

The Wrong Tools for the Job: Teachers' Voices on Cultural Capital Mismatch

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ABSTRACT: This case study investigates how teachers in a school with a large population of low-income students of color in the U.S. perceived students' cultural capital and associated teachers' roles. Twenty-seven teachers were interviewed and discussed four domains of cultural capital mismatch between students and teachers: behavioral, experiential, academic, and family norm. Teachers often characterized these misalignments as students' deficits and undertook parenting or friendship roles. This study highlights the need to support and train pre-service and in-service teachers' critical consciousness so that teachers leverage students' cultural tools to enhance instruction and to counteract deficit views of students of color.

KEYWORDS: Cultural capital mismatch, funds of knowledge, culturally relevant pedagogy, teacher role, critical consciousness

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It is predicted that by 2025, students of color will compose 52% of the total public-school population in the U.S. (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). However,

sixty-five years after mandated integration of public schools, educational inequalities continue to plague the learning experiences and attainment of students of color. Although the Supreme Court case *Brown v. Board of Education* ruled that separate education for different racial groups did not provide equal educational opportunities, the goal of equally distributed resources, integrated school communities, and success for all student groups has not been realized. The racial and ethnic composition of the teaching force is still substantially less diverse than that of the student population, as only 18% of teachers identify as teachers of color (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). The cultural framework within which these teacher-student relationships exist purports a dominant narrative that children of color are incapable of high achievement (Delpit, 2012). This perspective tends to frame teachers' approaches to students of color, resulting in lower teacher perceptions and expectations (Downer et al., 2016), higher rates of suspension and expulsion (Holt & Gershenson, 2015), and poor teacher-student relationships (Gallagher et al., 2013). This negatively influences students' learning experiences and attainment (Fletcher, 2014; Hughes et al., 2011), thereby leading to lower achievement (Dee, 2004).

Although a growing number of studies have focused on the problems of racial mismatch between teachers and students and the positive potential outcomes of race matching (Cherng & Halpin, 2016; Gershenson et al., 2016), simply diversifying the teaching profession would not solve all problems. Ethnically and racially diverse teachers are often reduced to stereotypes of their culture and treated as cultural experts who are adept at dealing with all multicultural issues, rather than as individuals who also need training and support (Santoro, 2015). Additionally, racial matching is not always feasible in multicultural classrooms and does not fully account for educational disparities when there is a racial match between students and teachers (Kozlowski, 2015). As such, racial matching itself cannot be the ultimate solution for educational equity; thus, we focus our inquiry on the cultural capital mismatch and its implications in the classroom, which is embedded in dominant narratives that devalue and underestimate minority students' academic, psychological, and moral development. This article aims to understand how teachers voice this cultural capital mismatch, and, in doing so, discredit the capabilities of their students of color.

Dominant Narratives, Cultural Capital Mismatch, and Pedagogical Possibilities

In the book, *Multiplication is for White People: Raising Expectations for Other People's Children*, Delpit (2012) admonishes that to create a culture of excellence in classrooms that serve students of color, at a minimum educators must "recognize the importance of a teacher and good teaching, especially for the 'school dependent' children of low-income communities; recognize the brilliance of poor, urban children, teach them more content, not less; and honor and respect the children's home culture" (p. xxi). Although this seems reasonably straightforward, schools and classrooms tend to be microcosms of the wider society in which students of color, primarily African American and Latinx students, are often seen as innately inferior or raised in such traumatic home

situations that they are incapable of learning and achieving at the levels of their white counterparts. Despite an abundance of evidence that Black children are not deficient (e.g., Frankenburg et al., 1975; Fagan & Holland, 2007), these beliefs underlying the prevailing dominant narrative persist in the classroom. This increases the likelihood that students receive less rigorous instruction (Long et al., 2009; Moore et al., 2010), are exposed to low expectations (Gershenson & Papageorge, 2018), and are recommended for special services (Jordan, 2005). By virtue of living in American society, teachers, no matter their race, are exposed to biased views and sometimes bring them into the classroom either consciously or unconsciously, including beliefs about what students need to know and experience to succeed in school.

