Race, Class, and Beliefs about Students in Urban Elementary Schools[1]

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Abstract

In this article, the authors use interview and observation data from five urban elementary schools to develop five hypotheses regarding the relationship between the race and class composition of schools' student populations, teachers' beliefs and expectations of students, and the educational implications of these beliefs. The authors show that the race and class composition of schools impacts teachers' beliefs about students' capacity and potential and their subsequent instructional responses. They further argue that organizational context can mediate the impact of teachers' beliefs by shaping their responses to perceived student challenges. The authors draw on Weick's (1979) distinction between perception and enactment of organizational environments and Giddens (1979, 1984) theory of structuration to argue that schools and their employees can shape the implications of certain structural characteristics of their environments, reinforcing, and potentially challenging, reproductive processes.

One of the most consistent findings in sociology is that family background is linked to children's educational outcomes, attainment, and adult occupational status (Blau and Duncan 1967; Coleman et al. 1966; Jencks et al. 1972; Orfield 1993). Data indicate that children from low-income families do less well in school than their more affluent counterparts, and that African American children's educational attainment continues to lag behind that of whites (Kalmijin and Kraaykamp 1996; Farley and Allen 1989).

Understanding how race and class stratification of this type is perpetuated from one generation to the next has been an enduring problem in sociological research, and a major concern of reproduction theorists of education. Reproduction theorists have identified how structural forces such as the correspondence between work, family, and school environments (Bowles and Gintis 1976), cultural capital (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990; Lareau 1989; Heath 1983), the persistence of racial stratification (Ogbu 1978, 1994; Fordham and Ogbu 1986, Fordham 1996), and institutional practices such as tracking (Oakes 1985) and low teacher expectations (Roscigno 1998; Brophy and Good 1973; Rist 1970, 1977; Rosenthal and Jacobson 1968) shape student outcomes.[1] All of these forces, it is argued, are implicated in passing on privilege to the children of the powerful and cementing the disadvantages of students from less affluent families.

One line of argument in this tradition focuses on teachers' perceptions and expectations for student performance (Roscigno 1998; Ferguson, 1998a; Jussim, Eccles, and Madon 1996) Rist 1970, 1977; Rosenthal and Jacobson 1968). This work suggests that teachers' perceptions of low-income, Black, and female students academic capacity are lower than those they hold for middle and upper income white male students (Farkas, et. al. 1990, 1996). This work also emphasizes the role of the "self-fulfilling prophecy" through which teachers' low expectations reduce students' self-image, cause them to exert less effort in school, and lead teachers themselves to give certain students less challenging coursework (Farkas et al. 1990, 1996; Rist 1973; Merton, 1948).

Central to these arguments is the belief that student behaviors or ascribed characteristics, rooted in family background, can lead teachers' to lower their expectations

and engage in practices that contribute to social reproduction. As it currently stands, this literature suffers from three important limitations. First, there is an emphasis on interaction between individual teachers and their students. This means that the potential implications of institutional context for the development and reinforcement of beliefs about and expectations for students has been under-examined. Second, this literature often implies a monolithic[2] response on the part of teachers, assuming that when they hold low or deficit oriented expectations of students they act in similar ways toward them.[3] Third, because of the emphasis on individual classrooms, the literature overlooks the potential role of school practices in mediating teachers' behaviors toward students.

In this paper, we use interview and observation data from a pilot study of five urban elementary schools to develop and articulate a series of hypotheses regarding the relationship between teachers' and administrators' beliefs and expectations of students and their implications. First, we argue that teachers' beliefs about students may be related to the make up of each schools' student population. Among our five schools, teachers and administrators at schools with higher proportions of Asian and white students and those with larger middle-income populations have more favorable perceptions of students and their families than personnel at schools with predominantly low-income Black students. In addition, social class background is tied to beliefs about students in the predominantly Black schools we studied, where perceptions were more asset based in the middle-income school than in the two lower-income schools. These findings suggest that when African American students from low-income families are concentrated in certain schools, teachers' impressions of the students, in general, may be leveled. In other words, the impact of family background on teachers' beliefs about students may be indirect, working through the characteristics of a school's student population rather than perceptions of individual students.

Second, we argue that enactments of teachers' perceptions are associated with their general impressions of students. In schools where teachers and administrators emphasize students' assets, they also tend to respond to students' challenges more proactively engaging in specific practices to respond to students' needs. In these schools, students' challenges are seen as malleable to teachers' and students' hard work and effort. In schools where teachers

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emphasize students' deficits, teachers' responses follow two distinct patterns. In one such school, students' challenges are seen as reflective of their innate ability. At this school, teachers report evaluating students work less critically, giving them less challenging work, and resisting instructional innovation. At the other school that emphasized students' deficits, students' challenges were not seen as innate, and teachers and administrators sought proactive strategies to address these challenges.[4]

This pattern among the two deficit-oriented schools points to our third argument. We argue that even when teachers' and administrators' beliefs about students are very similar, and students' characteristics are roughly the same, school-based instructional responses may vary substantially. To explore this pattern, we highlight two schools in which teachers and administrators hold similar, mostly deficit oriented, beliefs about their low-income African American students but demonstrate distinct enactments of these beliefs.

Race, Class, and Teacher Perceptions and Expectations

Since the publication of *Pygmalion in the Classroom* (Rosenthal and Jacobson 1968), there has been extensive attention paid to teachers' perceptions and beliefs about students and their implications for social reproduction. Several analysts have provided useful reviews of this work (Ferguson 1998a; Jussim, Eccles and Madon 1996; Good, 1981). At best, this literature can be characterized as inconclusive. Some analysts find pervasive biases in teachers' perceptions and behaviors toward different groups of students while others argue that there is significant accuracy and predictive ability in teachers' perceptions (Jussim, Eccles,and Madon 1996).

Ferguson (1998a) provides a useful framework for understanding this literature, arguing that much of the disagreement among researchers is based on different conceptions of what is meant by bias.[5] He argues that the work on teacher bias can be usefully divided into three types of teacher "deviation from some benchmark of neutrality" (Ferguson, 1998a: 275). The first he calls *unconditional race neutrality*, which means that unbiased teachers expect the same of black and white students regardless of their experiences with them. The second type is *conditional race neutrality*, in which teachers' expectations may be

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shaped by their past experiences with students. For example, past test scores or grades may account for differences in teachers' expectations or perceptions of students. The final benchmark is based on *unobserved potential*. This is not conditioned on past performance but is based upon what students might accomplish in the future.

> In this case, bias is found in the perception or estimation of student's full potential. Full potential equals demonstrated plus latent potential. It is alleged that teachers underestimate the latent potential of blacks more than whites (Ferguson 1998a: 281).

Ferguson argues that studies seeking unconditional bias are more likely to demonstrate race and class bias among teachers. Studies emphasizing conditional bias are more mixed in their conclusions, often suggesting that teachers perceptions are largely accurate. Finally, teacher bias based on unobserved potential is more difficult to assess because there is no clear objective measure of students' potential.

