Creating More Effective Multiethnic Schools

Sabrina Zirkel*

School of Education, Mills College

The empirical literature from education, psychology, and sociology is reviewed in order to identify strategies with demonstrated effectiveness in improving either the educational outcomes of students of color, interethnic relations in schools and colleges, or both. The conceptual framework for this review identifies eight core themes that can guide policy and change efforts in this area: (a) the need to explicitly and directly address issues of aversive and institutional racism, (b) the importance of conceiving of schools as agents of change, (c) the importance of leadership in setting a school or district tone, (d) the paradox that strategies for improving the educational outcomes for students of color can only be achieved by focusing on race and ethnicity, but the outcome of these efforts benefit all students, (e) the goals of improving interethnic relations and the educational outcomes of students of color are linked (in that improving one improves the other), (f) the need to explicitly affirm one’s confidence in the abilities of students of color, (g) the importance of creating opportunities for the development of a strong, positive racial or ethnic identity, and (h) the need to create settings in which students feel connected to school through their relationships with peers and teachers.

More than 50 years after Brown v. Board of Education (1954), educational equity for students of color remains a primary concern at all levels of education in the United States. Broad, extensive, and pervasive disparities persist in the educational experiences and outcomes between many students of color and many White students.
and African-American and Latino students particularly, but also American Indian and some groups of Asian-American students have persistently lower grades and test scores (Ladson-Billings, 2006) and graduate from high school at half the rate of more affluent White and Asian-American students (Greene & Winters, 2005; Orfield, 2004). They are also less likely to enroll in college and to graduate within 6 years if they do (Bauman & Graf, 2003; Horn, Berger, & Carroll, 2004; Steele, 1997, 2003).

We must not let the pervasiveness of this so-called “achievement gap” lead us to think that these disparities should be understood to emerge from within students and not from within schools. Nor should we allow ourselves to imagine that these patterns are either inevitable or unsolvable. These racial and ethnic disparities in educational outcomes are directly linked to demonstrated differences in students’ educational experiences, and there is much that we know and can do in order to create more effective schools for students of color (Hilliard & Amankwatia, 2003). Moreover, strategies for the creation of more effective schools for multiethnic student populations and better outcomes for students of color are known and do not wholly depend on increased spending—there is much that policymakers, school leaders, and teachers can do to address issues of educational equity more effectively.

**Racial and Ethnic Inequity in Education**

The pervasiveness and the persistence of inequities in educational outcomes among African-American, Latino, American-Indian, and some Asian-American students on the one hand and many White and some Asian-American students on the other can seem daunting. Grades and standardized test scores for African-American and Latino students lag behind those of their White or Asian-American counterparts (e.g., Ladson-Billings, 2006; NCES, 2008). African-American and Latino students are overrepresented in special educational programs (Harry & Klingner, 2005) and underrepresented in gifted programs nationally (e.g., Ford, 1998; Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008). In addition, educational persistence data reveal that African-American and Latino students are likely to leave school earlier than their White or Asian-American peers. High school graduation rates for African-American and Latino students are substantially lower—nearly two-thirds the graduation rate for White and many Asian-American students (Confronting the Graduation Rate Crisis in California, 2005; Fine, 1991; Greene & Winters, 2005; NCES, 2008; Orfield, 2004). College enrollment and graduation rates follow a similar pattern—a smaller percentage of African-American and Latino students graduate from high school with the academic preparation required by most 4-year colleges, and even among those who are prepared for college, a smaller percentage enroll in a 4-year college (Greene & Winters, 2005). Among African-American and Latino students enrolled in predominantly White universities, a
smaller percentage graduate from college within 6 years of enrollment compared with their White and Asian-American peers (Bauman & Graf, 2003; Greene & Winters, 2005; Horn et al., 2004; Steele, 1997, 2003).

Certainly, resource-based disparities are enormous in U.S. schools, and this plays an important part in accounting for differential school outcomes for different groups of students (e.g., see Ladson-Billings, 2006). Class and economic barriers to student success are many, and include disparities in health, nutrition, and housing that certainly contribute to student performance and educational outcomes (e.g., Noguera, 2003a; Rothstein, 2004). There are also wide disparities in educational facilities and school resources across racial and ethnic groups (Darling-Hammond, 2004; Fine et al., 2004; Fischer et al., 1996; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Oakes, 2004; Oakes & Saunders, 2004; Orfield, 2001, 2004; Kozol, 2005; Yun & Moreno, 2006). Similarly, there are wide disparities in the level and quality of teacher training in schools serving largely White, suburban affluent communities and those serving urban, often poor, families of color (e.g., Darling-Hammond, Holtzman, Gatlin, & Heilig, 2005; Fischer et al., 1996; Yun & Moreno, 2006). These disparities are heightened by a school context in the United States in which schools are widely and increasingly racially and ethnically segregated (e.g., Bell, 2004; Kozol, 2005; Orfield, Frankenberg, & Lee, 2003). Nevertheless, school resources do not account for all of the racial and ethnic differences in academic achievement. Disparities in students’ academic achievement and educational outcomes occur even within the same school (Lee, 2005; Lewis, 2003; Noguera & Wing, 2006; Steele, 1997), and so we need to look beyond school resources to understand differences in student achievement and outcomes.

These disparities in academic achievement and educational outcomes in high school and beyond are dramatic, but differences start small when students enter kindergarten and they get larger with time (NCES, 2008). Early achievement test results in no way predict the wide disparities of high school graduation rates. Similarly, although economic disparities in school facilities, resources, and teacher preparation are important and need addressing, they do not provide the whole story of differences in academic achievement across groups. The U.S. Department of Education reports that although the presence of a variety of economic and social “risk factors” tend to depress students’ academic achievement, statistically controlling for these factors reduces but does not eliminate racial and ethnic differences in achievement (NCES, 2008). Instead, the data highlight that in order to understand these disparities in student outcomes, we need a better analysis of what is happening in school. Schools are not neutral settings and the social and psychological landscape of schools is not similar for different groups. Student achievement is not simply an economic phenomenon: It is also an essentially social and a psychological one, and understanding the social processes that influence student achievement can take us far in articulating how to improve the experience and outcomes that students of color have in school.
Changing Demographics in Schools

Within the United States and in many other countries as well, changing demographics and immigration patterns mean that the school-age population is becoming more racially and ethnically diverse (Deaux, 2006a, 2006b; NCES, 2008; Zick, Pettigrew, & Wagner, 2008). Within the United States, students of color make up 43% of the public school student population nationally, 48% in the southern part of the United States, and 55% in the western United States. These percentages are more than double those of 30 years ago (NCES, 2008). Although the underachievement of students of color has long been a pervasive and important problem, these changing demographics have highlighted and given added urgency to questions of how to create schools that better serve students of color. This article focuses on the United States, but the educational patterns, changing demographics, and social processes involved in these issues extend far beyond the United States. We will return to this issue at the end of the article.

The increasing racial and ethnic diversity of the public school student body in the United States is occurring at the same time that the public school teaching force remains overwhelmingly White. In the 2000–2001 academic school year, 90% of teachers in the United States were White, a number that, if anything, has increased slightly over the last 30 years (Keller & Manzo, 2003; NEA, 2003). Additionally, although White flight to the suburbs played a central role in the increasing level of segregation of urban schools, recent housing trends show increasing numbers of families of color also moving to the suburbs (McArdle, 2002a, 2002b, 2002c), making many of these schools less racially isolated than they once were.

These demographic patterns highlight that strategies for creating effective multiethnic schools are important for teachers and administrators in all schools—including those wanting to work more effectively with a racially and ethnically diverse student body, those wanting a largely White teaching staff to work better with students of color, and those experiencing an increase in the population of students of color either through immigration or through changing local demographics.

Framework for the Review

Despite the increasing racial and ethnic segregation of schools in the United States (Orfield et al., 2003; Kozol, 2005), schools are still the setting in which most people will have their first and most extended interracial or interethnic interactions (Wells, 1996; Wells & Crain, 1994, 1997). Moreover, because the teaching force in the United States is largely and increasingly White at the same time that public schools, particularly, have increasingly more students of color, schools are inherently multiethnic settings. Schools are not neutral sites for interracial and interethnic interaction. Although there may be no truly neutral site for interracial and
interethnic interactions to occur, schools are particularly “hot” settings. Schools and education matter a great deal, and so the stakes are high. Throughout U.S. history, the issue of children and teachers from different racial and ethnic backgrounds coming together to participate in our largest public institution—public schools—has been highly contested. Efforts to integrate U.S. schools were hard fought in many communities, even to the point that some cities closed their public schools rather than integrate them, and in others the National Guard had to escort children to school to keep them safe (Zirkel, in press; Zirkel & Cantor, 2004).

Schools are also, in many ways, “ground zero” for negative stereotypes about students of color and their families. These negative stereotypes are often held by teachers (e.g., McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004) and are widely discussed in modern life (Bonilla-Silva, 2003). Students of color and their families are very conscious of the presence or potential presence of negative stereotypes, leading to potentially high levels of stereotype threat (the fear of confirming a negative stereotype about one’s group) (Steele, 1997; Steele, Spencer, & J. Aronson, 2002) and belongingness uncertainty (Murphy & Steele, 2008; Purdie-Vaughns et al., 2008; Walton & Cohen, 2007; Zirkel, 2007). Walton and Cohen (2007) defined belongingness uncertainty as the increased concern about social belonging that can occur because members of stigmatized groups may be uncertain about the quality of their social bonds in stigma-relevant settings. Teachers with such attitudes do behave differently toward students of color in ways that lead to lower levels of student learning and performance (Jussim & Harbor, 2005; Rosenthal, 2002; Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007; Weinstein, Gregory, & Strambler, 2004).

Exposure to these negative stereotypes and prejudiced behavior is emotionally exhausting (Dovidio, 2001; Dovidio, Kawakami, & Gaertner, 2002; Gaertner & Dovidio, 2005; Shelton & Richeson, 2006), cognitively taxing, (Richeson, Trawalter, & Shelton, 2005; Salvatore & Shelton, 2007), and has the potential to lead students to disidentify and withdraw from school (Finn, 1989; Steele, 1997; Steele et al., 2002). Schools are also settings in which everyone feels measured and assessed (frequently because they are), and so hierarchically organized comparisons between people and groups are often present in explicit or at least implicit forms. Attention to measurement and assessment can discourage the development of an orientation to learning and development and instead create a “culture of performance” (Murphy & Dweck, 2008), which in turn can be debilitating to students and will only serve to heighten fears about confirming negative stereotypes among stigmatized groups (Steele et al., 2002).

The interracial and interethnic interactions that happen in schools are meaningful and important, but they are also fraught with challenges. Interracial interactions—particularly among those without much interracial or interethnic experience—can be difficult to initiate (Richeson & Trawalter, 2008; Shelton & Richeson, 2005) and emotionally and intellectually exhausting (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2005; Richeson et al., 2003; Richeson & Shelton, 2003, 2007; Richeson
et al., 2005; Shelton & Richeson, 2006) for members of both groups (Shelton & Richeson, 2005; Shelton, 2000; Shelton, Richeson, Salvatore, & Trawalter, 2005). Even among well-meaning individuals who identify as nonprejudiced, the interracial and intergroup interactions can be difficult, both because of implicit or nonconscious attitudes (Baron & Banaji, 2006; Dovidio, 2001; Dovidio, Kawakami, & Gaertner, 2002; Gaertner & Dovidio, 2005, 2008), and because of a fear of appearing prejudiced (Devine, Plant, Amodio, Harmon-Jones, & Vance, 2002; Gaertner & Dovidio, 2005; Richeson & Trawalter, 2008). All of this means that interethnic and interracial relationships in schools are not generally easy ones, and that without direct action, they are not likely to prove helpful for improving intergroup relations in the larger society.