As progress in closing achievement gaps has stalled since the 1990s, several sociological theories have attempted to unpack the mechanisms that drive these disparities. One prevailing perspective that seeks to explain the discrepancies between historically marginalized students and their white peers on metrics such as achievement, graduation rates, and school discipline is cultural mismatch theory. Cultural mismatch theory asserts that an individual's performance in a given environment (e.g., classroom or school) is based on the degree of alignment (match or mismatch) between their own cultural norms and those of the existing context (Stephens et al., 2012). This theory aligns with other constructs, such as cultural capital mismatch and the notion of a cultural toolkit (Swidler, 1986), which are grounded in the idea that discrepancies exist between the cultural norms, values, and realities of students who have been historically underserved, namely Black and Latinx students, and those of the people, policies, and culture of schooling institutions (Delpit, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Valenzuela, 1999). Thus, the way that curricula are conceived, schools and classrooms are organized, language and accountability systems are implemented, and disciplinary practices are enacted, are all designed and guided by the dominant culture (Delpit, 1995).

Essentially, students and their teachers more often than not come from different places, have different histories, and demonstrate their values (which in many ways align) in different ways, which creates a form of cultural incompatibility (Riddle, 2014). Race tends to be implicit in this mismatch, and teachers are often seemingly unaware of how these differences affect the way they view, interact with, and treat Black and Latinx students. Swidler (1986) conceptualized this mismatch with respect to possession of the appropriate cultural tools. Cultural tools are made up of one's stories, styles, habits, skills, and symbols that are used to construct "strategies of action" (Swidler, 1986, p. 273). This notion of a cultural "toolkit" aligns with Bourdieu's cultural capital, which is not restricted to "high status cultural symbols" (Lamont & Lareau, 1988, p. 164) or only what members of the upper class transmit to their children for their continued societal power (Bourdieu, 1986), but includes the repertoire of competencies that working-class people accumulate and use in daily life (Swidler, 1986). This includes knowledge of the local environment (which may be science-based) and educational practices, work experience, recipes, childcare strategies, extended family networks and resources, and more. It is important to note that families of color also provide their children with a large body of cultural knowledge that they can draw from, both in school and in everyday life (González et al., 2005).

One's cultural toolkit becomes realized as legitimate and meaningful in particular contexts. As such, strategies for action are determined by contextual factors, thereby making some forms of action or ways of behaving more acceptable than others. Given the status and power of some groups, the strategies of action of these dominant groups become what is seen as the norm or standard practice. In the U.S., the white middle class is the more dominant class, so those not socialized in the middle-class context would not possess the "appropriate" cultural tools. The cultural tools that are conducive to the norms and practices of American schools tend not to match those of typically underserved students, but those of the white middle class. This absence of the appropriate cultural tools, or misunderstandings of the cultural codes (embedded in language, social interaction, etc.) are often interpreted by teachers and administrators as oppositional behavior or misconduct (Carter, 2005; Riddle, 2014) or ignorance, often resulting in student underachievement (Fruchter 2007; Noguera, 2003). Heath (1996) describes the ways that mismatch in these cultural codes, especially those of language, can devalue students' lived experiences. In her ethnography, *Ways With Words* (1983/1996), she describes the ways the rich language and literary practices of Black children in the southeastern US were not valued in schools, contrasting with their white counterparts, whose literacy experiences aligned with those of school, leading to academic success.

Cultural mismatch was also observed between Latinx students' notion of caring as a fundamental aspect of teaching and white teachers' orientation to teaching (Valenzuela, 1999). Valenzuela (1999) articulates the concept of "subtractive schooling," which stands in opposition to the notion that students' progress is based on developing a caring teacher-student relationship with an emphasis on respect, responsibility, and sociality. In this regard, the Mexican American students in her study resisted the irrelevant, uncaring, and controlling aspects of their school environment, although this defiance was interpreted incorrectly as resistance to learning. Additionally, when education is not embedded in students' culture and language, it profoundly subtracts from their academic well-being, thus leading to generational decline in academic achievement. An example would be promoting the idea of going away to college as an indicator of success when students value remaining in their neighborhoods. When a school's dominant values and ideals seem to conflict with who students perceive themselves to be and what they value, students often dissociate from the institution's norms and ultimately school (Cooper, 2013).