Whether or not teachers' perceptions are biased, the impact of these perceptions are greater for African American, female, and low-income students than for white male students (Ferguson, 1998a; Jussim, Eccles, and Madon,1996). Jussim, Eccles, and Madon (1996) tested the effect of teachers' perceptions at the beginning of the school year on students' math test scores and grades at the end of the academic year. The effect of teachers' expectations was found to be three times as great for African American students. Ferguson offers two potential explanations for this finding. One explanation suggests that teachers may be more rigid in their expectations for African American, female, and low-income students. In support of this view, Ferguson cites Taylor (1979) who finds that teachers treat white and black students differently. She finds that, when compared to whites, Black students get "briefer feedback after mistakes, … less positive feedback after correct responses, … and fewer helpful slips of the tongue" (Ferguson 1998a: 294). Taylor's findings are also confirmed by other studies in classroom settings.[6]

Second, such students may be more vulnerable to teachers' expectations. Ferguson cites Steele's (1992) work on "stereotype threat" and Mickelson's (1990) work of African

American students' expectations and aspirations as potential clues to why this larger effect is found for African American students. Ferguson writes that:

> Steele identifies a phenomenon he calls stereotype threat, and the resulting
>
> stereotype anxiety,   that can affect members of any stigmatized group.
>
> When the stereotype concerns ability, "threatened" individuals are anxious
>
> not to perform in ways that might corroborate the stereotype…One effect of
>
> this anxiety is "a disruptive apprehension" that can interfere with
>
> performance.

Mickelson's work suggests that the opportunity structure (particularly the job ceiling affecting the employment opportunities and outcomes of African Americans) has a leveling effect on students "concrete" aspirations. Thus, while their abstract beliefs about education and mobility reflect mainstream values, they may behave in ways that undermine mainstream success.

Therefore, regardless of the accuracy or inaccuracy of teachers' perceptions of student past performance, the implications of their beliefs and subsequent actions may detrimentally impact certain students more than others. In other words, once African American, female and low-income students are identified as having educational deficits, teachers' behavior towards students, students' responses to that behavior, or some combination of both may exacerbate the perceived deficit.

Given this discussion, we are interested in teachers' perceptions of students on three levels. First we want to explore the patterns in teachers assessments of students in different schools to understand if these assessments vary in any way by the composition of the student population. Second, we want to understand what teachers do with these beliefs and perceptions and how their actions might vary across different schools. More specifically, when teachers perceive students mostly in terms of assets or deficits, how do they respond to them and are these responses more or less consistent across our schools. Third, we want to explore how organizational context might mediate the responses of teachers and administrators to the perceived characteristics of students. As we shall discuss in the next

section, we believe that institutional context may be important to the development of perceptions as well as the enactment of teachers' beliefs.

Teacher Perceptions and Beliefs: Bringing the Context Back In

The current research on teacher beliefs and expectations emphasizes dyadic interactions between teachers and their students in classrooms (Jussim, Eccles, Madon, 1996). However, if students' race and social class influence teachers' expectations and beliefs, then the implications of de facto segregation on teachers' beliefs *in general* may also be influenced by institutional context. In other words, the demographics of the student population may have a leveling effect on teachers' expectations if de facto segregation creates schools where the students are disproportionately low-income or from Black families. Interestingly, Merton's (1948) original conception of the self-fulfilling prophecy emphasized beliefs at the institutional and societal level rather than focusing on dyadic relationships between individuals (Merton, 1948; Jussim, Eccles, and Madon, 1996). His original conception represents a more "sociological" perspective on the issue, emphasizing the importance of institutional practices and their implications for creating, sustaining, and even challenging inequalities.[7]

Several studies have examined the important role of residential and school-based segregation in impacting school resources, instructional practices, and students' access to knowledge (Roscigno, 2000, 1998; Bankston and Caldas 1996; Ayalon, 1994; Ogbu 1994; Kozol, 1991; Anyon, 1981; Bowles and Gintis, 1976 among others). Recent work (Roscigno, 2000) argues for an "institutional stratification perspective" on the role of family background and educational stratification that emphasizes the "multi-level and inter-institutional nature of racial educational disadvantage" (Roscigno 2000:271). Roscigno writes:

> Arguably, the most important of these inter-institutional linkages in relation
> to race/class reproduction in education has to do with family background
> inequalities and their consequences for achievement *through* the character
> and resources of the schools one attends. What this means, more

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straightforwardly, is that family background shapes residential options. Where

one resides, in turn, has a large impact on the school one attends and,

consequently, achievement [emphasis in original].

He concludes that residential segregation leads to indirect effects of family background

through enrollment patterns in public versus private schools, the social class composition of

schools, monetary expenditures, and school climate (Roscigno, 2000). He also includes the

potential for "… the negative impact of family disadvantage on achievement through

diminished teacher evaluations and expectations" (Roscigno 2000:271). In this discussion,

we examine whether the race/class composition of schools seems to influence what teachers

and administrators believe about students and how they respond to these beliefs. In other

words, we seek to understand how institutional characteristics might affect teachers'

perceptions of and actions toward students.

Institutional Mediation of Actions

As with the work on teachers' expectations for students, analysts who have examined

the implications of these beliefs in the practices of teachers have most often focused on the

individual level. However, because social actors are embedded in social contexts, there is a

potential for their actions to be influenced by that context. Merton (1948) argues that

"appropriate institutional and administrative conditions" and "deliberate institutional

controls" can undermine the operation of self-fulfilling prophecies (Merton, 1948: 210).

Ferguson (1998b) argues that school practices can moderate the impact of teacher

expectations for instructional practices. He highlights the accomplishments of certain school

interventions to demonstrate that schools, as organizations, can impact the practices of

individual teachers. We therefore seek to explore how human agency and organizational

context might mediate teachers' responses to perceived student deficits.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The data for this report is drawn from semi-structured interviews and observations

conducted at five urban elementary schools.[8] Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics

of each school.

[Insert table 1 here]

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The interviews were conducted primarily with 2nd and 5th (n=23) grade teachers at each school along with formal and informal school leaders.[9] In total, 57 teachers and administrators were interviewed. All of the interviews were conducted at the school and lasted between one and two hours. The interviews were audio taped and transcribed.

Teacher interviews were of two types; general interviews and post-observation interviews. The general interviews sought to capture teachers' beliefs about instruction and their beliefs and expectations of students. The post-observation interviews addressed the same issues but were conducted by interviewers who had observed the teachers' classrooms and were therefore grounded in observations of actual teaching practices. Leader interviews were conducted with the principals and assistant principals at each school along with other formal and informal leaders identified by school employees. These interviews asked school leaders about their beliefs regarding instructional innovation as well as the students, their parents, and the school community.

Observations were conducted in 2nd and 5th grade classrooms during math, science, and literacy lessons, faculty meetings, professional development sessions, special school events, after school programs, and informal occasions during the school day including teachers' lunch periods and break times.

Sample Selection

While some research acknowledges the impact of race and class segregation on the *institutional* practices of schools as organizations (Roscigno 2000, 1998; Bowles and Gintis 1976; Ogbu 1994), the teacher expectations literature has most often focused on individual teachers, or interactions inside classrooms, paying less attention to the broader organizational context within which teachers beliefs and their interactions with students are embedded (Jussim, Eccles, and Madon 1996). However, potentially compounding (or perhaps mediating) the impact of low teacher expectations is the concentration of racial minorities and low-income students in highly segregated urban schools.