Despite all of this, schools and colleges, as places of learning and development, are in many ways ideal settings in which to tackle these challenges. Creating conditions for improved student learning and academic outcomes across all groups is central to the mission of schools, which is not typically true in other organizational settings. Moreover, schools are settings in which intergroup interactions can be carefully orchestrated. The four conditions of Allport’s contact theory for improving intergroup relations (Allport 1954; see also Dovidio, Gaertner, & Kawakami, 2003; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006 for a recent meta-analysis) are more easily constructed in schools and colleges than almost any other settings: (a) ensuring people come together over extended periods of time, (b) work to achieve superordinate goals, (c) ensuring that members of different groups come together on equal terms, and (d) with the support of authority. Schools and classrooms are also sites in which open but carefully managed dialog can and sometimes does take place. Finally, schools are populated with teachers and leaders who have dedicated their lives to a social mission, many of whom are there because they sincerely want to make a difference in young people’s lives.

Why, then, is it so rare to find effective multiethnic schools that serve all students equally well? In large part, it is the presence of unrecognized aversive racism and institutionalized racism in schools that makes effective change so challenging (e.g., see Lee, 2005; Lewis, 2003; Noguera & Wing, 2006; van Ausdale & Feagin, 2000 for concrete examples of aversive and institutional racism even in schools that are making efforts to attend to issues of educational equity). Aversive racism refers to the fact that “... many whites, who consciously, explicitly, and sincerely support egalitarian principles and believe themselves to be non-prejudiced also harbor negative feelings and beliefs about blacks and other historically disadvantaged groups.” (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2005, p. 618; see also Dovidio et al., 2002). Bonilla-Silva (2003) calls this “racism without racists,” and King (1991) “dysconscious racism.” Schools are full of well-intentioned people who display the behavior of aversive racism—that is, they hold egalitarian values and desire to create better schools for students of color, but they often also hold negative beliefs about students of color and their families. McKenzie and Scheurich (2004)
have termed these beliefs “equity traps,” because of the way such beliefs and attitudes undermine any school’s attempts to improve the educational experience and outcomes of students of color. Undoing such attitudes and beliefs needs to be an essential part of any school change effort, and this work requires conscious and concerted effort.

Similarly, schools are frequently sites of institutionalized racism. Institutional racism “… refers to the intentional or unintentional manipulation or tolerance of institutional policies (e.g., poll taxes, admissions criteria) that unfairly restrict the opportunities of particular groups of people…” (Henkel, Dovidio, & Gaertner, 2006, p. 101; see also Jones, 1997). Within many schools, patterns and processes of assigning students to academic classes (Oakes, 2005), as well as gifted (Ford, 1998; Ford et al., 2008) and special education (Harry & Klingner, 2005) programs, the assignment of teachers to classes and classes to classrooms, and even of recruiting students to extracurricular activities (Rubin et al., 2006) are all examples of processes that are structured such that they “unfairly restrict the opportunities of particular groups of people.” In each case, students of color disproportionately suffer when choices are to be made about who gets access to better resources and who does not (see also Darling-Hammond, 2004; Harry & Klingner, 2005; Oakes, 2004; Oakes & Saunders, 2004). Curricular decisions in most schools also reflect a privileging of the experience of White Americans over those of people of color (e.g., Banks, 2004). Similarly, patterns of discipline in schools showcase the interplay of institutionalized racism and aversive racism in ways that disadvantage students of color, and particularly male students of color (Skiba et al., 2002; Skiba & Peterson, 2003). These processes and practices need to be undone if any large-scale effective change is to occur in schools.

Several themes emerge across this review that can inform our understanding of how to develop more effective multiethnic schools. These themes will be visible throughout the review and need to govern our efforts to create more effective multiethnic schools (see Table 1). First, it is imperative that efforts to create more effective multiethnic school environments acknowledge and address both aversive racism and institutionalized racism as described above. Efforts that take place without an awareness of these two processes cannot address the covert racism that governs many school processes and practices. Second, school leaders and teachers must perceive schools as agents of change. It is the individual schools and the individual leader, teachers, and staff in a school that will make a difference for students. Policies matter, but people matter even more. Third, leadership is essential to implementing change in this area. We need school and district leadership at every level that is ready to address issues of racial and ethnic disparities in education, and without strong leadership these issues cannot be effectively addressed. Fourth, paradoxically, educational practices that promote the achievement of students of color are practices that promote the achievement of all students, but they must be implemented with direct and clear attention to issues of race and ethnicity in
Table 1. Themes and Patterns for Developing New Policies and Approaches

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<th>Essential Ingredients for School Change</th>
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1. Change efforts must address aversive and institutionalized racism. No change can happen without the recognition of these and efforts to directly tackle them in every area. Examples include changing teacher attitudes and beliefs; changing approaches to reaching out to family; direct and indirect efforts to improve intergroup relations; examination and revision of school policies and procedures; uncovering assumptions about students implicit in student assignments to classes and academic tracks; and uncovering school discipline processes that favor some students over others.

2. School leaders and teachers must conceive schools as agents of change. It is individual people in individual schools that make a difference for students. Examples include building teacher capacities to work with different students; trying new pedagogical approaches and classroom organization processes; doing equity “audits” of student enrollment, discipline, and other processes. Not accepting racial and ethnic disparities in achievement as inevitable.

3. Leadership is essential to implementing change. Big changes require leadership and management. School leaders hire, evaluate, and supervise teachers. School leaders build relationships with families and communities. School leadership makes disciplinary decisions and sets school policy. School leadership engages students, parents, and teachers in changing popular policies like tracking. School leadership must supervise student outcomes and build capacity among staff. School leadership must ensure goals are met.

4. Paradoxically, practices must focus on race and ethnicity to be effective in eliminating racial and ethnic disparities, but the strategies improve educational outcomes for all students. Detracking, cooperative learning, less hierarchical classrooms, improved intergroup relations, new school disciplinary procedures, improved outreach to families; academic support to all students; fostering the development of ethnic identity—all policies that require careful attention to race and ethnicity, but they benefit all students. Attention to race and ethnicity brings urgency and creativity; changed school practices benefit all.

5. Efforts to encourage a strong, positive ethnic identity are helpful for improving student outcomes. A strong, positive ethnic identity is built in community; a strong positive ethnic identity forms a buffer against stress; empowers students to engage their own change efforts; encourages students to persist in hard times; ties struggles to a larger historical effort; is educational and aids students’ learning of history.

6. Explicit, sincere affirmations of the potential of students of color are essential. These affirmations address histories of racism and racial and ethnic stigma. Explicit affirmations place teaching in a context and increase trust and reduce anxiety, frustration, and stereotype threat.

7. Building relationships and a focus on relationships is the single most important ingredient for reform to take place. Teaching and learning is inherently relational; poor relationships between students and teachers make teaching and learning difficult if not impossible; school structures (small classes; small schools) that foster relationships are helpful; classroom strategies that improve relationships and reduce tensions between students foster student learning.

8. Improving intergroup relations and improving academic outcomes among students of color are inextricably linked—improving one improves the other. Cooperative learning, less hierarchical classrooms, improved student–teacher relationships; improved school–family relationships; detracking the curriculum all improve both intergroup relations and student of color performance. Reducing racial and ethnic stigma is the common link between the two.
order to be effective. Fifth, there are direct links between efforts to improve the educational outcomes of students of color and to improve intergroup relationships in schools—in that interventions designed to address one implicitly also address the other. These operate in tandem because both necessarily address racial and ethnic stigma. Sixth, efforts that encourage the development of a strong, positive ethnic identity among students of color are helpful for improving student outcomes in a variety of ways. Seventh, explicit and sincere affirmations of the academic abilities of students of color are an essential ingredient in their success. Finally, building strong relationships between and among students, staff, teachers, and school leaders are an important mechanism for improving student outcomes, but most important throughout will be the development of constructive and thoughtful relationships between students and teachers.

This review will be structured around two different types of school change that will facilitate the development of more effective multiethnic schools (see Table 2). The first focuses on efforts to change the “climate” of schools. These changes endeavor to improve intergroup relations, reduce or eliminate stereotype threat, and develop schools in which all students feel welcomed, supported, and in which all students’ identities are able to flourish. In many ways, this first section

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addresses issues of attitudes and beliefs and through them, relationships in schools. The second section focuses on changing school structures and policies in ways that provide more empowering schools for students of color and fairer and more equitable policies and practices. Here, the strategies are more focused on changing institutions. Thus, the first section is focused more on addressing issues of aversive racism, and the second more on addressing institutional racism.

**Changing School “Climate”**

Changing the school “climate” will have an enormous impact on student well-being and academic and educational outcomes. Students’ academic life is centered in their classrooms, and so it is essential that classrooms be settings that are supportive of all students (see left-hand column of Table 2). When young people reflect on what motivated them to succeed or discouraged them in damaging ways, it is teachers and experiences in classrooms that are most frequently mentioned (e.g., Plank & Jordan, 2001; Sánchez, Reyes, & Singh, 2005; Valenzuela, 1999). In considering how to address issues of stereotype threat, cultural distance between teachers and students, and interethnic relations between students and teachers or between and among students, and classrooms are an essential place to concentrate efforts. In addition to changing the climate in classrooms, schools can also do much to create a school setting that supports and fosters student development and the development of students’ ethnic identity. Finally, many schools, particularly in urban areas, have poor relationships with their families and the community, in part because teachers and principals do not live in the area. Building better relationships with the families and communities they serve is an important part of changing the social climate in a school.

**Identity-Safe Classrooms**

In order for students to succeed, classrooms have to be safe places for them to be (see “Identity Safe Classrooms,” Table 2). A great deal of attention has been given to the physical safety of students (Noguera, 2003a), but far less attention has been given to the psychological safety of students. Do students feel that their classrooms are a warm and welcoming place where relations with peers and teachers are positive? Do they feel that teachers hold high expectations of them and believe them essentially capable of the highest level of academic work? Or, alternatively, are classrooms places in which students experience hostile or difficult relationships with teachers or peers, and feel subjected to negative stereotypes about their capacities as learners and people? Do students feel that their identities are valued, understood, and protected, or do they feel that they are targeted as a member of a particular group? Are students encouraged to be motivated by learning and discovery, or by competing with their classmates and performing?
D. M. Steele and her colleagues (D. M. Steele et al., 2006) outlined a model of identity-safe classrooms that highlights the work of teachers who create classroom contexts in which all students feel like fully respected and valued members of the community. They note that such classrooms incorporate many of the features to be described below, but most importantly try to address issues of race and ethnicity openly and directly rather than through a color-blind approach (Markus, Steele, & Steele, 2000; Plaut, 2002; Plaut & Markus, 2006; Pollock, 2005; Taylor, 2000). Similarly, Ladson-Billings’ (1997/1994) case studies of teachers who are particularly effective with African-American students help us see this kind of teaching in action. Such teachers are made, not born. There is much that we can do to build teacher capacity for working with different students and developing the dispositions and orientations necessary to do the work (Murrell & Foster, 2004).

Hiring Practices

Even as we endeavor to build capacity in all teachers to work effectively with all students, hiring (and tenuring) a diverse and culturally competent teaching staff is often mentioned as an important ingredient in creating environments that serve all students equally well (e.g., Cooper & Jordan, 2003; Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1999; Jordan & Cooper, 2003; Quirocho & Rios, 2000). This need is especially apparent as we see the teaching force becoming increasingly overwhelming White and female and the student body becoming increasingly ethnically and racially diverse (see above). Several studies highlight specific ways in which students of color would be well served by a teaching force that better matched the ethnic make-up of the student body. Most importantly, African-American and Latino educators often bring with them a sense of urgency about educating students of color and an emancipatory, activist agenda that can have a profoundly positive effect on student learning, engagement, and achievement (e.g., see Foster, 1997; Gordon, 1993, 1995; Hooks, 1994; King, 2005; Moses & Cobb, 2002). In a study of race- and gender-matched role models, middle-school students’ with matched role models reported greater investment in and enjoyment of their academic work and higher grades than their peers without a matched role model.

