not by itself overcome the deleterious effects of the students’ returning each night to the ghetto—to poverty and desperate situations. Unless metropolitan-area school desegregation were accompanied by (at a minimum) substantial housing and job desegregation, metropolitan-area school desegregation would be a partial and ultimately unsuccessful solution.

A second possibility is that the state “take over” and run the city district (as it runs two other districts). Given the fact that many of the reforms attempted by the district in Marcy and the other pilot schools were actually mandated by the state department of education, it is not likely that the reforms the state would attempt in the district’s other schools would be different. Moreover, the reforms described in this article, as well as other, administrative, reforms, have already been introduced by the state in two nearby low-income minority urban districts when state personnel took control of those districts in 1989 and 1991. So far, little if any academic progress has been made in these cities’ schools, and insufficient numbers of students have passed recent state standardized tests to certify the districts.³⁴ According to news reports concerning the two districts under state control, some administrative mismanagement of funds by prior officials has been stopped, so that more classrooms have textbooks, paper, and other supplies, but several state personnel administering the larger district are themselves under indictment for misuse of school funds.³⁵

A third eventuality that should be considered is that personnel in the district described here will themselves ultimately effect significant improvements in the schools—with time, perhaps, and with larger infusions of money and more or better assistance. It should be noted in this regard that the district has unsuccessfully attempted continual reform initiatives since 1984. Moreover, the numerous improvement projects of the 1970s also failed to raise students’ achievement.³⁶ While poverty and racial despair have escalated in this city since the 1970s—as in other cities—so has educational alienation and failure.³⁷

Given the persistent historical correlation between poverty and school failure; given the resiliency of lived professional cultures such as that of school personnel described in this study; and acknowledging the power of the social and cultural distances between racially/economically marginalized school populations and the educational “help” they receive, it is unlikely that educators in ghetto schools will be successful in making substantial, long-term changes in their schools.

Thus, I think the only solution to educational resignation and failure in the inner city is the ultimate elimination of poverty and racial degradation. The solution to educational failure in the ghetto is elimination of the ghetto. This prescription seems extremely difficult to implement. I acknowledge this, but urge you to view its assumed improbability differently. As James Baldwin suggests in *The Fire Next Time*,

I know that what I am asking is impossible. But in our time, as in every time, the impossible is the least that one can demand—and one is, after all, emboldened by the spectacle of human history in general, and American Negro history in particular, for it testifies to nothing

less than the perpetual achievement of the impossible. . . . If we do not now dare everything, the fulfillment of that prophecy, recreated from the Bible in song by a slave, is upon us: GOD GAVE NOAH THE RAINBOW SIGN, NO MORE WATER, THE FIRE NEXT TIME!³⁸

I would like to acknowledge the valuable comments by Janet Miller, Lois Weis, and Julia Wrigley on earlier versions of this paper. I could not have completed the article without the crucial advice given to me by Roslyn Arlin Mickelson.

Notes

1 See, for example, Jonathan Kozol, *Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1991); and Gary Orfield and Carole Ashkinaze, *The Closing Door: Conservative Policy and Black Opportunity* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991). See also, among others, Lauro Cavazos, "National Assessment of Educational Progress," *Education Week* 7 (1990): 1, 21; Seymour B. Sarason, *The Predictable Failure of Educational Reform: Can We Change Course Before It's Too Late?* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1990); and Robert Rothman, "Obstacle Course: Barriers to Change Thwart Reformers at Every Twist and Turn," *Education Week* 10 (February 1993): 9–12.

2 See, among others, Sarason, *Predictable Failure*; Richard F. Elmore and Associates, *Restructuring Schools: The Next Generation of Educational Reform* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1990); Michael Fullan (with Suzanne Steigelbauer), *The New Meaning of Educational Change* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1991); George A. Goens and Sharon I. R. Clover, *Mas - tering School Reform* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1991); Dwight W. Allen, *Schools for a New Cen - tury: A Conservative Approach to Radical School Reform* (New York: Praeger, 1992); Ann Bradley, "Education for Equality," *Education Week* 11 (1994): 28–32; Peter Schmidt, "Urban School Results Linked to Funding Woes," *Education Week* 11 (1994): 3; Patricia Wasley, *Stir - ring the Chalkdust: Tales of Teachers Changing Classroom Practice* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1994); and Ann Lieberman, ed., *The Work of Restructuring Schools: Building from the Ground Up* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1995). But see Kozol, *Savage Inequalities*, and James Comer, *School Power* (New York: Free Press, 1980), who consider more than most the contributions of race and poverty to the success or failure of educational reform.