We argue that emphasizing teachers' and administrators' beliefs at a broader organizational level can help us better understand their impact when the student population is relatively homogenous as well as facilitate comparisons across schools. Therefore, we attempt

to ascertain teachers' and administrators' beliefs about students moving beyond the classroom by interviewing a broader range of actors in each school and seeking to connect their beliefs to a broader organizational response to students. To do this, we focused on two grade levels – one lower elementary grade (2nd) and one upper elementary grade (5th). In addition, we interviewed both formal and informal leaders at these schools. Formal leaders are those who hold formal positions such as principals, assistant principals, counselors, and curriculum coordinators. Informal leaders are those who emerge as leaders based on our conversations with teachers. Informal leaders are viewed by other members of the organization as influencing their practices.

Data Analysis

We analyzed our interview and observation data by first categorizing teachers' and administrators' beliefs about children and then coding their beliefs in terms of assets and deficits. Responses were coded as asset oriented if they contained statements that highlighted students' strengths. Here we borrow from Farkas et al (1990, 1996), and other work in this tradition, by emphasizing teachers' *cognitive* and *non-cognitive* assessments of students.[10] Asset oriented non-cognitive assessments emphasized behavioral qualities such as maturity, responsibility, high work ethic, and the ability to work well with other students. Asset oriented cognitive assessments tended to focus on students' ability to read and compute at high levels, successfully engage in higher order thinking, master course material, and do well on standardized tests. Deficit oriented comments in this category typically suggested that students lacked these qualities and abilities. Teachers and administrators' non-cognitive assessments of students were further divided into three categories – schoolwork related (i.e. completion of homework), marginally schoolwork related (i.e. maturity, disruptiveness), and ascribed characteristics (i.e. race, class, sex). These categories were again borrowed from Farkas (1996).

Having coded the data from each school using this strategy, we then explored patterns at each school paying particular attention to the race and class composition of the student population. To create these categorizations we borrowed from the scheme used by the Consortium on Chicago School Research at the University of Chicago.[11] Having identified the

themes for each school, we then determined the nature of responses for each teacher/administrator that fit into each category, and aggregated this to the school level in order to make comparisons across individuals and the schools as a whole.

Finally, we distinguished between teachers' and administrators perceptions of their students and their enactment of these perceptions (Weick, 1979). We were interested not only in what they believed about their students but how they acted on these beliefs. In particular, we sought explicit connections between beliefs and action both in interviews with teachers and administrators and in our observations of their actual practices. Moreover, we were not simply interested in what individual teachers did in isolation, but also tried to explore how their actions were embedded in more widely held "organizational beliefs" and orientations toward students. The organizational beliefs at a given school are tied to the individual beliefs of teachers and administrators, but are more than the sum of these beliefs. We are interested in a school-wide orientation towards the students at a given school, where the beliefs and responses toward the students do not depend on any individual. This depends on a certain number of people sharing similar beliefs in a school, but it also depends on what kind of people have these beliefs. When similar beliefs are distributed across people at different levels in the hierarchy and in different domains, we can speak of organizational beliefs. The more places that an orientation is re-enforced, the greater the evidence for organizational beliefs. Thus, we examine domains as various as the classroom practice of teachers, the professional development of leaders and the decorations of the hallway in a school for evidence of a shared orientation towards students. Another sign of shared beliefs is when both teachers and administrators express similar beliefs. Therefore, we were interested in the beliefs and responses of individual teachers as well as schools as organizations.

STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS AND BELIEFS ABOUT STUDENTS

The data suggest that the racial and ethnic compositions of schools relate to teachers' and administrators' general beliefs about students. When we analyzed the data from the schools separately, we found that teachers' and administrators' beliefs about students varied by the schools' racial group composition.

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In School A, an integrated school with "only" 64% low-income students,[12] the students were characterized as engaging in asset based behavior. At this school the students were characterized as "eager to learn," "highly motivated," "mature," "eager to help others," and "hard working." All of the teachers in this school emphasized asset behaviors over deficits. In terms of their deficits, these tended to be tied to specific students rather than the general student population. Interestingly, the only cognitive deficits identified were language difficulties. We interpret this to refer to the rising Mexican-American student population at the school, which is a recent phenomenon but has led to the rapid expansion of the schools bilingual program and was presented by the school principal as one of the school's major challenges.

In School B, which is majority Asian and 84% low-income, the majority of teachers' comments about students emphasized cognitive and non-cognitive assets. The cognitive assets included "excellent math, reading, and science skills," and the ability to "catch on quickly." In terms of the non-cognitive assets, comments emphasized students' high levels of motivation, the limited number of discipline problems, students' hard work, and the prominence of educational values in Chinese culture. As one white female curriculum coordinator argued "as a culture, they [Chinese] so value education. That permeates the building to an extent." Notice how this comment attributes these values to all Chinese people, not a specific group of students. Some teachers did raise concerns about the students' capabilities, however, these comments tended to be statements about specific students. For example, a white female upper grade science teacher argued that certain students sometimes lack motivation and have difficulty focusing, while a white female 2nd grade teacher argued that the students who are slower (a small number of students) slow the other children down. Overall, however, teachers and administrators assess students favorably at this school.

At School C, which is 100% African American and 61% low-income, all of the teachers' comments were asset oriented with the exception of the principal, who was concerned that students demonstrated a lack of respect for adult authority at times. Teachers argued that students presented no major behavioral problems, that they were respectful of adults, and generally good kids. Some teachers did raise challenges faced by students, which

included making too much noise and lacking focus, however, such feelings were expressed in the context of statements like "these are really good kids compared to students at other schools." Likewise, while some teachers raised concerns about students' cognitive ability, they were in the context of more positive general statements. For example, an female African American 2nd grade teacher stated that her students sometimes had trouble visualizing in science and reading but added that " I have a lot of good readers and very good math students. They're really, really high up there."

School D, which is 100% African American and 88% low-income was characterized by a more deficit oriented construction of students. Of the nine teachers and school leaders interviewed, six emphasized students' deficits more than their assets. Most of these comments focused on non-cognitive attributes and were only marginally related to academic performance. At this school, teachers argued that students were "disrespectful," "lacked discipline," and were "too social." Other comments emphasized more performance oriented non-cognitive attributes like students having trouble focusing and the failing to adequately complete course work. However, even though many comments were deficit-oriented, two teachers and one administrator emphasized students' assets. For example, the white male assistant principal argues that the students are adept at using computers and understanding technology and that the students presented no major behavioral problems. Other asset oriented comments were what can best be described as qualified compliments. For example, the school's African American male technology coordinator argued that:

> I worked at the Jail. I worked at the juvenile detention center. So, I just had
> the opportunity to be exposed to all types of kids, and all types of
> environments. And, it's really given me the edge, because you can't tell me,
> when you're talking about kids, that [this school] has the worst kids, when I've
> been to juvenile detention centers and the jails. You don't have the worst
> kids. They're not the worst kids. Matter of fact, there's some pretty good
> kids.

His comments, while asset oriented, use young offenders as the reference point. This is clearly not a ringing endorsement of the students' behavior.

Others in this school discussed students who possessed assets as exceptions to broader patterns. A white female 2nd grade teacher talks about two students in her class who posses strong cognitive skills. She argues:

> Well there's a boy who's probably the smartest kid in the class. I mean, he's so smart. He's got so much outside knowledge that most of the kids don't have. He's so bright, I mean - he gets it. I say one thing, I read one thing - he remembers that word. He's got just like a memory that's incredible, and he just easily picks up concepts. And, I have a girl, who's really intelligent. . . . The one's that are brighter, I have to say, seem to come from these really tighter families and more support with the education through the parents that I know.