A diverse teaching staff may better enable students of color to feel that their teachers will be fair (Ancis, Sadlacek, & Mohr, 2000; Brown & Dobbins, 2004)—perceptions that are not unjustified. Studies of K-12 students and their teachers reveal that teachers themselves report more positive relationships with students of their own ethnic background (Saft & Pianta, 2001; Zirkel, 2004b) and a study of White female teachers demonstrated that they treated their African-American students less favorably than their White students (Casteel, 1998). Perceptions of teacher bias are associated with higher dropout rates (Wayman, 2002). African-American and Latino students are less likely to experience stereotype threat in
classrooms with teachers from their own ethnic background (Casteel, 1998, 2000; Galguera, 1998; McKown & Weinstein, 2003; Tatum, 2004; Walters, Shepperd, & Brown, 2003). Teachers of color are also more likely than White teachers to engage issues of race and ethnicity throughout the curriculum, facilitating all students’ intellectual growth and development (e.g., Gaines, 2004; Tatum, 2004).

However, there is much that White teachers can do to effectively divert fears among students of color. Simple affirmations to students of color about teachers’ confidence in them (Cohen & Steele, 2002) or teachers’ statements affirming their interest in cultural diversity (Brown & Dobbins, 2004) can have a substantial calming effect on students’ fears. Increasing the racial and ethnic diversity of the teaching force is not a strategy that can stand alone. When we focus exclusively on increasing racial and ethnic diversity among the teaching staff, we act as though we can relegate higher expectations of students of color to members of students’ own ethnic groups and other teachers of color, and thereby absolve White teachers of any responsibility for making changes in their teaching to address these issues. We also cannot assume that all teachers of color are by definition effective teachers of students from their ethnic background. This can only be one small part of a more comprehensive strategy for teacher development and capacity building.

Changing Teachers’ Attitudes and Beliefs

In building schools and classrooms that effectively work with students of color, the importance of building teachers’ capacity for working effectively across racial and ethnic lines cannot be overstated. Developing a strong, equity-oriented teaching staff is the single most significant and effective change that can be made in a school. A poor-quality or inadequately prepared teaching staff is the most pervasive barrier to the development of effective schools for students of color. Study after study, however, reveals that a majority of teachers need tremendous development in this area.

Research in schools reveals a pervasive pattern of teachers describing students of color as lacking—lacking motivation, lacking skill, lacking potential, and lacking caring parents (e.g., Conchas, 2006; Lee, 2005; Lewis, 2003; McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004; Noguera, 2003a; Noguera & Wing, 2006). In McKenzie and Scheurich’s (2004) study of teachers in an urban school in the southwest, students of color were described as being unreachable as early as 4: “Sometimes I think by the time they are 2 or 3 they probably already have that [anger]...just from the 2 or 3 years of living in the environments they live in or whatever the circumstances...I hate to say that they are already tainted when they are 4 year old, but...” (p. 609). By blaming school failure on parents, teachers were able to absolve themselves of any responsibility for their students’ performance: “[I blame the parents] 100%. Not that it’s their fault. But it’s their culture that they are living in...our kids come to us at pre-K, 2 or 3 years below grade level
already... we are playing catch up from preschool on” (p. 608). Such statements of the deficiency of particular groups of students do not explicitly name race, but it is clearly present (Conchas, 2006; Lee, 2005; Lewis, 2003; Pollock, 2005).

As we would expect from modern or contemporary racism theory (Dovidio, 2001), these discussions typically happen in covert ways. Most teachers do not generally make direct statements to the effect that certain racial or ethnic groups are “smarter” than others. Rather, they appeal to “cultural,” “family,” or “class-based” differences in ways that are designed to place the blame for any problems students are having outside of the school (Pollack, 2008). Despite a lack of direct statements about deficiencies being racially or ethnically focused, the implication is obvious. Lee (2005) notes, for example, the way in which teachers in her study described their U.S.-born White students as “talented” but their immigrant students of color as “interesting”—terms that convey a great deal about how students and their potential are perceived. Lee’s (2005) analysis provides many telling exemplars, but the comments of her teachers are in no way unique. Researchers find very similar deficit-based conceptions of students of color among White teachers in the rural south (Moses & Cobb, 2002), an urban school in Texas (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004), politically liberal teachers in Berkeley, California (Noguera & Wing, 2006), and teachers in urban and suburban, progressive and traditional schools on the west coast (Conchas, 2006; Lewis, 2003; Pollock, 2005).

School leadership is essential for building a team of allies who support efforts to create greater equity in education. Emphasizing the importance of equity, providing training and opportunities for teachers to discuss equity issues, and making efforts to alter the socialization processes between teachers to facilitate more socialization toward equity rather than away from equity all lend themselves to the growth and cultivation of an equity-focused teaching staff. School leaders play an important role in this process at both ends—both in framing a school context that socializes teachers’ attention toward an equity focus, and also in providing support for teachers who engage in such professional development on their own. Lawrence (2005) found that support from school administrators played a central role in the extent to which teachers engaging in antiracist professional development felt able to implement relevant changes in their classrooms over an extended period of time.

Ensuring all teachers work well with all students takes focused, concrete professional training. Although teacher education programs are increasingly taking up the issue of training teachers to work with students from diverse backgrounds, these efforts are often insufficient and/or meet with resistance from White preservice teachers (e.g., Case & Hemmings, 2005; Gay, 2005; Gay & Howard, 2000; Gay & Kirkland, 2003; King & Howard, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2004; McAllister & Irvine, 2000; Montecinos & Rios, 1999). The teaching of multicultural educational principles is still developing and although some programs have both the interest and the expertise to teach it well, many do not. Moreover, a high
percentage of the existing teaching force in the United States was trained more than 20 years ago (Keller & Manzo, 2003), when multicultural educational practices were not widely taught in teacher preparation programs in the United States.

Training teachers to work in multiethnic schools requires far more than helping them develop the intellectual capacity to appreciate students’ differences. It requires that teachers learn to form authentic and deeply felt relationships with all of their students. Such training is possible, but it requires thoughtful attention. There is a strong role for school leaders to play, as both administrative and instructional leaders, to demand that their teachers undertake such training and to assist them in acquiring it. School administrators can help their teachers acquire these skills and dispositions through modeling these relationships with students and families, and by making clear that anything less will not be tolerated.

An example of the kind of professional development that would be beneficial for school personnel is one created by Lawrence and Tatum (1997a). They developed a semester-long antiracism seminar for White teachers and administrators to help participants to thoughtfully and carefully document the ways in which racist practices and beliefs are woven into everyday school practices. The authors document the impact the seminar had on participants through an examination of participants’ journals: More than half of the participants documented concrete changes that they were making in their personal and professional lives as a result of what they learned in the seminar.

These actions generally fell into three broad categories identified by the authors: Changes in the quality of interpersonal relationships between school and community members (e.g., reaching out to students and parents in new ways), changing the curriculum to reflect what they had learned (e.g., focusing on slave resistance rather than just stories of slave victimization), and implementing changes in institutional policies (e.g., questioning the criteria they had been using in student assessments for special education; bringing forward concerns about disciplinary practices). Additionally, participants reported that the seminar empowered them to act as allies and to advocate for their students of color in new ways. By emphasizing changes teachers can make in the way they work with students of color rather than chastising them for past behavior, the training provides a powerful model for how to move teachers to become allies in the struggle against racism in the schools. However, Lawrence and Tatum (1997a) emphasize that this change occurs slowly over time, and point out that these changes occurred in a program in which teachers and administrators read about, discussed, and reflected upon these issues over the course of several months, not hours or days.

**Pedagogical Approaches and Specific Classroom Strategies**

Research has identified both broad pedagogical approaches and specific classroom strategies that can be helpful in creating more identity-safe classrooms for
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students of color. These are important components to the creation of classrooms that are warm and supportive of all students, but especially to eliminate some of the identity safety concerns of students of color.

**Culturally relevant or antiracist teaching.** Teaching that is consciously designed to address issues of racism in schools or to expressly work to better the educational outcomes of students of color have been variously termed culturally relevant pedagogies (Delpit, 1996; Gay, 2000, 2002; Howard, 2001, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 1997/1994; Moses & Cobb, 2002), antiracist teaching (Lawrence & Tatum, 1997a, 1997b), multicultural education (e.g., J. A. Banks, 1997, 2004; J. A. Banks & C. A. M. Banks, 2004; McAllister & Irvine, 2000), liberatory education (Gordon, 1993, 1995), or identity-safe teaching (e.g., D. M. Steele et al., 2006). Teachers are asked to examine how the curriculum presented and the methods of instruction can differentially advantage some ethnic groups (e.g., White students) over others (e.g., immigrant students, or students of color).

With strong professional training—either pre-service or in-service—teachers learn different pedagogical approaches and curricular content that can make an enormous difference in how effective they are in teaching students of color (e.g., Ladson-Billings, 1997/1994, 2005a, 2005b; Zirkel, 2008b). For a comprehensive review of multicultural educational practice—including, among other aspects, curricular content and pedagogical approaches—in which it is shown that they have a demonstrated and substantial positive impact on both student achievement and intergroup relations within schools, see Zirkel (2008b).

**Teaching a learning orientation.** Dweck’s model of fixed versus malleable models of intelligence have important implications for individuals’ experience of classrooms and their relationship to learning (see Dweck, 1999, 2002 for reviews). A fixed model of intelligence holds that intelligence is a static commodity. Implicit within such a model is that tests, assignments, and classroom behavior are measures or demonstrations of intelligence rather than a means to develop it. Such an orientation leads to more anxiety about being seen as “not smart,” and leads to a greater reluctance to exert effort or to ask questions because such actions might imply a lower intelligence (Dweck & Sorich, 1999). These concerns are likely to be especially heightened in settings where negative stereotypes or stigma reinforce and exacerbate concerns about appearing not smart—such as girls in math and science, or students of color in a wide range of academic settings.

Alternatively, a malleable model of intelligence holds that intelligence grows with learning, and that effort and learning are important ingredients to increasing intelligence. When students perceive intelligence as malleable and as improved through effort, they are then more willing to exert effort and ask questions to improve performance (Dweck & Sorich, 1999; Hong, Chiu, Dweck, Lin, & Wan, 1999). Perhaps most importantly for our purposes, fixed or malleable models of
intelligence are strongly shaped by the context, organization, or school setting in which an individual is operating, and people learn to adapt their behavior and attitudes to that of the group (Murphy & Dweck, 2008). Interventions that focus attention away from competition and grades, test scores, and performance and instead focus on cooperation, learning, and growth are techniques for changing the “intellectual culture” of a classroom and the implicit (if not explicit) messages students receive about their potential. Their potential for improving intergroup relations in classrooms as well as reducing anxiety and increasing academic effort and performance are discussed below.

J. Aronson and his colleagues (J. Aronson, Fried, & Good, 2002; Good, J. Aronson, & Inzlicht, 2003) have used Dweck’s model to create a successful classroom intervention for reducing stereotype threat by explicitly fostering the development of a malleable model of intelligence. The intervention has been successful with both college students and younger students making the transition to middle school. College students trained in holding a malleable model of intelligence exerted more effort, participated more actively in class, performed better over time, and enjoyed schoolwork more than did those who did not receive this training. Moreover, the effect was strongest among African-American students, a result the authors speculate is because a malleable model of intelligence can reduce stereotype threat (J. Aronson et al., 2002).