3 I will call on the concept of "ghetto" to highlight the extreme poverty and destitution of children in America's inner cities. The definition of ghetto that I will use throughout the article is that recently proposed by William Julius Wilson: A ghetto is an inner-city neighborhood in which more than 40 percent of the inhabitants are poor. Most inhabitants of such neighborhoods are black (with increasing percentages of Hispanics) and are economically, culturally, and politically isolated from the mainstream, despite their usual proximity to city hall and downtown shopping districts. The school that is to be discussed in this article exists in such a neighborhood, or ghetto. Census data from 1990 show that, in the census tract in which the school is located, 45 percent of all persons have incomes below the poverty level; of female-headed householder families with related children under eighteen years, 66 percent are below the poverty level; of female-headed householder families with related children under five years, 82 percent are below the poverty level. According to the 1990 census, the per capita income in the census tract in which the research site is located was \$7,647. (The per capita income in 1990 in the city was \$9,437. Per capita income in the state was \$24,936, which was 33 percent higher than the national average. New Jersey, the state in which the school is located, was in 1990 the nation's second wealthiest state.)

(See William Julius Wilson, "Public Policy Research and "The Truly Disadvantaged," in *The Urban Underclass*, ed. Christopher Jencks and Paul E. Peterson [Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1991], pp. 460–82; and idem, *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987].)

4 David B. Corson, "Some Ideals and Accomplishments of the Newark School System," National Education Association Proceedings and Addresses (1921): 707–13; and idem, "Leading School Systems of New Jersey: The Newark System," *New Jersey Journal of Education* 13 (March 1924): 1ff.

5 George D. Strayer et al., *The Report of a Survey of the Public Schools of Newark, New Jersey* (New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1942).

6 State of New Jersey Governor's Select Commission of Civil Disorder, *Report for Action: An Investigation into the Causes and Events of the 1967 Newark Race Riots, February, 1968* (New York: Lemma Publishing Corporation, 1972), pp. 170–71.

7 *Report to the Acting Executive Superintendent, Newark School District*, from the State of New Jersey Department of Education and the Commissioner of Education, Trenton, August 13, 1984.

8 According to New Jersey Department of Education data, in 1992–1993, 51 percent of the certificated full-time teachers in the city were black, and 8.5 percent were Hispanic (*New Jersey Department of Education, 1992–93 Certificated Full-Time Staff Report by District, Position and Race* [Trenton: Department of Education, 1994]), p. 1374. According to an informant in the Bureau of Research at the city's Board of Education, the percentage of African-American teachers cited in the state statistics is low. According to this informant, the percent of African-American teachers in the city is much higher, due to the relatively high number of teachers in the district who are not certified, and who are part-time (long- or short-term substitutes). Almost all part-time teachers in the district are African-American.

Although statistics could not be obtained from the district, observation reveals that in schools (such as the research site) where black children are the majority, there are more black teachers than at district schools where the majority of the children are Italian or Portuguese. As noted below, 64 percent of the classroom teachers at the site were African-American.

According to state figures, in 1992–1993, 43.3 and 7.7 percent of district administrators were black and Hispanic, respectively. Fifty percent and 5.8 percent of special-services personnel in the schools were black and Hispanic, respectively (p. 1374).

9 Sabrina Hope King, "The Limited Presence of African-American Teachers," *Review of Educational Research* 63 (1993): 115–50.

10 Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965 and 1991); idem, *Dominated Man* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968); Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove, 1967); Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970); and Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978).

11 I participated in the reform during 1991–1993 primarily as staff developer. I carried out workshops in cooperative learning in several of the eight target schools and subsequently assisted teachers in their classrooms. I carried out the workshops at Marcy School between January 1992 and February 1993, and worked at least one full day a week during the ten school months in teachers' classrooms, providing coaching in the new methods (see Jean Anyon, "Teacher Development and Reform in an Inner-City School," *Teachers College Record* 96 [1994]: 14–31, for further description of one portion of this work).

In addition to the more than 200 hours spent with teachers in their classrooms, I also attended reform team meetings during school years 1991–1992 and 1992–1993, and spent numerous hours talking with teachers at these meetings. In my year at Marcy School I spent approximately half (21) of the lunch periods "hanging out" with the students in the cafete-

ria and on the asphalt yard; I also chatted with them frequently in classrooms and halls. I became well acquainted with the assistant superintendent responsible for the reform, commuted on the train with her on numerous occasions, and often discussed the reform efforts with her, and with members of her staff. Between 1991 and 1993 I formally interviewed the assistant superintendent, her staff, twenty-four of the twenty-five classroom teachers at Marcy School, the members of Marcy School's school-based support team, both Marcy School administrators, the school's drug counselor, fifteen parents, and twenty-five students. I read numerous school and district reports and other documents (such as state reports) pertaining to the schools and the reform initiative. I examined all curriculum materials—those in use and those prepared by the district but not much used.