Again, while the teacher distinguishes these students' assets, they are constructed more as an exception than the rule. This is in contrast to the first three schools where students' assets were emphasized and their deficits were more often seen as exceptions.

Finally, school E, was perhaps the most deficit oriented of the schools in terms of teachers and administrators construction of students, particularly their family backgrounds. Teachers and administrators believe that the students' family environments and neighborhood contexts, along with the presence of drugs and gang violence all contribute to them coming to school somewhat unprepared or unable to focus. Some major themes in the teachers and administrators beliefs about children are reflected below.

> These kids are hard core inner city. Parent involvement is a joke. I have some great parents Out of 30 kids I'd say I have ten living with a grandparent or foster parent and twenty living with their mother. I think I only have one living with both parents. And those numbers are consistent with my class last year. Most of the boys have no male figure in their lives. It's really sad.
>
> <div align="right">-White female 2nd grade teacher</div>

R: Then there's the crack kids. I mean some of our kids are drug babies and

<div align="center">15</div>

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>
> -White female 2nd grade teacher

R: Then there's the crack kids. I mean some of our kids are drug babies and

you can tell. Like ---- for instance. His mother was doing crack when he was
still inside her.

I: You can tell?

R: Yeah, you can. He can't stop moving. He's always up and around. And
that's why he just can't follow all the time."

-White female 2nd teacher

The students go around thinking that things can't get any better, or any
different than they are now. No one in their family has an education, no one
is leaving the neighborhood. Sometimes people here are just existing, not
living. This limits their ability in school.

- Black female school counselor

Almost none of the teachers' and administrators' comments focused on students'
assets. This school was focused on students' challenges and not their perceived assets.

PERCEPTION AND ENACTMENT

Simply identifying the beliefs held by teachers and administrators tells us little about
the impact that those beliefs may have on teachers' instructional practices or on the students
themselves. Much of the literature suggests a correspondence between what teachers believe
about students and how they treat them. However, teachers' beliefs are most significant when
they shape their interactions with students at the individual and organizational levels. The
basic argument in the teacher expectation literature is that low expectations for students
translate into instructional practices that ultimately contribute to social reproduction. For
example, Good (1981) summarizes findings demonstrating that high and low-achieving
students are treated differently by teachers, with low-achievers receiving less attention, being
seated further from the teacher, getting less demanding work, getting less teacher support in
failure situations, and getting less time to answer questions.[13]

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While most of this work focuses on individual teachers and classrooms, we were interested in understanding if discernable patterns exist among teachers in the same schools. In others words, were there similarities and difference in responses to perceived students deficits that seemed to vary by school. In particular we were interested in the extent to which teachers encouraged student effort and adjusted instructional practices to meet the needs of students with perceived deficits. This, we felt, could give us insight into teachers' actions related to students' *unobserved potential*. If teachers see challenges as changeable for some students and not others, this might reflect a bias based on unobserved potential, particularly if there are school-based patterns in responses reflective of the student composition of schools. Our data suggest that teachers' responses to perceived student deficits did in fact follow certain school-based patterns.

At schools A, B, and C the response to student challenges tended to be proactive. Teachers adjusted their behaviors and instructional practices to meet the needs of students who faced challenges. In these schools, teachers' behavior seemed to reflect a belief that student ability was malleable and could be developed through the hard work of teachers and students.

In school D, this is less often the case. Instead, some teachers seemed to believe that students were incapable of doing challenging work and that their lack of ability was innate (or at least unchangeable). In this school, teachers' comments often tied students' ability to family background and placed the "blame" for behavioral difficulties and classroom problems on students. This led four teachers to resist instructional innovation, avoid the use of minipulatives in math and science instruction, and emphasize basic skills to the exclusion of more advanced applications of knowledge. Teachers' also presented students with less challenging course work for fear they were not capable of handling it. School E, a very high performing low-income Black school, while teachers and administrators acknowledging student deficits, they follow the pattern of schools A, B, and C. We will return to the discussion of School E later.

At school A teachers seek to address perceived student challenges directly and creatively. Their actions suggest that they believe students' challenges can be overcome. For

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example, a Hispanic 5th grade teacher at this school, discusses the use of "literature circles" to address students challenges with reading.

> I have been thinking about doing more … literature circles where I can pick
>
> out books for them to chose from that are more to their level and
>
> concentrate with, on those books with those students [who are having
>
> difficulty]. So I'm looking into that right now, at the literature circles, how I
>
> would design that.

The same teacher seeks to reassure the schools growing Mexican American population that they can do the work, even if they face challenges around language. As she states

> We meet the challenges as they occur. Mainly it's trying to keep the child
>
> positive. We explain to them … try and get the child understand that we are
>
> trying to help them and that we want them to learn but its going to be a little
>
> difficult but we're going to keep on working until we are successful.

This teacher's comment demonstrates an expectation that encouraging students can help them achieve academically. The linguistic deficit identified by this teacher is seen as something that can be addressed through encouragement and changes in her instructional practices.

> Another teacher (eighth grade white female) tries to find ways to get students excited about math and science.

> I guess I approach all of my teaching kind of in the same way.
>
> It's that a lot of times you get, by the time the kids get to eighth
>
> grade they're turned off with school and I try to turn them back on. So
>
> … I try and get them to like mathematics and I try to get them to think
>
> scientifically. So, I guess I approach everything like "how would the kids see
>
> this" and try to make it exciting for them.

Again, the emphasis here is changing instruction to meet the needs of the students. While students' lack of motivation is seen as raising a challenge for instruction, this teacher responds by attempting to make instruction more meaningful and interesting for them. In both of these cases, student deficits are seen as challenges but are not identified with "innate ability" or unchangeable student characteristics. This approach is similar to what can be found at school B.

At school B, a white female upper-grade teacher responds to students with learning disabilities and challenges in reading as follows.

> Some have reading deficits that make it difficult. They have trouble reading directions and things like that. Some need verbal directions, [they are] learning disabled where they absolutely need that. So consequently, for hands on, where you're constantly giving them direction in one form or another, I usually … verbally tell them, supply them with written directions, have then read it and model it.

A white female intermediate science teacher explains how she deals with students who have had difficulty with mathematics concepts.

> So when you're dealing with math concepts, because I do middle grades, you've already got kids who have run up against failure. You've already got kids who have or are beginning to create an identity of failure. I'm back-dooring Math through Science. I love telling them about Einstein. Bad mathematician, learned enough to do brilliant Physics. Learn what you need to do what you love. It's all you've got to do. Sometimes if you can remove the difficulty, if you can demystify, and if you can take it, enter it through something they find interesting then it's not, it doesn't set up those automatic, "I can't do this. I can't do this. I can't do this. No, I'm stupid."

This teacher demonstrates a proactive response to student challenges. This approach was characteristic of responses of several teachers at this school. The general pattern is to address perceived deficits directly and to reassure students that they are capable of doing the work. Teachers take responsibility for addressing students challenges and see them as malleable rather than innate.

Finally, at school C, teachers also adjust instructional practices to meet the needs of students who face challenges. An African American female 2nd grade teacher explains that while her students are good readers and very good at math, some have trouble visualizing in science and in reading. She explains her response to this challenge while reflecting on a lesson.