This pattern also holds true for younger students. In the study of seventh-grade girls of color, Good et al. (2003) trained mentors to encourage the girls to understand the problems they were having with their schoolwork as normal struggles associated with the transition to middle school. In so doing, the mentors encouraged them to see these difficulties as temporary and caused by something other than their own abilities. The girls whose mentors had encouraged them to think this way showed more improvements in their standardized test scores in both reading and math later that year than did a group of control students who had not received this encouragement.

Thoughtful approaches to providing students with feedback. White teachers can also be more thoughtful in the way they provide feedback, especially negative feedback, to students who are negatively stereotyped. Combining negative feedback with invocations to both maintaining high standards and assurances that the teacher believes that the student can meet those high standards helps alleviate the debilitative effects that negative feedback can have—for students of color especially, but also for White students (Cohen & Steele, 2002; Cohen, Steele, & Ross, 1999). Although these studies of providing student feedback have been conducted in college settings, they can inform how teachers can be trained to give feedback in K-12 settings as well. Younger students look to their teachers for affirmation of their abilities (Daniels & Arapostathis, 2005; Pianta, 1999) and teachers’ assessments of students’ potential has been demonstrated to have a great influence
Consequently, paying careful attention to how K-12 teachers give feedback to their students concerning how to improve their work can have a profound impact.

**Building Relationships among Schools, Family, and Community**

Parental involvement in school has long been seen—incorrectly—as a proxy measure of parents’ interest in their child’s education. School personnel frequently assume that parents who are not involved with school in numerous ways are not interested in their child’s education. However, parental involvement in school is highly correlated with parent socioeconomic status (SES). Parents of high SES children often wield a great deal of power in schools (e.g., Noguera, 2001, 2003a, 2004a; Oakes, Wells, Jones, & Datnow, 1997; Welner, 2001). Non-White, poor, or immigrant parents are often excluded from many sources of parental influence in schools because of the attitudes of school personnel about poor, immigrant, and/or families of color, parents’ work schedules, challenges in finding or paying for childcare, language barriers, and the social capital to know how to most effectively interact with school personnel (see, e.g., CADRE/Justice Matters, 2004). Noguera (2003a) added that high-status, economically well-off parents are able to influence school policy and practice because they have the power to leave the community or school and “take their students’ tax money with them,” whereas parents of poor students, as a “captured market,” can be ignored without threat to the district budget. These disparities have led at least one scholar to argue that schools would do well to better separate themselves from families, because any attempt to involve families in schools will necessarily privilege the children of the most affluent and highly educated parents (de Carvalho, 2001).

Nevertheless, there is much to be gained from building better relationships with families and communities that have not been deeply involved in schools (e.g., Constantino, 2003; see Improving School–Family Relations in Table 2). Developing stronger relationships with parents can be an effective tool for helping teachers to better understand their students and to assist teachers in seeing parents as allies who are indeed very concerned about their children’s education (e.g., Blumer & Tatum, 1999; Fine, 1991; Lee, 2005; McHatton, Zalaquett, & Cranso-Ginras, 2006; McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004).

Reaching out to families in meaningful ways can be an effective tool in helping families to understand how they might be able to influence their child’s school experiences. Efforts to reach across language barriers or other obstacles can deepen students’ sense of connection to school and their feeling that schools are a place that embraces their families and cultural traditions (e.g., Gibson, Gándara, & Koyama, 2004; González, Huerta-Marcías, & Tinajero, 1998; Lee, 2005; Routé-Chatmon et al., 2003). This can be particularly important for immigrant students who are experiencing a cultural conflict among the expectations of peers, school, and family (see, e.g., Lee, 2001, 2002, 2005; McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004).

on students’ motivation (Baker, 1999; Deiro, 2004; Pianta, 1999; Telan, 2001).
When parents of students who are less well served by a school organize, they are able to effect important educational changes in the school(s) that specifically benefit students having the most trouble. It has been efforts such as these that have created some of the more innovative and helpful school reforms, including the development of small schools in places like Oakland, Chicago, New York, and Boston (e.g., Fine, 1993; Paolino, 2006; Stovall & Ayers, 2005; Strategic Measurement and Evaluation, 2007). They have also been instrumental in developing programs that give special attention and scarce resources to the lowest performing rather than the highest performing students (Ginwright, Cammarota, & Noguera, 2005, 2006; Routé-Chatmon et al., 2003).

**Fostering Student Development and Positive Ethnic Identity**

The development of a strong, positive ethnic identity is emerging as an important way to develop a more empowering school culture, and a positive influence on the academic achievement among students of color (see fostering students’ ethnic identity development in Table 2). A strong, positive ethnic identity has long been known to contribute to psychological well-being across ethnic groups (e.g., see Cross & Straus, 1998; Mossakowski, 2003; Phinney, 1991; Sellers, Copeland-Linder, & Martin, 2006; Yip & Fulgni, 2002). Recently, we have become aware of the role a strong, positive ethnic identity has for students’ educational commitment and academic performance. Students of color with a strong, positive ethnic identity that is central to their self-definition have better grades in middle school (Zirkel, 2008a), high school (Chavous et al., 2003), and college (Thomas, Caldwell, & Njai, 2006; Wout, 2006). They are also more likely to graduate from high school and to enroll and persist in college (Chavous et al., 2003), and are more committed to college while enrolled (Chavous, Rivas, Green, & Helaire, 2002; Cole & Arriola, 2007; Ethier & Deaux, 1990, 1994). Moreover, case studies of successful African-American high school and college students reveal similar patterns (e.g., Tatum, 2003/1997, 2004).

School leaders can do much to structure opportunities for students to explore and develop their ethnic identity, both through curricular content and through extracurricular activities. Such opportunities, like all aspects of schools, need to be constructed thoughtfully, with attention to what, precisely, students will find useful, relevant, and helpful. When constructed in ways that affirm students’ identities, such activities become opportunities for students to participate actively in the development of schools (e.g., Ginwright, 2004; Ginwright et al., 2005, 2006). It is important that school leaders see students’ efforts to build ethnic or racial identity as positive and as contributing to school success and commitment to the larger organization, rather than detracting from them (Tatum, 2003/1997; Villalpando, 2003).
An example is provided by a project conducted by Hains, a First Nation elder and high school teacher. She used a combination of Aboriginal and participatory action research methods to invite First Nation students in her school to reflect on why so many First Nation students were dropping out of school (Hains, 2001). Although not part of her original plan, once students had an opportunity to reflect together in a culturally affirming way about what they felt was leading First Nation students to leave school and the need for First Nation students to get an education, they decided they wanted to take action. The students then designed a mentoring program for new First Nation high school students that paired a more senior First Nation student with each new student to help connect them to a community of students and to provide someone to help address newer students’ concerns. After the first-year implementation of the student-developed and -led mentoring program, the dropout rate among First Nation students at the school dropped from 90% to 0%. The students continued to meet after the study was completed, and began to lobby for and effect other changes in the school around issues of curriculum, language learning, and disciplinary practices. The students’ self-empowerment through an affirmed ethnic identity also helped bring their families to the school and form bridges between First Nation families and the high school that were previously not present.

Improving Intergroup Relations among Students

Relationships with peers play an important role in students’ educational experiences—and this is particularly true for students of color (Zirkel, 2004, 2007). A feeling of belonging in school is essential for intellectual and academic growth (Osterman, 2000). Belonging and connection among peers is closely tied to individuals’ motivation to engage in a setting and persist in it through challenging situations, and to see oneself in similar settings (e.g., college). There are a number of cues that young people can use to assess whether a setting is one in which they will feel a strong sense of belonging and connection with peers—including the numerical proportions of individuals who share a similar identity (Murphy & Steele, 2008; Murphy, Steele, & Gross, 2007; Purdie-Vaughns et al., 2008) and the ease with which they make friends in that setting (Zirkel, 2004, 2007).

Intergroup relations within a school can have a profound effect on students’ feelings of connection to and belonging with peers in school, and has important implications for students’ trust in the setting (Purdie-Vaughns et al., 2008), motivation and engagement (Murphy et al., 2007; Murphy & Steele, 2008), persistence (Chavous, 2000; Zirkel, 2007), identity development (Zirkel, 2004), and educational aspirations and goals (Zirkel, 2007) (see “improving intergroup relations among students,” Table 2). Intergroup relations will not improve with vague appeals to abstract concepts like “colorblindness” or “treating all kids the same” (Lewis, 2003; Markus et al., 2000; Plaut & Markus, 2006). In fact, such vague
appeals can backfire and instead indicate to students a lack of will to directly address issues of race and ethnicity in the classroom (e.g., Purdie-Vaughns et al., 2008). Instead, concrete and focused attention to improving intergroup relations and to fostering the ideal conditions outlined more than 50 years ago by Allport (1954) (see above) is necessary. These approaches are both implicit, in terms of the pedagogical approaches one uses to deliver the curriculum and arrange one’s classroom, and explicit, in terms of creating space for developmentally appropriate open dialog and conversation in the classroom.

**Pedagogical Approaches That Improve Intergroup Relations**

Implicit in the way teachers structure their classroom and organize student work are messages about competition or cooperation, of building relationships and working together, or learning as an individual, isolated activity. Also implicit in teachers’ pedagogical approaches and classroom organization are messages about who is smart and who is not, and whose ideas are valued and respected and whose are not. Specific attention to fostering positive intergroup relations through pedagogical approaches that sometimes explicitly and sometimes implicitly convey messages about the value of all students, affirm that all students can learn from each other, and that learning is a cooperative activity that happens with others rather than as an individual activity that happens in competition with others are important ingredients in developing schools that will work for all students.

**Creating less hierarchical classrooms.** Teachers have a large influence on the kinds of social groupings students develop within their classrooms and the level and kind of interactions that occur between members of different racial and ethnic groups. Some teaching styles increase attention to status and status hierarchies between students and some deflect attention away from such concerns. When teachers place a strong emphasis in their classroom on outcomes like grades and standardized test scores, this increases a sense of competition between students, and this in turn is likely to increase prejudice between students (e.g., Esses, Jackson, & Dovidio, 2005) and suppress cross-race friendships (Hallinan & Teixeira, 1987a; Hallinan & Williams, 1987).

Less hierarchically organized classrooms can have a profound effect on student achievement as well. These are classrooms in which student performance is measured in a variety of ways and in which students are not implicitly compared to each other along a universal norm. Plank (2000) found that students build more cross-group friendships in classrooms with more personalization and less of what he calls universalism—or holding strict guidelines for performance from students. Kuklinski and Weinstein (2001) found that the effects of self-fulfilling prophesies on student performance were minimized in classrooms in which these expectations were more hidden—specifically, in classrooms where less attention
was given to organizing students hierarchically. Techniques for structuring the curriculum in less hierarchical ways, such as through cooperative learning techniques (see below) and de-tracking the curriculum schoolwide (see later section) improve the academic outcomes of all students, and dramatically improve the academic and learning outcomes of lower-performing students. Less hierarchical does not mean less structured, however. Gluszek, Purdie-Vaughns, and Eibach (2008) found that stigmatized students who were concerned about whether they “belonged” in a prestigious university preferred structured classes in which guidelines were clear.

Cooperative learning models. Studies of effective teachers often reveal that they are committed to the concepts of cooperative learning in its broadest sense (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 1997/1994). Some of the basic components of a cooperative learning model include a focus on students learning from each other, students learning to see each other as experts worthy of respect, and a commitment to having students perceive education as a cooperative process in which all succeed or fail together (see, e.g., Cohen, 1994, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Carefully constructed cooperative learning paradigms have been demonstrated to have both a positive effect on student thinking and learning (e.g., Cohen, 1994, 2004; Cohen & Lotan, 1995, 1997) and intergroup relations between students (E. Aronson, 2002; E. Aronson & Bridgeman, 1979; E. Aronson & Osherow, 1980; E. Aronson & Patnoe, 1997; Cooper & Slavin, 2004; Slavin & Cooper, 1999; Walker & Crogan, 1998).