12 Mun Wong et al., "Under Siege: Children's Perception of Stress" (Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association, Washington, D.C., August 1992).

13 "For Idle Young in Newark, Pride in a Theft Done Right," *New York Times*, August 11, 1992, p. A1.

14 The analysis of adults in the school reported in this article is based on my observations and interactions with African-American and white employees, and statements about teachers are confined to members of these groups. As far as I could tell, the relatively few Hispanic employees (six classroom teachers, several aides, and the vice-principal) did not differ in substantive ways from their white and black colleagues. However, with the exception of one teacher and the vice-principal, the Hispanic staff were (unofficially) isolated from the rest of the school in a bilingual program, and the time I spent with them was limited.

15 See David D. Laitin, *Hegemony and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986); and Russell Hardin, *Collective Action* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982).

16 See Jean Anyon, "Inner City School Reform: Toward Useful Theory," *Urban Education* (in press), for further description of the Professional Development Project. See also idem, "The Retreat of Marxism and Socialist Feminism: Postmodern and Poststructural Theories in Education," *Curriculum Inquiry* 24 (1994): 115–34, for a discussion of the theoretical import of this and other reforms.

17 New Jersey Department of Education, *Newark Public Schools, Level III External Review* (Trenton: Author, April 16, 1993: Education Programs, pp. 13, 15.

18 Examples of black dialect (gathered in classrooms of Marcy School) follow. (See also Geneva Smitherman, *Black Language and Culture: Sounds of Soul* [New York, Harper & Row, 1975].)

STUDENTS: "They lookin at us paper." [at our paper]
 "He ain't ax you." [didn't ask you].
 "I'm is the girl you want." [I am]
 "When my sister take my baby sister toys she be in school."

19 Joan C. Baratz, "Beginning Readers for Speakers of Divergent Dialects," in *Reading Goals for the Disadvantaged*, ed. J. Allen Figurel (Newark, Del.: International Reading Association, 1970), pp. 77–83.

20 Ibid.; Morton Wiener and Ward Cromer, "Reading and Reading Difficulty: A Conceptual Analysis," *Harvard Educational Review* 37 (1967): 620–43; William Labov, "Some Sources of Reading Problems for Negro Speakers of Non-standard English," in *Teaching Black Children to Read*, ed. Joan Baratz and Roger Shuy (Washington, D.C.: Center for Applied Linguistics, 1969); Joan Baratz, "Teaching Reading in an Urban Negro School System," in *Teaching Black Children*, pp. 92–116; and Bernice E. Cullinan, *Black Dialects and Reading* (Urbana, Ill.: National Council for Teachers of English, 1974).

21 See Cullinan, *Black Dialects and Reading*; Figurel, *Reading Goals for the Disadvantaged*; and Baratz, "Beginning Readers." For studies of children speaking other nonstandard dialects (Native American, Appalachian, Hawaiian), see, among others, Barbara Z. Kiefer and Johanna S. DeStefano, "Cultures Together in the Classroom: 'What You Saying'?" in *Observing the Language Learner*, ed. Angela Jaggard and M. Trika Smith-Burke (Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1985).

22 Eleanor Wilson Orr, *Twice as Less: Black English and the Performance of Black Students in Mathematics and Science* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1987).

23 *Ibid.*, p. 171.

24 I estimate that most of the African-American teachers at Marcy use dialect with their students at least some of the time (mixing it with standard English). I estimate that approximately one-third use dialect all the time with their students. Examples follow:

TEACHERS: "What does a sentence begins with?"
 "When I be out they has a good time!"
 "You didn't do nothin' yet."
 "You wrong!"
 "Take care your crayons—we can't get no more."
 "Have anyone seen Shawana?"

I estimate that approximately the same fraction, one-third, of the principals I talked with at reform team meetings also consistently spoke black dialect. According to the assistant superintendent, these men speak dialect "most of the time."

PRINCIPALS: "He have a parent who . . ."
 "Many people have came here."
 "He don't never come to school."

25 Newark Board of Education, *Restructuring Urban Schools in Newark, NJ: An Evaluation of the Cluster Program*, Newark, N.J.: Author, 1992.

26 Janice E. Hale-Benson, *Black Children: Their Roots, Culture, and Learning Styles*, rev. ed. (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).

27 New Jersey Department of Education, *Newark Public Schools, Education Programs*, p. 68. The phrase "institutional abuse" as used by the New Jersey Department of Education refers to emotional, physical, or sexual abuse of students by public school employees.