> I was doing a science project with the kids and I realized that some of them weren't getting it and I just kind of stood there, I'm like, to me it was a simple concept that a second grader should be able to get. So I just stopped and I turned around and I did an overhead so they could actually visualize what was going on and when I did that all the kids got it.

Another teacher at School C, an African American 5th/6th grade science teacher says that she has to address pacing issues with some students who have a difficult time keeping up.

> Some of them you really have to change your teaching style for them. … I do give them additional time. … Last year I had them (a good thing about fifth and sixth grade is that I see them for two years). So the one [boy] I had last year only for science, I'm like, "he's not getting this." His scores are low. He's not completing anything. [Now] I've got him this year in my homeroom I realize he just needs extra time because he's doing really well. He's getting As, Bs and Cs, where before he and Ds and Fs from me. … what I did was I went and told his other teacher. I said, you know what, he needs extra time. He's going to finish his work but he going to ask you separate questions and he's going to require additional time. And it really works for

him.

At schools A, B, and C, teachers' responses to students they perceive as having challenges are proactive. They seek to encourage students, push them to excel, and adjust their instructional practices to meet students needs. We argue that these responses to students' challenges suggest that they perceive student intellectual ability as malleable rather than innate. In other words, they believe that hard work on the part of teachers and students can enhance student outcomes (Stevenson and Stigler, 1992).

In contrast to these schools, at school D, teacher's enactments seemed to reflect a belief in innate ability. Instead, teachers and administrators seemed fixated on challenges and used these to explain their inability to effectively work with certain students. At this school, teachers' emphasized students' deficits and their beliefs about students were connected to certain instructional practices. Some teachers in this school reported that they evaluated student work less critically, gave students less challenging work, resisted innovation, and emphasized highly structured classroom work. The following discussion is more detailed than the prior section on schools A-C. It connects teachers' beliefs about students to several specific teacher responses.

At school D, Teachers' beliefs about students were often transferred into specific responses. Some teachers claim to evaluate their work less critically because of their perceived limited capacity. A white female art teacher shared in an informal conversation that she evaluates her students work less critically than she would "in a suburban school" because the students face more challenges and need to feel a sense of accomplishment. This suggests a leveling of expectations for performance based on perceived deficits.

A white male 5th grade teacher demonstrates his low expectations for his students during a classroom observation. The researcher notes how the teacher seemed to water down the curriculum and not challenge students. Not only did the math problems he assigned seem very simple, emphasizing only mathematics procedures, the teacher walked the students through the problems, spoon feeding them the correct answers.

Throughout the lesson, Mr. ___ guides students to the correct answers. One

problem involved adding two numbers together and then subtracting the sum

from a third number.

T: "What operation do we need first?"

S: "Multiplication?"

T: "No......what do we do first (as he draws plus sign on the board)?

S: "Addition?"

T: "Right (adding two numbers together himself)...now what do we do?"

S: "Subtract?"

T: "Right (putting the subtraction on the board)."

Here, the teacher does not challenge the students by giving them the opportunity to reflect on the problem and reach an answer but instead quickly gives them the right answer. Good (1981) argues that this is typical behavior for teachers with low expectations for their students. They often provide limited wait time for low-achievers in their classrooms.

In addition to uncritical assessment of students' work, teachers at school D were reluctant to try "new things" because they feared that students would not be able to handle more innovative practices. For example, an African American female 1st grade teacher explains why she does not use manipulatives in science and math.

The behavior of the children does not lend itself there. When I try and use

cubes. We use cubes for counting and figuring out stuff. They stack them.

They're making this with them. They're making that with them. They're

not doing what should be being done with them.

Because of her experiences and beliefs about student behavior this teacher does not attempt more innovative instructional practices with her students. When asked to speculate about why her students have trouble with this type of work, she ties students' inability to successfully respond to these practices to their home environments and their family backgrounds. As she stated in a grade level meeting:

[many of the students are] simply not ready for school. Some of the children

are not socialized for school. They don't have to come until they are seven

years old. Where I'm from … they have to come earlier to school. But it

starts at home. If they are walking around all day running around crazy

watching TV, or walking up and down the street with their parents eating

potato chips they are not going to be ready for school.

This teacher's comments reflect a belief that students lack the ability to be successful in her classroom. While they do not completely emphasize innate ability, they seem to suggest that factors other than her teaching strategies are most critical to students' outcomes. Because of this focus, she does not seek to change her practices but emphasizes students' deficits as barriers.

The 5th grade teacher discussed above emphasizes seatwork and reading from textbooks rather than doing experiments in science because he argues that his students cannot do more independent work. He argues that they "lack maturity," "don't respect the school," and "don't value education." He has stopped doing hands on projects and experiments in science because he feels it is a waste of time.

I have found that as much structure as possible will at least will hold the

students on the topic, what it is we're talking about. Because if we loosen up

at all they tend to go in many different directions and I can't assume

anything. I can't assume that they really know what they are doing or why

they are doing it. I found that it is a waste of time [to do experiments]. We

did one with red food color and there was red food coloring everywhere. And

it got to the point that it was much ado about nothing. We wasted a lot of

time and yet they did not understand the concepts. So I've found that if I can

get them to stay together in a paragraph and follow through on that

paragraph with terminology and main ideas … at least I know that they've

heard it and familiar with what the words are.

Thus, because of disciplinary problems and classroom management issues, the students are not exposed to experiments in science, and instead only get exposed to science "terminology

and main ideas." As with the 1ˢᵗ grade teacher discussed above, he also claims that using minipulatives with these students does not work because:

> I have not been able to control the students' manipulation of the materials. I
> will say please don't spill this on the desk or the floor but I might as well be
> whistling Dixie because its beyond them to control materials, it just ends up
> everywhere.

His comments that it is "beyond them to control materials" suggests that he believe the students' behaviors are fixed and unlikely to change. Interestingly, while none of these behaviors point to the students' cognitive capacity, they effect his instructional practices and thus the rigor of work to which students are exposed.

This teacher believes that the disciplinary problems he experiences in the classroom are tied to the students' "lack the maturity and responsibility . . . they have no respect for the school." According to this teacher, these characteristics can be tied to students' home environments. As he states:

> Well what's expected of them as far as their futures, that's a learned behavior
> from home. If the parents don't talk about graduating from high school, then
> the student doesn't see it as significant. If the parents don't talk about a
> career, what you want to do someday, and see that's something to think
> about, that type of home influence is what I'm talking about.

Therefore, his response to these students is to expect less of them and to teach them what he can given their limited capacity. Tying their behavior and ability to the home environment also takes the onus for addressing students' deficits off of the students and himself and places it on the parents whom he claims have a limited appreciation for the importance of education and pass these beliefs on to their children.

The schools' other fifth grade teacher also seems wedded to "traditional" instructional approaches. The following fieldnote captures one researcher's impressions of an African American female 5ᵗʰ grade teachers' general instructional orientation after a classroom observation.

Her overall teaching style was fairly traditional. She believes in teaching the

basics she tells me because "that's what these kids need."

Teaching the "basics" is not problematic in and of itself, however, in the absence of combining the basics with more advanced instruction, students may be affected in ways that many reformers see as negative. Moreover, when this teacher talks about "these kids" we see an implicit assumption that students with different characteristics might be better suited to other forms of instruction. After further conversation with the researcher, this teacher explained her instructional practices were much the same as they had been for years and that she saw no real reason to innovate.