A number of formal models of cooperative learning have been developed that can be a great aid for teachers who are struggling to create the kind of classroom atmosphere that will foster this kind of work (see, e.g., Cohen, 1994, 2004; Aronson & Patnoe, 1997; Cooper & Slavin, 2004 for reviews). These more formalized models of cooperative learning are generally organized with several goals in mind: (a) learning from peers as a means of creating interdependence and connections between students, (b) development of interethnic bonds and friendships to combat ethnic segregation between students, (c) students learning to observe each other struggle through problem solving so that they have a more complex understanding of how everybody learns, and (d) helping to form academically centered identities by integrating students into social groups that are based in academic work.

Not all work group arrangements are productive. Every teacher can tell stories about the time they assigned students to work in groups and things went very badly. Instead of forming bonds, the students fought and ridiculed each other, certain students were excluded or scapegoated, and the teacher vowed to never use work groups again (e.g., Rubin, 2003). The student work groups to be discussed here are not created haphazardly—rather, a great deal of research and thoughtful planning has gone into the development of particular work group configurations and strategies for the management of student work groups that make them effective and productive rather than destructive.
The most effective cooperative learning projects contain several core features: Teachers take an active role to create both interdependency (Walker & Crogan, 1998) and equal status relationships between students by deconstructing preexisting status relationships (E. Aronson, 2002; E. Aronson & Patnoe, 1997; Cohen, 1994, 2004; Cohen & Lotan, 1995, 1997; Cohen et al., 1990; Treisman, 1992, 1993), in part by providing structures so that students without a strong history of academic success can participate actively and equally with their peers. In addition, Cohen (1994) emphasized that in order to be effective, the projects undertaken in cooperative learning groups should be projects in which group work is genuinely and authentically helpful, in which the problems to be addressed are open ended, and when the projects demand high-level work.

Strategies with an Explicit Focus on Intergroup Relations

In addition to the implications of implicit messages that pedagogical approaches and classroom organization have for improving intergroup relationships within the classroom, direct, open, and explicit conversations about issues of race and ethnicity in schools and society can play an important role. These conversations must, naturally, be structured in developmentally appropriate ways—the conversations that college and graduate students can have are clearly quite different from those that can take place in elementary, middle, and high school. However, some version of an open discussion can be had at every age, and research consistently shows a positive impact of such openness on intergroup relations as well as on the feelings of belonging and connection of students of color.

Open dialogue and conversation. Teachers and peers have a strong influence on young people’s attitudes about race and racism (Aboud & Doyle, 1996b; Aboud & Fenwick, 1999). Open discussions about race and ethnicity tend to lead to reductions in prejudiced attitudes among young people, in part because the less-prejudiced children tend to be more able to convince more-prejudiced children to change their attitudes through their ability to appeal to notions of fairness and justice (Aboud & Doyle, 1996a; Aboud & Fenwick, 1999) and in part because the openness of such discussions leads to better, deeper connections between students and less reliance on stereotypes (e.g., see Schoem & Hurtado, 2001; Tiven, 2001). These conversations can take place even among fairly young children (Aboud & Doyle, 1996b; Aboud & Fenwick, 1999; Derman-Sparks, 2004), and they can take place even in all-White settings (Derman-Sparks, 2006; Tatum, 1992, 1994). Instructor- and peer-led dialogues have even greater potential to effect students’ intellectual outcomes as well as their social relationships when they take place in college (e.g., Antonio et al., 2004) and are well structured for this purpose (e.g., Gurin et al., 2002; Gurin & Nagda, 2006; Gurin, Nagda, & Lopez, 2004; Lopez, 2004). Peer-led efforts to teach a curriculum that encourages young people
to examine some of their biases and to examine the consequences of racial and ethnic bias in history have demonstrated important shifts in how young people think about and relate to others (Bettman & Friedman, 2004; McKenna & Sauceda, 2001).

**Common ingroup identity model (CIIM)-based interventions.** Gaertner and Dovidio’s CIIM (see Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000, 2008 for reviews) provided a framework for developing improved intergroup relationships, and is particularly well suited to use in a school setting. The CIIM predicts that when conditions are created in which members of two different groups can find a common, perhaps superordinate, identity (members of the same community, school, etc.), intergroup trust will increase and intergroup bias will diminish. Dovidio and Gaertner and their colleagues have tested this model in a variety of settings and found improved intergroup attitudes (e.g., Beaton, Dovidio, & Léger, 2008; Dovidio et al., 2002; Johnson, Gaertner, & Dovidio, 2006; Neir et al., 2001; see also Stone & Crisp, 2007). An intervention study designed to use the CIIM to improve intergroup relations in an elementary school revealed promising results. Houlette and her colleagues (Houlette et al., 2004) utilized a curriculum focused on helping students see each other as part of one, larger superordinate group (students in this class) rather than as members of subgroups within the class. After participating in this program over several weeks, participating students were more likely to report having a close friend of a different racial background than before the intervention. Efforts on the part of schools to build community in schools and to build a school identity can help facilitate the development of such a superordinate identity. Building school community through schoolwide activities and events and within classrooms through cooperative learning strategies and creating more of a learning orientation all move students in this direction.

**Summary**

Changing relationships is an essential component of creating more effective schools for students of color, but in many ways it is also the hardest work. So much of the relationships between all of the actors in schools—principal, staff, teachers, students, and parents—are rooted in deep attitudes, beliefs, and behavior that are not always conscious and are not always part of what we think about when we think about changing schools. It is much easier to think about improvements in curriculum, technology, facilities, and even professional training than it is to think about how individuals within a school relate to one another. Nevertheless, it is the interpersonal work that will likely reap the greatest rewards in terms of student achievement and educational outcomes. In tackling these relationships, it is especially important to address the contemporary or aversive racism among teachers and school leaders—wherein, they may profess egalitarian views and
desire to work effectively with all kids, but nevertheless simultaneously hold attitudes and beliefs that will interfere with that work. A focus on aversive racism is primary because teachers or principals who explicitly hold or espouse “old-fashioned” racism—believing that some children are not capable of learning, or that certain groups of students will never get anywhere—do not really belong in schools, and they present other challenges that require other kinds of tools (i.e., human resource law) that are not part of the scope of this article.

Improving relationships across the board—between teachers and students, of course, but also between students and between schools and families—will change the “climate” of schools in ways that will likely have a large impact on student motivation, effort, commitment, persistence, and performance. We ignore these or minimize the importance of these relationships at our peril. Beyond the relationships in schools, we must also attend to the policies and practices that give shape and meaning to the attitudes and beliefs discussed above. It is not just that teachers have attitudes about students—but also that those attitudes are reflected in everyday decisions about who gets taught what, where, and by whom, and whose behavior is acceptable and whose is not. Thus, together with addressing the relationships between actors in schools, we must examine and revise the schools’ organization as reflected in the everyday policies and procedures that govern how schools operate.

**Empowering School Organization**

J. A. Banks (2004) identified an empowering school organization as an essential component of multicultural education, and as such a central aspect of creating more effective multiethnic schools (see right-hand column of Table 2). An empowering school organization is one in which the policies, practices, and structure of a school are aligned in ways that affirm the value and potential of all students. An examination of school culture and organization requires that we look beyond individual classrooms to explore the kinds of beliefs, values, and supports that the school as a whole embodies.

Any effort to create more effective schools for students of color needs to involve creating a culture at the school in which student success is assumed and facilitated for all, and this includes a careful look at the way assumptions about students are embedded within broader school practices and policies. For example, how does the school leader make decisions about assigning students to courses, teachers to classes, and classes to classrooms? How does the school leader reflect on the fairness or justice implied in his or her practices of school discipline? These practices convey deep meaning to students and their families about who is valued and who is not, and these larger practices are cues to students and families about the extent to which they are valued members of the school, the district, and the community. For example, when students and families see that students
of color are disproportionately assigned to special education or remedial-level coursework, taught by the least qualified teachers, and have their classes held in the least desirable classrooms in school (e.g., the basement, the unheated, un-air-conditioned portable buildings), the message is clear (see also Skiba & Peterson, 2003). In many schools and districts, this is a routine pattern.

Similarly, many urban schools that serve primarily poor students of color are often very large and sometimes extremely large, creating very impersonal schools in which the challenges to the formation of strong and positive relationships between teachers and students and between and among students are exacerbated. In some urban districts, for example, many of the poorest performing schools were also the largest, with elementary schools that were built for 400 students serving student bodies of even 1,000 students or more, or high schools serving upward of 4,500 students (LAUSD, 2008; Oakland Community Organization, 2008). Sometimes these schools become so large that they implement year-round schedules or day and evening schedules to accommodate the student body. Even under less dramatic circumstances, attending to the size and structure of a school allows more personalized attention that teachers can give their students. Creating school organizational structures and practices that can interrupt these sometimes taken-for-granted practices is essential for creating more effective multiethnic schools.

Structuring Schools with a Relational Focus

School organization and structure have large implications for the relationships between and among people in those schools (see “School Structure” in Table 2). Changing school “climate,” as described above, is one component of changing relationships within a school. However, the relationships across the school are also influenced by the shape and organization of the school. School reform efforts that are directed toward restructuring schools in ways that improve relationships, increase trust between students and teachers, and foster the development of a common sense of mission and purpose are an important part of many recent reform efforts (Kahne, et al., 2008; Noguera & Wing, 2006; Strategic Measurement and Evaluation, 2007).

Small class sizes. Several large-scale analyses of the effects of carefully constructed interventions to reduce class sizes on student achievement have been conducted in recent years. The emerging consensus of these studies is that small class size, especially in the early grades, has a substantial, long-term, positive impact on student achievement. Moreover, this positive effect is greatest among the lowest performing students, the effect is greater the longer students participate in smaller classes, and the effect of class sizes in the early grades on student achievement holds over the educational life of the student (e.g., Finn & Achilles, 1990,
Small class sizes better enable teachers to work with students as individuals and thus to pay attention to students’ strengths and weaknesses, rather than to rely on stereotypes. Similarly, small class sizes better enable teachers to form meaningful relationships with students and families that can have a positive influence on students’ experiences and academic outcomes. Students may also be better able to form bonds between and among each other in smaller class environments.

Small schools and “schools within schools.” Studies of small schools and smaller “school within a school” programs also reveal a strong relationship between such programs and student achievement, attendance, and high school graduation rates. Small schools offer many of the same advantages that small classes do, in that such schools are often more easily able to develop a strong community and to help students form deeper and more personal relationships with each other and with teachers and staff. In addition, smaller schools better enable school leaders to keep on top of a number of equity issues that might otherwise remain either unnoticed or unattended. A careful examination of Berkeley High School, with over 3,000 students, leaves the impression that at least at the time of the study, “no one was watching the store”—meaning that concerns about racial and ethnic equity in school discipline, classroom management, student enrollment patterns, attendance, and graduation were left unattended while a series of short-lived principals dealt with more immediately pressing problems (Noguera & Wing, 2006).

Both qualitative case studies and large-scale survey or experimental research reveal the positive influence of small schools on student outcomes. Small school reform efforts do appear to create school cultures of greater trust between teachers and between teachers and students, and also reveal a greater commitment among students (Kahne et al., 2008). Many studies do reveal a positive impact on student attendance and graduation rates, and in many studies attendance and graduation rates tend to increase dramatically. Several studies showing student absences and school dropout rates are cut by one-third or more (Conchas, 2006; Strategic Measurement and Evaluation, 2007) and others demonstrating a smaller, though still substantial difference (e.g., Kahne et al., 2008). In some small schools or “schools within schools,” graduation rates are near 100% (Conchas, 2006; Strategic Measurement and Evaluation, 2007) in schools and cities where graduation rates typically hover closer to 50%. Such an impact on attendance and graduation rates is important and meaningful.