A conversation I had early in my work at Marcy School is of interest here. During one of my first few weeks in the building, the child study team (psychologist, social worker, learning disabilities specialist) invited me to lunch. They seemed eager to tell me about the school. The following is from my field notes:

We are discussing the enormous problem the team sees "getting anything done" at Marcy School. "We're part of the problem, you know," the psychologist says, "I mean, jailors and prisoners are the same." The social worker adds, "This district has enormous problems—the mayhem of the system itself is a big problem. But the children's lives are the biggest problem." "Yes," agrees the psychologist, "We should be teaching them [the students] who they are in the system, and what the system does to them. We need a diagnosis like they have in Europe—of economic and social victimization—that's what these kids are—victims."

"What about the teachers," I ask. "What are they like?" The psychologist states, "There is a lot of teacher abuse of the students—it's common here. The children have desperate lives, and the teachers distance themselves from that by abusing them, by separating themselves from the children, even though they're [the teachers

are] black, too. But you know, most of these teachers are one paycheck away from welfare themselves.”

“And you,” I ask, “how do you deal with the children and the system?” They say they blame the system. “Contradictory initiatives on the part of the board; disarray at the board,” says the learning disabilities specialist. And he blamed the state. “The state is weak; it has no money to monitor the system, and couldn’t afford to take over [the city’s schools].” “Even your project,” says the psychologist, referring to my work teaching the teachers to use cooperative learning. “We’ve seen it all before. We did cooperative learning in the early 1970’s—the open classroom, curriculum integration, there’s nothing new being done now, it’s all been tried before.” “Yes,” I say. “But maybe this is how *we* distance ourselves from the problems. We say, ‘there’s nothing we can do, it’s all been tried before.’” “Maybe,” said the psychologist.

28 Ray McDermott, “Achieving School Failure: An Anthropological Approach to Literacy and Social Stratification,” in *Education and Cultural Process: Anthropological Approaches*, 2nd ed., ed. George Spindler (Prospect Heights, Ill.: Waveland, 1987), pp. 82–118.

29 Ernest A. Haggard, “Social Status and Intelligence: An Experimental Study of Certain Cultural Determinants of Measured Intelligence,” *Genetic Psychology Monographs* 49 (1954): 141–86. See also, among others, Courtney Cazden, “The Neglected Situation in Child Language Research and Education,” in *Language and Poverty: Perspectives on a Theme*, ed. Frederick Williams (Chicago: Markham, 1970); and Geneva Smitherman, *Talking and Testifying: The Language of Black America* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1977).

30 See also Herbert Kohl, *“I Won’t Learn from You”: The Role of Assent in Learning* (Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 1991).

31 “In Newark, a Prologue to a Performing Arts Center,” *New York Times*, January 1, 1995, p. A9.

32 Orfield and Ashkinaze, *The Closing Door*; Norman Fainstein and Susan Fainstein, *Urban Policy under Capitalism* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1982); and Dennis R. Judd and Todd Swanstrom, *City Politics: Private Power and Public Policy* (New York: Harper Collins, 1994).

33 Orfield and Ashkinaze, *The Closing Door*; and Kozol, *Savage Inequalities*.

34 Mathew Reilly, “Report Says Jersey City Schools Need Two More Years under State Control,” *The Star Ledger*, June 21, 1994, p. 19. See also Kimberly J. McLarin, “Education Board Extends Takeover of Jersey City Schools,” *New York Times*, September 8, 1994, p. B6; and idem, “Schools in Paterson Lagging on Standards, Report Says,” *New York Times*, November 4, 1994, p. B6.

35 Robert J. Braun, “Top School Officials Fired in Jersey City,” *The Star Ledger*, July 6, 1994, p. 1; and idem, “Klagholz Details ‘Loose’ Fiscal Policies Found in Jersey City Audit,” *The Star Ledger*, July 7, 1994, p. 16.

36 An assessment detailing the fact that the city’s student achievement scores were well below national levels in the late 1970s stated, “In both reading and mathematics Newark has attempted to improve pupil performance during the past ten years by resort to a staggering variety of new programs. Indeed, one of the consistent criticisms voiced is that too many programs have been tried with too little effective evaluation of them” (Paul Trachtenberg, “Pupil Performance in Basic Skills in the Newark School System since 1967,” in *1967–1977: An Assessment*, ed. Stanley B. Winters (Newark, N.J.: New Jersey Institute of Technology, 1978), pp. 235–43).

37 Orfield and Ashkinaze, *The Closing Door*; idem, “Public Policy Research”; and Andrew Hacker, *Two Nations: Black and White, Separate, Hostile, Unequal* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1992).

38 James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (London: Michael Joseph, 1963 [Reprinted: Random House, 1992]), pp. 119–20.