Responsive Teachers

While five of the seven teachers who had explicit comments about students and instructional practices matched the patterns we discussed above. Two teachers seemed more responsive to students and sought to address students' challenges directly. For example, a white female 2nd grade teacher explains how she works with students who exhibit reading problems.

There are about three kids who couldn't read at all. … So, they were really

behind and I really spent time with those kids and they're all reading now. . . .

They're still lower then the other kids, but they can read now.

And I've basically, like when we'd write in the journals in the morning,

I'd let them come to me, I would write it - they would dictate it to me.

I would write it, they'd read it back to me, and then they would copy it.

That was helping. I was giving them extra phonics work … I would work

with those kids, have them read to me I mean, whenever I could get a

moment.

While this teacher and one other teacher was more responsive, when compared to schools A-C teachers at school D were less proactive in addressing perceived student deficits. They saw them as less changeable through effort and hard work and seemed resigned to the fact their students had limited ability.

To this point in our analysis school-based patterns, the findings were much as we expected. School perceptions of students and their enactment of those perceptions seemed to be following a systematic pattern. White, Chinese, and middle-income African American students were treated as if they had more potential than African American children from low-income families. This would suggest that teachers' behavior help to create and reinforce educational differences between race and class groups. The encouragement found in schools A-C would seem more likely to lead to higher levels of student performance than the responses found at school D.

However, our analysis of School E unearthed a different pattern. School E is populated by low-income African American students and teachers who emphasized students' challenges. Nonetheless, teachers responded in ways more similar to schools A-C than school D. The following section discusses the enactments found in this school and juxtaposes them with those found in school D. At the end of this section, we present our interpretation of what distinguishes school E from school D.

In School D, teachers' and administrators' beliefs about students emphasized their deficits and their enactment of these beliefs suggested that they saw them as innate characteristics rather than more malleable. In contrast, at School E, teachers and administrators felt that the challenges faced by students were surmountable through hard work and effort. At this school, discussion and implementation of instructional innovation was frequent, teachers sought new strategies to address student needs, and a systematic effort was made to acknowledge students' challenges without lowering expectations for their work. The comparison between these two schools suggests that there is not a one-to-one correspondence between teachers' beliefs about students and their interactions with them, and (as we shall discuss later) that the organizational context can shape teachers' responses to the challenges they identify in educating their students.

Recognizing the challenges the children face, teachers and administrators at School E make a concerted effort to create a welcoming and warm environment that highlights African American accomplishments. When one enters School E they are struck by the positive affirmations about school success everywhere in the school. The walls reflect the general orientation of the schools' employees toward challenging students as the following field note conveys

> The first things I noticed were the decorations and signs all over the walls. They said, "Character is who you are and what you hope to be" and "Kids first" and "Honesty and Truthfulness" and "Team-Together Everyone Achieves More." Down one hallway hung banners with a variety of values written on them: honesty, respect, etc. [All of these signs struck me as extremely infused with empowerment values, self-responsibility, perseverance and success].

In addition, the messages of the school were infused with positive affirmations about African American culture and the accomplishments of prominent African Americans. The schools' African American Studies Coordinator argues that the intent behind this is to demonstrate a respect for the culture of the schools' students.

While recognizing that the students' face challenges, the principal argues that it is the responsibility of the school to respond to the students, regardless of the challenges they may bring. As she states:

> It would be ideal if all of our kids came to you ready to move on to the material that you would like to teach them but number one that's not going to happen… In terms of who comes into our classrooms, I don't know who's coming in. *All we can do is tailor our curriculum program to the students we get*…You have to think about how you need to spend your time to reach *these children*.

While acknowledged, the circumstances of children's lives are not used as an excuse to alleviate teachers' responsibility. The African American Assistant Principal (a former classroom teacher at this school) argued this very clearly in and interview:

> I don't allow anyone to say to me 'because he's this, because he's that, because he's the other he can't do it.' The reason for that is you could have been talking about me, when I was that age. I know given time, resources, and proper teaching I can get it. I believe...we use to have it posted, if he didn't learn it, you have not found a way to teach it.

Others in the school echo this belief, arguing that they address the challenges faced by children through hard work. As the following field note suggests:

> Other Staff members echo this idea of hard work. It seems to be part of the collective identity of the school community. They seem to take pride in their identities as 'hard workers.'

In addition, there is an organizational thrust to maintain a focus on what is best for the children, emphasizing teachers' responsibility to address their needs.

> It is devastating what some of these children have to live through. For some of them, school is the best part of their day. So it is our obligation to make their time here as positive as we can. That's what all the effort is for—it's for them.
>
> - White Female 2nd grade teacher

> [The principal] came in as one person and she came in here and we all had this feeling for the most part that she was here for us and she always let us know that our job is to meet the needs of the student. We wouldn't have a job if it wasn't for the kids…I mean, we're here for the sole purpose of these children, to meet the needs of the whole child.
>
> -Black female 5th grade teacher

We're all here for one reason—the children. We all have one common goal

and we know it'll be okay because we're all doing the work for the children.

- Black Female 2nd grade teacher

The principal does not want me spending my time filling out paperwork.

Someone else can do that. She wants me mostly talking to the kids, attending

to their needs.

-Black Female School Counselor

Therefore, in contrast to the situation at School D, School E stresses the need to respond to the needs of its students regardless of their circumstances and take a proactive stance toward addressing these issues.

In an effort to facilitate instructional innovation, teachers are expected to participate in extensive professional development activities that reflect the sense that the school needs to innovate in order to meet the needs of the children. In contrast to School D, these meetings are frequent and focus on cutting edge research on educational practice and the instruction of Black children. The principal explains that:

Everything we have tried to do, and as we try to move forward, we have tried

to do within a context of 'What does the research tell us. What the literature

on best practices tell us' and then it will move forward…I think that schools

have to, from my perspective, move forward within this whole literature and

ongoing professional development…

The school has developed many opportunities for teachers to engage in dialogue about their instructional practices and ways to make positive changes. One program called Teacher Talk is focused primarily on reading articles relevant to issues teachers' face, then discussing these articles in a group. After attending one of these sessions, a researcher wrote the following fieldnote:

I am really impressed by the fact that some teachers actually seemed to have

read the article. They were actually engaging in a three-way (at least)

discussion about the issues that were brought up by the piece.

Teachers in other contexts also drew on the literature to gain insights into their work with the children. Meetings were infused with statements like, "Let me share the key findings gleaned from this survey about inclusion" and "We know our students are having more problems at home because of the results of the latest study…"

The principal is an important part of this process. During an interview the assistant principal made the following statement.

[When she came in], she just laid out what's expected of us, what the state was

going to be looking for in the future, what the city was looking for. She

encouraged us to continue to keep ourselves informed, abreast with

whatever's going on in the education field through research, reading articles,

listening to the media, read newspapers…And every time there was something

that came out, she made sure that we were informed of what was going on.

She's a person who was on top of all of the current issues statistic-wise, you

know, according to research, and she stayed in contact with meeting university

contacts or what have you…Whatever information she found, she would pass it

down to us. And we were able to take a look at it and see what we needed to

do to apply it to our school.