Even so, small schools or “schools within schools” are not a panacea. Achievement gains in small school reforms are variable and likely depend on specific aspects of the small school programs. Some studies demonstrate small schools having a positive impact on achievement (Conchas, 2006; Darling-Hammond, Ancess,
but others do not (Kahne et al., 2008; Wasley et al., 2000). In part, the fact that many previously poor-performing students are staying in school and achievement levels are not going down may actually suggest that there is much improvement in student learning. However, how such programs are run and the implicit beliefs of teachers within them still matter tremendously for their effectiveness (Conchas, 2006; Noguera, 2002; Oxley, 1994; Stevens, 2008).

Small schools provide an easier context in which to build better relationships between teachers and students, especially when compared to the extremely large schools found in some urban school districts (Paolino, 2006; Strategic Measurement & Evaluation, 2007). However, leadership is still needed to ensure that smaller schools and the increased collegiality among teachers often found there translate into improved instructional practices (Kahne et al., 2008; Strategic Measurement and Evaluation, 2007). Studying the same set of Chicago High School Reform Initiative, Stevens (2008) found that school principals play a pivotal role in determining the level of instructional improvement that takes place.

**Looping.** Looping refers to a strategy for building relationships between teachers and students and teachers and families by keeping children with a teacher for two or more years—that is, an entire class, including the teacher, moves together across grade levels. Often, students stay together as a class with a specific teacher across their time in school (e.g., sixth–eighth grade). Looping offers teachers, students, and families the opportunity to get to know one another over an extended period of time. In this way, teachers are afforded the opportunity to know their students at a deeper level and to work with students’ own strengths as they develop greater understanding of their students over time (Black, 2000; Lincoln, 1997). Students and families are afforded the opportunity to work with a teacher who has the time to get to know them and to work with teachers more as a team interested in the students’ long-term growth than in traditional arrangements. Looping in middle school means that students stay with one primary teacher not only over several years but also for most of the school day. This also addresses concerns raised by some developmental psychologists that children are harmed by a move to school schedules with a different teacher for every subject in early adolescence (e.g., Eccles & Midgley, 1989; Eccles, Midgley, & Lord, 1991).

Looping has been effectively used in elementary and middle schools to improve student outcomes (Black, 2000; Yamauchi, 2003) and relationships between school and family (Little & Dacus, 1999; Nichols & Nichols, 2002). There have been few comprehensive studies of looping, in part because looping often emerges within a larger reform effort and thus it is difficult to tease apart the specific influence of looping on student outcomes. However, it seems a promising strategy worthy of greater attention as we learn the value of relationships in student outcomes.
English language learner programs. English Language Learner (ELL) and Limited English Proficiency (LEP) programs often operate as small “schools within schools” in many urban U.S. schools. As such, they function to offer ELL students a place in which they feel a strong sense of community and belonging. In many ELL programs, students report having strong relationships with peers, teachers, and/or counselors, and these relationships are often described as an essential component of the value of such programs (see, e.g., Lee, 2005; Noguera, 2004b; Wing, 2006). However, these strong relationships often form as a result of the isolation of ELL students from the rest of the school, which can be the greatest weakness faced by ELL programs.

As immigrants or the children of immigrants who typically have little understanding of how college admissions works in the United States, ELL students are also among the least likely to receive the kind of guidance they need in order to prepare for college, and their placement in ELL often bars them—from participation in AP courses or other curriculum that is important for college admission (e.g., Lee, 2005; Noguera, 2004b; Rubin et al., 2006; Valenzuela, 1999; Wing, 2006). ELL programs that combine the “school within a school” model of relationship building and the social activism often found among ELL teachers and counselors with a strong, mainstreaming and college-preparedness program to ensure that ELL students are achieving at the highest levels and are well prepared for college would be a very powerful model.

Strong leadership is required to ensure that teachers across the school are prepared to work with ELL students and to ensure they mainstream into classrooms beyond the ELL program. Lucas, Henze, and Donato (1990) conducted case studies of schools that were successful with language-minority Latino students, and they outline several ways that school leaders can help to improve the educational outcomes of ELL students more generally. These strategies are first, to recognize the value of heritage language and culture for immigrant children and children from immigrant or aboriginal families (see also Hains, 2001; Stanton-Salazar, 2001; Valenzuela, 1999; Villegas & Prieto, 2006). This requires teachers and administrators across the board to learn about the cultures and languages reflected in the student body (Olson, 1998, 2000; Olsen & Jamarillo, 1999), and to have at least some staff who speak the language(s) of students on site. It is also important to make the education of ELL students a priority, with staff development time and resources focused on how to accomplish this effectively (see also Olsen, 1998, 2000; Olsen & Jamarillo, 1999), and to have sincerely high expectations for the educational achievements of ELL students. This means designing programs that effectively teach ELL and LEP students English literacy sufficient for both social and academic success (see, e.g., Crandall, Jamarillo, Olsen, & Peyton, 2002). It also means preparing to move students from ELL classes at some point.

Several studies highlight the processes that sometimes lead ELL students to be kept in ELL classes long past the time when such classes are necessary. This
happens because of a push from outside of the ELL program (non-ELL teachers often do not want to work with ELL students) and the pull of ELL itself (students and teachers fear what might happen to students outside of the “cocoon” that ELL can become). School administrators can provide leadership to help teachers and students resist these pressures, and help them to see both how to serve ELL students across the curriculum and how ELL programs can provide supportive relationships that are not stifling of students’ academic development. Olsen and Jamarillo (1999) would add that it is essential for school administrators to develop data systems and habits of analysis and reflection on the performance and outcomes of ELL and LEP students in their schools, and to actively and regularly listen to their ELL and LEP students and families to better understand which needs are being met and which are not.

Dismantling Institutionalized Racism in Schools

Institutionalized racism in the everyday practices of schools is widespread, but it can be seen most dramatically in the processes and procedures of academic tracking and school discipline. Careful attention to the differential impact of these practices on students of color and changing processes to foreground equity issues has a tremendous impact on students’ experiences in schools and their academic outcomes (see “Dismantling Institutionalized Racism” in Table 2).

Eliminating ability groupings or academic “tracks.” Academic tracking in elementary and secondary schools can present strong organizational barriers to the achievement of students of color and to the development of positive relationships between students of different ethnic backgrounds. Academic tracking or ability grouping almost always serves to separate students by race and ethnicity (see, e.g., Khmelkov & Hallinan, 1999; Oakes, 1996, 2005; Schofield, 1989). Students of color are less likely to move “up” to higher tracks and more likely to move “down” to lower tracks than their White peers (Ford, 1998; Ford et al., 2008; Hallinan, 1996a, 1996b; Oakes, 2005). Tracking also has a negative impact on the development and maintenance of interethnic friendships at school (e.g., Braddock & Slavin, 1993; Hallinan & Teixeira, 1987b; Hallinan & Tuma, 1978; Hallinan & Williams, 1987; Kubitschek & Hallinan, 1998; Schofield, 1979; Tatum, 2003/1997). Academic tracks are based in educational models that see intelligence as a fixed and unidimensional entity that is easily measured—ideas that run counter to much of our modern understanding of educational and cognitive processes (see, e.g., Dweck, 1999; Oakes, 1994; Oakes et al., 1997 for relevant reviews of different literatures).

Some schools and districts have endeavored to eliminate academic tracks from their curriculum—offering all students mixed classrooms with a challenging curriculum. Several studies of the impact of detracking have found solid and
extensive evidence that all students perform better in heterogeneous groups, but especially that poorer performing students show dramatic increases in performance after detracking.

Burris and her colleagues (Burris, Heubert, & Levin, 2006) undertook one of the most thoughtful and systematic detracking efforts ever documented, and their efforts have been enormously successful in improving the academic outcomes of all students, and in getting nearly all students to achieve at very high levels. The effort was districtwide, and started with sixth-grade math, with the goal of all students completing Sequence I (roughly equivalent to Algebra I) in eighth grade and completing at least precalculus, if not Advanced Placement Calculus by the end of their senior year in high school. Prior to the study, 5% of the low “track” students, 29% of the middle “track” students, and 64% of the high “track” students completed Advanced Placement Calculus in high school. After the change, 18% of the low track, 44% of the middle track, and 76% of the higher track had successfully completed Advanced Placement Calculus. Similar gains were seen across all three groups for each level of math attainment—i.e., among those who did not reach AP Calculus prior to graduation. Why did everybody’s performance improve? Because in addition to a clear, focused high-level curriculum, the schools offered math support to any student who wanted extra help—including the higher-performing students. In other words, part of the harm we do to students by tracking them is to reify students’ placements, implicitly encouraging a “fixed” model of intelligence, and in so doing we minimize our efforts at encouraging a culture of asking for assistance among all students.

Detracking has effects beyond academic achievement, however. When carefully planned and executed, it can also improve intergroup relations between students in school. Relationships between formerly lower-track students and their teachers also improve after detracking (e.g., Cooper, 2000; Oakes, 2005). Students who were formerly enrolled in lower-tracked classrooms were less likely to be described as “behavior problems” in heterogeneously organized classrooms (Oakes, 2005). Improvements in students’ behavior can be linked to the more challenging and engaging curriculum, changes in peer norms about behavior in different settings, and students’ greater feeling of being engaged in meaningful work that suggests the school as an institution believes in them.

Despite their demonstrated success, efforts to eliminate tracking in public schools often meet with resistance, and this resistance needs to be anticipated in order to effectively engage in efforts to detrack the curriculum. Resistance is largely based on lay understandings of teaching and learning (e.g., Wells & Serna, 1996). These concerns need to be addressed if efforts are to be successful. Some resistance will almost certainly come from some parents, particularly parents of high-achieving, high-track youth (see, e.g., Marsh & Raywid, 1994; Oakes et al., 1997; Wells & Oakes, 1996; Welner, 2001; Welner & Burris, 2006), who can be very effective in derailing efforts to eliminate tracking (Oakes et al., 1997; Welner
Resistance can also come from teachers who are accustomed to particular ways of teaching (Oakes et al., 1997), and efforts to eliminate ability groupings that are not well supported by teachers may fail to create the desired classroom dynamics (Rubin, 2003). Several researchers document the inadequacy of efforts to detrack schools by allowing students and parents to choose the academic track in which a student participates, because students and parents are not equally informed regarding the pros and cons of different options (e.g., Noguera & Wing, 2006; Yonezawa, Wells, & Serna, 2002).

Successful efforts at “detracking” school curriculum have paid careful attention to the resistance offered by parents of high-achieving students (Marsh & Raywid, 1994, 1995; Oakes et al., 1997; Welner & Burris, 2006). These parents are often afraid that detracking the curriculum will result in their children receiving a “dumbed down” education in order to accommodate the needs of a broader range of students. Oakes and her colleagues (Oakes et al., 1997) described a successful program in which special attention was paid to including parents in the planning of the new curriculum to ensure that it would remain challenging. This involvement of parents was combined with extensive teacher training in the new curriculum over the summer to ensure that teachers mastered techniques by which they could engage the whole student body in a high-level curriculum. By engaging rather than simply resisting the concerns of the parents of high-achieving students, school administrators were able to enlist efforts of these parents and gain their approval of the new plan. Welner and Burris (2006) argued that a school leader needs to know the community in which he or she is working, and to develop strategies for effecting change based within an accurate understanding of the amount and kind of resistance that will be encountered when equity-based interventions are planned, and they articulate different strategies for working with more and less cooperative and equity-oriented communities.