Access to the relevant cultural tools can affect how students attempt academic challenges, engage in help-seeking behavior, and conceive of the effort they put forth in school settings. However, students' strategies of action may not match what teachers view as the way to succeed in school. A longitudinal study of a socioeconomically diverse school by Calarco (2011) showed that middle-class students requested teacher help more often with different strategies of action, including directly asking and even interrupting, while working-class students tended to work together, listen in when the teacher was helping another student, and rarely directly ask for help. Similarly, Kozlowski's (2015) study found that Black and Hispanic students were much more likely than white students to say they were working hard in school when their teacher disagreed. Socioeconomic status accounted for a majority of this overrepresentation in the data, lending further support to the idea that working-class students' cultural toolkits may not equip them to understand their teachers' and schools' expectations for effort and success. Although

teachers may implicitly encourage help-seeking and effort, the cultural understandings that some students experience with these concepts is not matched to what teachers are implying.

This cultural capital mismatch may lead to teachers' low expectations of student achievement. When students notice, either explicitly or implicitly, that teachers have low expectations of them, students themselves may modify their own self-perceptions, and subsequently their behaviors, in ways that align with their teachers' expectations. Given the status of the teacher, they often accept his/her judgment. Also, these low self-perceptions may magnify the negative effects of stereotype threat – risk of confirming negative perceptions of one's social group (Steele & Aronson, 1995). Both these scenarios support disidentification with the educational environment and create a cycle that operates in self-fulfilling ways (Burgess & Greaves, 2013). Additionally, low expectations of students may influence how teachers teach; for example, modifying curricula to make it less rigorous, harsher or more lenient evaluation, or advising in ways that diminish opportunities for professional and social mobility.

Therefore, a potential problem leading to the achievement gap would not be in a racial mismatch between teachers and students, but between teachers' and schools' perceptions of an essential "cultural toolkit" and the assets that working-class students of color possess (Kozlowski, 2015). Consequently, the cultural capital mismatch between teachers and students becomes a foundational source that impacts how teachers relate to their students, how they view their roles, and what actions and strategies they use in classrooms.

When studying teachers who effectively instruct students of color, researchers have found that linking curriculum to students' everyday lives and cultures can increase student achievement (Au & Jordan, 1981; Bell & Clark, 1998; Ensign, 2003; Kelley et al., 2015; Rivet & Krajcik, 2008; Ware, 2006; Williams, 2006). Ladson-Billings originally labeled this "culturally relevant pedagogy," a method that empowers "students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (1994, pp. 17-18). She conceptualized the theory on three legs: boosting student achievement by constructing new knowledge based on what they already know; building cultural competence in their own identities; and developing a critical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995a, 1995b). However, many educators and researchers since have focused only on the first leg, connecting school to students' homes and cultural worlds. The focus on student achievement prioritizes high expectations and concrete learning goals over character education (Young, 2010). The other two legs are equally necessary: students need to develop their own cultural identities and a critical consciousness to facilitate their entry and success in dominant society without damaging their self-worth or subconsciously adapting contradicting beliefs (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011; Milner, 2011). When looking at the reality of how culturally relevant pedagogy is used in the classroom, Young (2010) found that the lack of educators' race consciousness, systemic racism in school policies, and consistent implementation were three major challenges for its faithful execution. A culturally relevant approach to teaching could potentially aid in students' construction of cultural competence by valuing the knowledge they already have and demonstrating how each student pulls from a variety of cultural competencies. Additionally, it could develop critical

consciousness for both teachers and students by dissecting the systems that bar access based on a mismatch of cultural capital. More recently, research and practice have moved toward culturally sustaining pedagogies, which emphasize multiculturalism and the changing nature of culture. This requires teachers to provide critical safe spaces and allow students to draw on a variety of resources to develop critical consciousness (Wynter-Hoyte et al., 2019).