This organizational push for innovation based on research literature is reflected in the instructional practices of individual teachers. Following an observation of a 5th grade math lesson, the teacher, a Black female in her mid 40's shared that she was inspired to do this lesson because of her experience with a math and science integration program at local university. She says she has always taught math using the programs materials. This teacher also states that she interacts with other teachers and that they share research-based information. She states that during these interactions strategies are discussed about how to present challenging material.

Teachers feel that if they do something and it does not work the first time,

they feel that they should to go back to the drawing board and look at why it

did not work, and they try to impart that same type of feeling to the

children.

Members of the school community engage in instructional practices based on cutting edge research and this is reflected in the classroom observations of math, science, and literacy instruction. They also challenge students by using rigorous content and innovative teaching strategies.

School E as a unique case

Upon reading this characterization of school E, one might think that the pattern identified works against the pattern found in the other schools. We argue that several characteristics of school E make it unique among similar schools in the district. First, it is among a set of schools that has demonstrated the highest academic productivity measures in the district for the past ten years (based on measures developed by the Consortium on Chicago School Research). Second, it is considered by several observers of the district to be a model for urban education. Third, the schools current test scores are higher than the vast majority of schools with similar demographic compositions. Fourth, the school has accomplished all of this despite being extremely large, serving well over 1100 students. Because of these characteristics, we argue that this school is atypical of schools serving similar students and therefore see it as a potential exception to the pattern observed in the other four schools. More specifically, it may be the case that one of the reasons for the success of this school is the way it responds to the perceived challenges of its students. Therefore, the recognition of challenges might enhance this schools ability to respond in ways that facilitate student achievement. We will return to this point in the next section.

In the previous discussion we have made three main arguments. First, we have argued that the demographics of a school's student population seem to have a leveling effect on teachers' perceptions of students. When students are majority African American and low-income, teachers hold more deficit oriented beliefs about them than when they are majority Caucasian, Chinese, or from middle-income families. Second, we have argued that teachers' responses are associated with their general impressions of students. In schools where teachers and administrators emphasize students' assets, students' challenges are seen as malleable to teachers' and students' hard work and effort. In schools where teachers emphasize students' deficits, teachers' responses follow two distinct patterns. In one such school (which we have argued is the more typical low-income African American school) students' challenges are seen as reflective of their innate ability, and teachers report evaluating students work less critically, giving them less challenging work, and resisting instructional innovation. At the other school that emphasized students' deficits (a school that we have argued is exceptional), students' challenges were not seen as insurmountable, and teachers, administrators, and the school as a whole sought proactive strategies to address them. Finally, based on the pattern observed in the two low-income African American schools, we conclude that even when teachers' and administrators' beliefs about students are very similar, and students' characteristics are roughly the same, school-based instructional responses may vary substantially. These findings have important theoretical implications when considered in the context of the literature on teacher perceptions and expectations of students and social reproduction.

Perception, enactment, and school context

As discussed previously, most of the literature on teachers' beliefs and expectations of students has focussed on dyadic relationships between teachers and students in individual classrooms (Jussim, Eccles, and Madon 1996). We suggested the utility of returning to Merton's (1948) original conception of the self-fulfilling prophecy that sought to explain

this pattern at the institutional and societal level. The data presented in this paper suggests that institutional context might be important in two primary ways. First, the composition of the student population may have a leveling effect on teachers' perceptions of students in general when students come from low-income African American families. This, in turn, may lead teachers and administrators to respond to perceived student challenges in a more rigid fashion than they do when students are white, Chinese, or from middle-income families. This finding suggests one mechanism through which institutional stratification (Roscigno, 2000) may function to reinforce race/class stratification. De facto school segregation may affect students' outcomes by shaping teachers' perceptions of students, and their responses to them when they face educational challenges. In a sense, this may reinforce the original perception of students. When they are seen in terms of their deficits, and treated as if they have limited potential for change, they may not be pushed to reach their full potential. When students are seen as having assets, and more aggressively pushed, they may actually become more asset-rich because teachers' actions tap into their potential.

Second, the case of school E suggests that school-level practices may mediate the implications of teachers' perceptions of students. We have argued that teachers' responses to students' challenges at this school are atypical and that the organizational context may mediate these responses. This returns to Merton's original promise that "appropriate institutional and administrative conditions" can undermine the operation of self-fulfilling prophecies (Merton, 1948: 210) and reinforces Ferguson's (1998b) observation that schools can make a difference. We agree with Jussim, Eccles and Madon (1996) that returning the discussion of self-fulfilling prophecies to Merton's original, more sociological, conceptualization promises to enrich the discussion.

Enactment and the Duality of Structure

With regard to teachers' and administrators' beliefs and expectations of students, we have borrowed from Weick (1979). He distinguishes between the perceived environment and the enacted environment, arguing that enactment underscores how organizations "construct, rearrange, single out, and demolish many objective features of their surroundings. When

people act they unrandomize variables, insert vestiges of orderliness, and literally create their own constraints." (Weick, 1979:164). In our case, we argue that teachers attach meaning to the characteristics and behaviors of their students, and that this creates the organinzational environment to a certain extend. In their construction and enactment of their beliefs, teachers give meaning to students and their backgrounds, shaping the implications of these "objective" characteristics.

We argue that family background has both a material and symbolic reality. Students come from actual families, whose race and class help determine where they live and where they go to school. In the schools we have studied, this family background seems to result in our students attending schools that are relatively homogenous by race and class. Thus, family background has a material affect, determining the schools that our students attend. Family background also has a symbolic reality. Teachers and administrators use family background symbolically when they focus on what that background says about students. Schools enact their environments when they interpret the meaning of students' backgrounds and act on these interpretations. Therefore, when teachers view their white, Chinese, and middle-income students as having assets and view their limitations as malleable, the consequences of their actions make structural arrangements meaningful in practice. Likewise, when teachers view the challenges faced by their low-income African American students as innate, they also make structure meaningful in practice, "creating" the organizational environment to a certain extent.

Therefore, we argue that schools are not passive receptors of their environments but instead actively engage and make sense of them. Distinguishing between the perception and the enactment of school environments (specifically teachers' beliefs about their students' resources) also allows us to better understand the how teachers and administrators in similar context with similar perceptions of their students can engage in different organizational practices. We argue that the structural context can create objective conditions, but that the enactment of the environment by human agents directly impacts the implications of those conditions. The differences between schools D and E, we argue, underscores how human

agents and schools as organizations "rearrange … objective features of their surroundings" (Weick 1979:164).

To extend Weick's argument in this way we use Giddens (1979, 1984) theory of strucutration and the duality of structure. Giddens agues that structure (as rules and resources) represents both the *medium* and *outcomes* of human action. In other words, when people act on the world they are enabled by structure but the outcome of their actions contributes to the production (and most often) reproduction of structure. We argue that enactment of organizational environments is an example of the potential of human agents to directly impact the implications of structure. In the pattern we identified in schools A-D, teachers' interpretation of students' abilities (which we argue are tied to family background) has implications for how they treat them. When students come from white, Chinese, and middle-income families they are viewed more by their assets and their challenges are seen as surmountable through hard work. When students are low-income and African American, teachers tend to emphasize deficits and view students' limitations as less changeable. This means that African American students may not be challenged to reach their full potential.[14] The unintended consequence of these actions on the part of teachers may be to reinforce educational inequality and thus contribute to social reproduction.[15] One the other hand, we argue that human action can at times have intended consequences (though this is not Giddens' focus). In school E, we argue, teachers' and administrators' responses to perceived student challenges are more likely to have the intended consequence of challenging reproductive processes than the unintended consequence of reinforcing them. We discuss the implications of this for the broader discussion of social reproduction below.