Student disciplinary practices. Who, when, and how schools discipline students is highly racialized in most schools (e.g., Ferguson, 2001; Noguera, 2008; Skiba et al., 2002). Studies of disciplinary practices in schools reveal that from the earliest school years, practices that are based in assumptions about “getting rid of troublemakers” disproportionately identify the behavior of male students of color as problematic and serve to effectively drive some students away from school (e.g., Ayers, Dohrn, & Ayers, 2001; Ferguson, 2001; Fine, 1991; Gregory, Nygreen, & Moran, 2006; Noguera, 2003a, 2003b, 2003c, 2008). Such disciplinary practices are based in assumptions that behavior emerges wholly from the individual and is not understood to emerge within a particular school context. In addition, behavior is perceived to be “good” or “bad” rather than simply functional and instructive about what is happening in students’ lives.

Data from nearly three decades of research have consistently demonstrated that students of color, and most particularly African-American and/or Latino
boys, are disproportionately more likely to be involved in disciplinary actions at school and more likely to receive more severe punishments (e.g., suspensions and expulsions) than their White peers (e.g., Ayers et al., 2001; Gregory, 1996, 1997; McCarthy & Hoge, 1987; McFadden, Marsh, Price, & Hwang, 1992; Nichols, Ludwin, & Iadicola, 1999; Skiba et al., 2002; Skiba, Peterson, & Williams, 1997; Wu, Pink, Crain, & Moles, 1982).

Careful studies of disciplinary practices reveal that although lower socioeconomic status (SES) students are more likely to be the subject of school disciplinary actions (e.g., Skiba et al., 2002; Skiba et al., 1997; Wu et al., 1982), racial differences in school discipline cannot be accounted for solely on the basis of SES (Skiba et. al., 2002; Wu et al., 1982) or the severity of the behavior resulting in disciplinary referral (Shaw & Braden, 1990; Skiba et. al., 2002; Skiba et al., 1997). Rather, several studies suggest that students of color, and particularly African-American and Latino boys, receive more severe punishments for the same behavior. For example, Shaw and Braden (1990) found that African-American male students were more likely to be referred for disciplinary action and to receive corporal punishment, even though the offenses for which they were referred were less severe than those for which White students were referred. In a large, statewide study of disciplinary practices, Skiba and his colleagues (Skiba et al., 2002) found that White students were more likely to be referred for behaviors in which they objectively disobeyed school rules (e.g., smoking, vandalism), whereas African-American students were more likely to be referred for behaviors involving a more subjective judgment of behavioral appropriateness (e.g., loitering, disrespect, excessive noise). These latter concerns frequently represent power struggles and cultural and class tensions between a largely White, female, and middle class teaching force and young, male students of color.

School districts and administrators play a central role in crafting and implementing school disciplinary practices. Keeping schools safe for students and ensuring that they are places where effective academic engagement can take place is one of a school leader’s primary duties. Nevertheless, the possibility of racial differences in disciplinary practices highlight that this is an area requiring careful attention and thoughtful implementation. “Zero tolerance” policies, in which a single instance of fighting, drugs, or alcohol—even off-campus—can lead to expulsion from the school are increasingly popular in response to media images of “out of control” schools, and they are particularly likely to have a negative effect on students of color (Ayers et al., 2001; Koch, 2000; Skiba & Knesting, 2001). Disciplinary practices that are exclusionary (suspension and expulsion) are likely to lead to students’ increased alienation from school, which is in turn directly linked with dropping out (e.g., Bowditch, 1993; Finn, 1989; Gregory, 1997; Townsend, 2000). Skiba and his colleagues (Skiba et al., 2002; Skiba et al., 1997) found that racial differences in disciplinary outcomes is primarily accounted for by racial differences in teacher referrals, suggesting that administrators need to
take a leadership role in ensuring that all teachers are engaged in processes of critical self-reflection regarding who, when, and why they decide to refer students for discipline.

Discipline audits are a good strategy for beginning a school- or district-wide conversation about disciplinary practices. Discipline audits can highlight both who is doing the referring for discipline and who is getting disciplined. Often, a small number of teachers are doing most of the referring for disciplinary practices. Teachers who feel they have no control of their classrooms may refer a large number of students for discipline for even minor infractions. Once particularly frequent “referrers” are identified, a school leader can direct effort to helping those teachers find ways of getting control of their students and to think differently about how to manage their classroom. For example, the teachers might be paired with effective senior mentor teachers who can help them to think about discipline differently. Ongoing staff development time could be devoted to the issue of the racial makeup of school disciplinary rolls, with particular attention given to how disciplinary patterns may reflect broader problems in relationships between a largely (female) White teaching staff and (male) students of color and how these issues can be addressed.

Noguera (2001) pointed out that when we identify disciplinary problems within individual students and locate those individuals as the problem, we miss the larger social context in which student behavior occurs and misread students who are bored, frustrated, and angry with their educational experience as “the problem” (see also Valenzuela, 1999). He noted that students who are deeply engaged in their learning generally do not misbehave, and that presenting students with more challenging material can improve their behavior as a result. Remember that students previously labeled a “behavior problem” often “behave” better in heterogeneous classrooms, and particularly those with a more challenging curriculum. Studies of schools that are effective in creating safe, orderly environments in poor, urban communities do so by building strong relationships between and among students, faculty, and staff (Sandler, 2001).

**Summary.** Changing school organization and undoing institutionalized racism in school practices and policies can go a long way to create better, more effective schools for students of color. Audits of the implications of school practices and policies can help uncover the unintended institutionalized racism that may lurk in, for example, school discipline practices. The policies and practices—for example, tracking—may also reflect deeply held and yet unexamined beliefs about teaching and learning and about student performance. Thoughtful explorations of such practices among teachers and principals can help teachers and parents move forward with changes that challenge the status quo in ways that will improve the school experiences and academic outcomes of all students.
Large-scale structural change will likely not take place in the first place, or stay in place if it does, without careful planning and strategic political thinking. Creating an empowering school organization that will serve all students typically means creating large-scale change. Large-scale change will necessarily meet with resistance, be it political, economic, or social. Large-scale changes often mean interrupting policies and practices that are serving some students and families well in order to more equitably serve all students. In some cases, all students benefit academically from the change, as we see in the efforts at detracking undertaken by Burris and her colleagues, as described above. However, in order to create this benefit to students, difficult choices have to be made. In order to fund the kinds of math supports that the detracking program entailed, less money was available for other projects. Similarly, smaller class sizes and schools are often politically “positive” in that nearly all parents will support them—but that support can wane when the financial and opportunity costs of such programs are realized. Organizational changes of the kinds documented here all require tremendous leadership—to create the vision of what can be, to facilitate the transition, and to manage resistance along the way. Structural changes (e.g., smaller schools) can create a context that can facilitate other change (e.g., improved teacher–student relationships), but leadership is still necessary to ensure the changed structure leads to the kinds of improvements envisioned.

Implications for Policy, Practice, and Theory

In general, broad policies at the federal and state level have not been tremendously successful in making the changes we desire in schools. Court challenges such as Brown (1954) or federal policies targeting students of color or disadvantaged students have typically provided some important ingredients for change, but on their own they have been of limited effectiveness. Hurston (1954) was skeptical of federally mandated school integration because she feared that forced integration would only harm African-American children, as did Dubois. Their concerns were in many ways realized, with African-American families exchanging segregated schools with poor resources but excellent, activist African-American teachers committed to their students for resource-rich schools with teachers who were indifferent to their African-American students—or worse (Foster, 1997; Hooks, 1994). This poor exchange is part of what has led Bell (2004) to argue that the original litigation and compliance targets of Brown were ill-conceived.

In our modern school context, Darling-Hammond (2006) pointed out that many civil rights leaders applauded the passing of the federal policy colloquially referred to as No Child Left Behind (Elementary and Secondary Education Act, 2001) because it finally demanded that schools give concentrated attention to racial and ethnic disparities in student learning. Unfortunately, it’s punitive structure and sole focus on the constant improvement of average standardized test scores
means that school reform efforts that lead to promising results such as increased high school graduation rates can be thwarted. This results from the unintended implications of the policy is that schools are advantaged if lower-performing students drop out of school (and thus are not included in the testing).

This is not to suggest that broad policies do not matter—rather, they matter very much. The recent Supreme Court decisions regarding affirmative action (Gratz v. Bollinger, 2003; Grutter v. Bollinger, 2003) and school desegregation (Parents v. Seattle School District, 2007) are important and will have a longstanding impact on schools and colleges and their accessibility to students of color. Change efforts in schools may need to start with litigation and/or legislation, but they cannot end there. These policies need to work through to the individual people in individual schools. Because teaching and learning are inherently relational activities that happen between individual people, the way teachers and students come together in the classroom and the schoolyard matters. I return to the seven themes that I identified at the start of this article (see Table 1), to highlight principles that can guide school improvement efforts in more effective ways.

Attending to Aversive and Institutional Racism

Creating more effective multiethnic schools requires attention to both aversive and institutional racism (see Item 1 in Table 1). When we do not acknowledge that people’s (often sincere) belief in egalitarian principles may live side by side with attitudes or beliefs that advantage some students and disadvantage others, we undermine any change efforts we make before we start. Underlying attitudes and beliefs about cultural groups, class differences, families and communities, and even models of intelligence need to be acknowledged, surfaced, and confronted or they will undermine all efforts to improve relationships between and among students and teachers in school settings.

Similarly, changes that do not address taken-for-granted ways of doing things that (in?)advertently advantage some students and disadvantage others cannot effect the kind of broad changes that are needed to create more effective schools. Too often, changes occur at the policy level—advocating, for example, for greater racial and ethnic integration in schools, without corresponding attention to how to do integration well. The net effect is that the policy change looks like it “failed” to make a difference for students.

It is important to acknowledge both institutional racism and aversive racism—not just one or the other. Changes to institutionally racist policies and procedures—such as disciplinary practices and academic tracking as described above—are doomed to fail if aversive racism is not also attended to. Part of what made the detracking efforts of Rockville Centre School District so effective was that they were carefully planned to create successful experiences. All students were
offered extra help—not just those that might have supposedly needed the help. All students were offered only the highest level curriculum, not a midlevel curriculum that presumes some kids cannot work at the highest level. All of this required careful attention to implicit beliefs about who can learn what and who cannot. In Oakes’ (Oakes et al., 1997) terms, the effort was made to “detrack” minds as well as courses.

Conceiving Schools as Agents of Change

If we conceive of schools as the agent of change, we have to conceive our efforts to create more effective multiethnic schools holistically, rather than in terms of isolated programs or policy change (see Item 2 in Table 1). It is the school in its entirety that needs to change, and through systematic change, real differences in students’ experiences and outcomes are likely to occur. School policies, practices, and everyday ways of operating across the board must be assessed for their impact on the educational outcomes of all students. Without that, any interventions we employ will be piecemeal and seen as peripheral to the educational enterprise. It is important that helping all students achieve at the highest levels and improving the educational outcomes of students of color in particular are perceived as central aspects of the educational mission of the school and not something to “add on” to the “real” educational work of delivering content. When we conceive of schools as agents of change, we can look more deeply at all of our practices and examine how and why they were developed as well as who they are serving and who they are not. Often, educational practices are designed to meet the needs of the highest-achieving students whose parents are the most vocal in demanding that their children’s needs are addressed.

Leadership Sets the Tone

One aspect of this work that has emerged again and again over many decades is that interventions must “come from the top” (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew, 1998; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2000, 2006) (see Item 3 in Table 1). This means that administrators must be deeply involved in these efforts by providing the conceptual framework and the tone for the whole school (e.g., Blumer & Tatum, 1999). It is through leadership and leadership alone that educational reform efforts can be implemented completely as designed. Leadership needs to provide the vision and the plan, but leadership is also needed to build support for challenging reforms among teachers and parents.