Implications for Social Reproduction

In most reproduction theories, schools and their employees are seen as the "agents of the system" (Carlson, 1996). Teachers and administrators actions are seen as determined by the demands of broader structures of domination and thought to contribute to social reproduction. Unfortunately, in emphasizing the role of schools as reproductive sites, reproduction theorists have often failed to see how some school employees exhibit agency in

the context of broader processes of social reproduction and how schools, as organizations, might respond to similar conditions in distinct ways (Carson, 1996).

Drawing on the work of Gramsci, and similar to Bourdieu, Apple (1995) argues that institutions such as schools exhibit relative autonomy from the larger systems of domination within which they are embedded. He writes:

'Superstructural' institutions such as schools have a significant degree of relative autonomy. The economic structure cannot insure any simple correspondence between itself and these institutions. However, such institutions, with the school among them, perform vital functions in the recreation of the conditions for ideological hegemony to be maintained. These conditions are not imposed, though. They are and need to be continuously rebuilt on the field of institutions like the school . . .. Above all, hegemony doesn't simply come about; it must be worked for in particular sites like the family, the workplace, the political sphere and the school (Apple, 1995: 15-16).

What is of particular interest here is that relative autonomy exists inside *schools*, that school employees can *engage in actions* that facilitate continued relations of domination. This passage suggests that school employees do work that advances the interests of the economic elite. As many reproduction theorists aptly point out, the structure of institutions such as schools and the practices of their employees do a great deal to reproduce stratification. However, embedded in this seemingly pessimistic observation about the role of schools and their employees in reproduction is the possibility for transformative practice on the part of teachers, administrators, and schools as institutions. Because of the relative autonomy of educational institutions, school employees are not bound by the demands of race and class domination to blindly recreate stratification. Instead, they maintain some degree of autonomy and can make choices regarding how they carry on their work.

In the case reported above, we argue that institutional stratification (Roscigno, 2000) may contribute to social reproduction through teachers' beliefs about students and their subsequent enactments of these beliefs. If teachers' perceptions of students are leveled by the

concentration of low-income Black students in their schools, and they treat these perceived deficits as innate rather than malleable, then the consequences of teachers' actions may in fact contribute to reproduction. However, as the case of school E demonstrates, school and individual-level responses to students may work against social reproduction.

We conclude that within the broader process of social reproduction, we need to closely attend to the autonomy of schools as organizations and their employees as human agents in order to recognize the implications of their actions for reproduction and social change.

Finally, based on our analysis of this pilot data, we have generated several hypotheses that we plan to explore further in our analysis of data from year one of the full study.

> **Hypothesis 1**: Student demographics may have a leveling effect on expectations of students, in general, when students are low-income and African American and may enhance teachers perceptions of students assets when they are middle-income, white or Chinese.
> **Hypothesis 2**: Teachers may see deficits as more innate when their students are African American and low-income and more malleable when they are Caucasian, Chinese and/or middle income.
> **Hypothesis 3**: When teachers see student deficits as more malleable they engage in more proactive strategies to address these challenges.
> **Hypothesis 4**: Organizations may mediate teachers' enactments of their beliefs about students.
> **Hypothesis 5**: In the highest performing low-income African American schools, students' challenges are recognized but seen as malleable through hard work.

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Table 1.
School Demographics

School Demographics	School A	School B	School C	School D	School E
% low income	65	85	60	90	98
% Asian	0	60	0	0	0
% Black	5	5	100	100	100
% Hispanic	25	25	0		
% Caucasian	70	10	0	0	0

Endnotes

[1] Resistance theory, which arose out of concern over the structural determinism of theories of reproduction, demonstrates how students respond to structural forces by rejecting the schools' achievement ideology (Willis 1977; Fordham and Ogbu 1986), adopting alternative mobility strategies (Ogbu 1978), lowering aspirations for success (MacLeod 1995), forging oppositional cultures (Solomon 1992), and otherwise resisting domination (Giroux 1983; Apple 1995; Willis 1977).

[2] Farkas et al (1990) do separate teachers by racial group membership, gender, and tenure teaching but the general pattern is to assume, these things being equal, that teachers will behave toward students in the same way.

[3] Good and Brophy do argue that "…even when he [a teacher] has consistent expectations, he may not necessarily communicate them to the student through consistent behavior" (1973: 75). However, the idea that teachers act in different ways even when they hold similar beliefs has not been explored often.

[4] As we will discuss later, we view this second school as an exceptional school. It is very high performing and is distinct in several ways from most low-income Black schools in the district.

[5] While the term bias often has an individual level connotation, we understand it as a term that includes intended and unintended individual actions as well as institutional practices that may differentially effect students from different groups.

[6] For a summary of some of this work see Brophy and Good, 1974 and Good, 1981.

[7] It should be noted that Merton's conception is also premised on the falsity of perceptions in the making of self-fulfilling prophecies. We acknowledge that teachers' perceptions of students demonstrated ability and work habits may be largely accurate (Jussim et al. 1996; Farkas, 1996). This would mean that at the level of perceptions of students (Ferguson's conditional race neutrality) teacher's perceptions may not fit neatly with Merton's original conception of the self-fulfilling prophecy. However, we are interested in teacher neutrality based on students' potential, which cannot be known. Therefore, we apply the unconditional race neutrality perspective to this issue, which makes the truth or falsity of teacher's perceptions impossible to measure.

[8] Table 1 reports student demographics for each school.

[9] Formal school leaders are identified as those who hold officially defined leadership positions in schools (principals, assistant principals, curriculum coordinators, etc.). Informal leaders were identified through interviews as those who influence the practices of other organizational members. These included six classroom teachers.

[10] Again borrowing from Farkas, Non-Cognitive assessments were further divided in three categories. First, there were non-cognitive assessments that are tied to academic performance such as work habits and completion of homework. Second there were behaviors less directly tied to achievement such as disruptive behavior. Finally, there were assessments that seemed unconnected to achievement such as membership in race, class, and gender social groups.

[11] For racial group membership, we used the following categories. Integrated schools were those with more than 30% white students. Black schools were schools with 85% or more Black students. Minority schools have 70% or more students who represent mixed-minority statuses. We adapt this slightly in the case of our majority Asian school that we refer to as Asian rather than minority. Finally, mixed schools have 15-30% white students. With regard to social class, we created four categories. The first was schools with 50% or fewer students who receive free/reduced lunch, the second category was 50-70% low-income, the third was 70-90% low-income and the final category contained schools with 90% or more students who receive free or reduced lunch.

[12] This is a low percentage for this district where the average percentage of low-income students is 84%.

[13] Actually, Good offers 12 major points detailing how highs and lows are treated differently by teachers. We have outlined only some of these above.

[14] This may also have something to do with why the impact of teachers' expectations is so much higher for low-income African American students than for other students as Jussim, Eccles, and Madon (1996) have found.

[15] Giddens argues that reproduction is most often the unintended consequence of intentional human action. For an in depth discussion of structuration theory please see Giddens (1979, 1984)