Efforts to change schools that come from administrators but are not wholly supported by teachers and parents can be undermined very quickly. Oakes and her colleagues (Datnow & Hirshberg, 1996; Oakes, 2002, 2005; Oakes et al., 1997; Wells & Oakes, 1996) have noted that efforts at detracking schools can easily be
derailed by high-status parents or poorly trained, unsupported, or unenthusiastic teachers. Undertaking a change of this size is not simply an organizational issue of setting up heterogeneous classrooms and letting the magic happen. This is because detracking the curriculum is not a technical solution but rather a conceptual one—it is a “deep” reform that involves rethinking what many believe about teaching and learning. In fact, Oakes et al., 1997 have specifically argued that the more important reform is “de-tracking the minds” of parents and teachers—getting them to change how they think about how and when teaching and learning take place—and officially detracking the curriculum probably should not take place until this deeper reform has taken place. Strong administrative leadership is necessary for these deeper reforms to take place.

Similarly, leadership, broadly conceived, is an essential ingredient in all the strategies and reforms described above in that teachers must be actively, not passively, involved in each effort. Teachers who passively or unreflectively incorporate cooperative learning into their classrooms will not implement these strategies in a way that is effective. In fact, Rubin (2003) pointed out that in such cases, their efforts may do more harm than good. Teachers set the tone in their classrooms, and through their efforts they can create an “identity safe” or “identity threatening” environment, which will make all the difference in how effectively they can accomplish the twin goals of improved interethnic relations and improved educational outcomes for students of color (D. M. Steele et al., 2006). Teachers’ explicit affirmation of their commitment to the success of all students and their deep belief in the abilities of all creates a classroom climate in which other reform efforts can be effectively implemented.

The Paradox of Needing to Focus on Race and Ethnicity While Benefiting All Students

Quite hopefully, the interventions and reforms reviewed here highlight the ways in which working to create more effective multiethnic schools is just good educational practice (see Item 4 in Table 1). Thus, the interventions and strategies discussed above are helpful and empowering for all students, not just students of color. However, a paradox that emerges is that although most of the principles, strategies, and techniques outlined here will benefit all students, and not just students of color (e.g., see Zirkel, 2008b), they are only likely to have a positive impact on the educational outcomes of students of color if they are implemented with conscious and specific attention to issues of race and ethnicity.

Efforts that attempt to create solutions to racialized achievement in a color-blind manner without conscious attention to issues of race and ethnicity have not been effective (e.g., Markus et al., 2000; Zirkel, 2008b). Without special attention to race and ethnicity, aversive and institutional racism can continue to operate without interference, and these processes will undermine any reform
efforts. Moreover, color-blind approaches to solving racial and ethnic differences in school experiences and outcomes ignore the role that racial stigma plays in achievement differences, and they downplay or minimize the role that a strong, positive ethnic identity can play in propelling students forward.

Encourage the Development of Ethnic Identity

Efforts to improve the educational outcomes of students of color and intergroup relations in multiethnic schools are greatly enhanced by efforts to create a setting that facilitates the development of a strong, positive racial or ethnic identity among students of color, and there is much that K-12 schools can do in this regard (see Item 5 in Table 1). The development of a positive ethnic identity has been demonstrated to be an important factor influencing a wide variety of educational outcomes for students of color.

Many of the interventions described in this article are likely to influence student outcomes at least in part by encouraging the development of students’ ethnic identity. Such interventions include changes to increase the multicultural base of the curriculum, the creation of opportunities to openly and directly discuss issues of race and ethnicity, and efforts to help teachers and schools to work to uncover institutional racism. However, Tatum (2003/1997) noted that in order to help foster ethnic identity, we might sometimes need to accept uncomfortable situations—such as when we see students separated by ethnic group in the school cafeteria or playground. We may need to allow students to actively engage in the process of ethnic identity development and provide structures and opportunities for interethnic contact within school activities rather than expecting it to emerge on its own. Contrary to fears that are often expressed, Phinney and Ferguson (1997) found that a positive ethnic identity led to more positive, rather than negative, attitudes toward outgroup members. When we create space for students to explore their ethnic background in curriculum and student organizations and we also provide room to have thoughtful, engaging discussions of race and ethnicity, we provide an ideal setting for the development of a positive ethnic identity that is associated with better, rather than worsened, relations between groups.

Explicit Affirmations of the Abilities of Students of Color

Negative stereotypes about the academic abilities of students of color and the stigma that such stereotypes convey present an active threat to the educational outcomes of students of color as well as to intergroup relations between and among students (e.g., Steele et al., 2002; Zirkel, 2005). Efforts to create effective schools for all students require that we not ignore such stereotypes but rather actively work to subvert them through direct efforts (e.g., J. A. Banks, 2004; D. M. Steele et al., 2006; Zirkel, 2005) (see Item 6 in Table 1). Many of the interventions described
in this article have as a key component the need to publicly and openly affirm our commitment to equity and our confidence in the abilities of students of color.

Part of the importance of having at least some teachers of the same racial or ethnic background as students is that students of color do not fear that teachers of their own ethnic background have lower expectations of them than their White peers—this affirmation is assumed until demonstrated otherwise (Brown & Dobbins, 2004; Casteel, 2000; Galguera, 1998; Wout et al., in press). However, White teachers can destigmatize their classrooms and more deeply engage their students of color through a simple, explicit affirmation of their belief in the abilities of all students (Brown & Dobbins, 2004; Cohen et al., 1999; Wout et al., in press).

The elimination of academic tracks, the invitation of students of color to academically oriented schools within schools, culturally relevant pedagogy, cooperative learning, organized study groups, and similar interventions all have at their base the implicit, and sometimes explicit, statement that students of color are capable of the very highest levels of academic work. Such affirmations of confidence in students of color need to be addressed both explicitly, in teachers’ statements to students and classes, and implicitly, in the curriculum offered to students. Too often, poor students in urban schools are offered a lower-level curriculum that communicates all too clearly teachers’ and principals’ expectations for them (Noguera, 2003a). “Color-blind” approaches, in which the focus is on ignoring group membership, can exacerbate the problem, because we cannot subvert stereotypes without addressing them directly (Lewis, 2001; Markus et al., 2000; D. M. Steele et al., 2006).

“High expectations” is a concept that is frequently discussed in the educational literature, but rarely do we consider the many layered ways that low expectations are communicated to students. High expectations are not just a buzzword—rather, teachers and school leaders must deeply and authentically—rather than just intellectually—believe in the potential of their students of color and their families. Many teachers and administrators have vague notions about social justice and working in urban schools, but when faced with the realities such schools present, they often resort to deficit-based thinking about students and families (Flessa, 2008; McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004). It is important that teachers and administrators become aware of their own limitations and engage in whatever personal work is necessary to develop the ability to effectively work with different populations of students. This is often no small task, and school leaders can play an important role in providing the space and time for teachers to reflect on their practice in ways that allows them to become effective educators for all students.

**Building Relationships**

The importance and effectiveness of relationships in student achievement cannot be overstated (see Item 7 in Table 1). Good student–teacher relationships
are essential, but so are peer relationships both within and across ethnic groups. These social bonds are what tie students to the academic enterprise generally and to each school specifically (e.g., Gibson et al., 2004; Zirkel, 2004a). Recent studies of student development have demonstrated that simple interventions designed to increase students’ attachment to each other and to teachers and administrators at school can have large and longstanding effects on a variety of life outcomes (e.g., Lonczak et al., 2002). The development of social bonds between students is at the center of efforts to explicitly improve intergroup relations such as the Common Ingroup Identity Model (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000) and intergroup dialogues (Gurin et al., 2002; Lopez, 2004; Nagda, Chan-Woo, & Truelove, 2004; Schoem & Hurtado, 2001).

Improved and deeper relationships can be seen at the center of many other of the reform efforts described above as well. For example, small schools and schools within schools operate on the principle that teachers and students, because they are better known to each other, can work together more effectively. Recall that efforts at detracking improve intergroup relations within the classroom and also improve the relationships between formerly lower-track students and their teachers. Cooperative learning and the creation of less competitively arranged classrooms both also improve students’ relationships with each other and facilitate the development of cross-race friendships that are longer lasting than in more competitively organized classrooms.

These social bonds are not an incidental aspect of these interventions, but rather are an essential ingredient in their success. The social bonds are important ingredient in keeping students connected to school (Gibson et al., 2004; McNeely & Falci, 2004; McNeely, Nonnemaker, & Blum, 2002). Improved relationships with peers and teachers at school are effective means to create less stigmatizing school environments (D. M. Steele et al., 2006; Zirkel, 2005), which in turn provide a context likely to facilitate the engagement, persistence, and ultimately the academic performance of students of color (Walton & Cohen, 2007; Zirkel, 2007). These social bonds—with teachers and peers alike—likely keep students focused and committed to school when the schoolwork itself is not going so well, thus facilitating the academic persistence that is likely to lead to better educational outcomes over time (Walton & Cohen, 2007).

**Links Between Improved Intergroup Relations and Improved Educational Outcomes**

Throughout this article, we can see that efforts to improve intergroup relations and efforts to improve the educational outcomes for students of color are inextricably linked, in that efforts to achieve one also tend to facilitate the other (see Item 8 in Table 1). These links can be seen in efforts to detrack the curriculum, develop cooperative learning techniques, change the classroom climate...
to focus on learning rather than performance, facilitate the development of racial and ethnic identity, as well as in organized efforts to facilitate both formal and informal interethnic contact. All of these strategies have been demonstrated to improve both intergroup relations and the educational outcomes of students of color (e.g., Antonio, 2001, 2004; Gurin et al., 2002, Gurin, Nagda, & Lopez, 2004). The links between these two outcomes is meaningful, because in large part both are linked to efforts to destigmatize race and ethnicity in school and create an environment in which students of color do not feel threatened by stigma (D. M. Steele et al., 2006; Zirkel, 2005). When we create classroom environments in which we thoughtfully facilitate interactions between diverse students at the same time that we destigmatize the classroom by creating less hierarchically organized classrooms and schools, we create the perfect setting for both intergroup relations and students of color to flourish. This is welcome news because it makes our work as educators concerned about the atmosphere of our schools and the educational outcomes of all of our students that much easier.

Summary and Conclusions

Creating more effective multiethnic schools—schools with positive interethnic relationships and in which all students succeed—is probably the biggest challenge facing educators today, both in the United States and around the world. This article focused specifically on strategies and approaches that have been successfully implemented in the United States. However, similar, if not identical issues are present in most parts of the industrialized world—including, but not limited to, France, Germany, Australia, the United Kingdom, South Africa, Brazil, and Japan (e.g., J. A. Banks & C. A. M. Banks, 2004; Grant & Lei, 2001). The persistence and pervasiveness of these issues speak to the urgency with which we need to address them. There are, however, many strategies and approaches to creating more effective multiethnic schools that can be implemented by individual teachers, principals, and/or school boards as they endeavor to create better educational experiences for all.

Implementing new or innovative approaches to effecting positive changes in this area can be overwhelming, particularly as most educators already feel overloaded with demands. This article provides specific strategies that can be immediately implemented in schools as well as an analysis of the principles that underlie these approaches and can guide the development of new approaches. An essential concept that emerges from this work is that effective multiethnic schools do not simply happen but do require specific, reflective attention in order to be successful. Across all strategies and approaches, the need to address issues of race and ethnicity directly becomes clear. We cannot solve racially or ethnically coded problems with solutions that do not specifically address issues of race and ethnicity.
The good news is that strategies for creating more effective multicultural school environments that are grounded in current understandings of multicultural or antiracist education and are thoughtfully implemented can and do have enormous impact on students. The disparities we see in students’ outcomes are deeply rooted in students’ experience—and by changing the experiences students have in school, these problems are imminently solvable. It is time to roll up our sleeves and get to work.

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