Methodology: Unearthing Beliefs, Perceiving Patterns

Although many studies (e.g., Gershenson et al., 2016) have investigated racial mismatch between teachers and students, fewer have considered cultural capital mismatch, which has broader implications in educational contexts. This study aims to fill the gap noted above by examining how teachers in a school in a disadvantaged community perceive working-class students of color, the cultural capital they bring to school, and how this perception relates to teachers' expectations and their perceived role in education. The following research questions are examined:

- In what ways do teachers of low-income students of color value or problematize their students' cultural capital?
- How are the ways teachers view students' cultural capital related to their perceived roles as teachers?

To answer these deeply rooted questions, this study employed an interpretive case study design, which focuses on understanding how and why social actors act, interact, make decisions, and generate certain meanings through in-depth exploration of one or more cases within a bounded system (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017; Stake, 1995). As a key feature of a case study, the bounded system is understood as a "phenomena of some sort occurring in a bounded context" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 25). The specific case within a bounded context serves as the "subject of the study," which needs to be understood through a particular analytical frame, or the "object of the study" (Thomas, 2011). The object of the inquiry for our current study is understanding teachers' cultural capital mismatch and their perceived roles as teachers. To explicate this phenomenon, our case, which serves as the subject of study, was 27 teachers in Highland Park Elementary School in the U.S.

Highland Park Elementary School (a pseudonym) serves a low-income urban community in the midwestern U.S. It was chosen based upon student demographics, specifically racial makeup and socio-economic status. When data was gathered in 2017, 88.4% of the students were from minority groups. Hispanic students composed 65.1% of the student population, Black 11.6%, Asian 1.3%, Native American 2.1%, white 13.8%, and two or more races 6.1%. Historically, this school had predominantly white students; however, since 2000, Hispanic student numbers increased. In 2006, Hispanic students (35%) outgrew white students (31%) and continued to rise. The school population had 92.6% of students eligible for Free/Reduced Lunch, and 46.7% of the students were

labeled as English language learners. District demographics showed that 15.7% of the population was below the poverty line, and 9.9% of adults had not graduated high school. Regarding education, 31.4% had a bachelor's degree and above; these demographics contrasted to the state averages of 16.5% living below the poverty line, 12.7% having no diploma, and 24.5% having at least a bachelor's degree (Office of Educational Quality and Accountability, 2017).

Highland Park Elementary School consisted of 35 grade level teachers and 20 resource teachers. Using criterion sampling method (Creswell & Poth, 2017), we recruited all teachers who met the criterion of working at Highland Park Elementary School as a full-time teacher. Twenty-seven teachers (17 grade level teachers and 10 resource teachers) volunteered to participate. As shown in Table 1, below, at least one teacher participated from each grade level, and number of years they taught varied from 1 year to 42 years. Not all teachers chose to disclose their racial identity, which is a limitation of this study.

Table 1
Participants' Background Information

Pseudonym	Position	Gender	Years taught	Racial identity
Yesenia	Pre-K Teacher	Female	7	Hispanic
Shelby	Pre-K Teacher	Female	1	White
Darla	Pre-K Teacher	Female	4	White
Molly	Kindergarten Teacher	Female	7	White
Cindy	First Grade Teacher	Female	7	White
Jane	First Grade Teacher	Female	4	White
Ashley	First Grade Teacher	Female	7	White
Kristen	First Grade Teacher	Female	6	White
Marla	First Grade Teacher	Female	1	Black
Ynez	First Grade Teacher	Female	8	White
Kara	Second Grade Teacher	Female	3	White
Noel	Second Grade Teacher	Female	1	White
Lola	Third Grade Teacher	Female	1	White
Taylor	Third Grade Teacher	Female	1	White
Josh	Fourth Grade Teacher	Male	22	White
Jackie	Fourth Grade Teacher	Female	17	Undisclosed
Chad	Fifth Grade Teacher	Male	8	White
Frederick	ESL Teacher	Male	20	White
Mariposa	ESL Teacher	Female	34	Hispanic
Kelly	ESL, Lab Teacher	Female	5	White
Annalis	Speech Pathologist	Female	5	White
Courtney	Makers Space Teacher	Female	7	White
Julie	Library Media	Female	42	White
Karina	Special Education Teacher	Female	5	White
Nolan	Music Teacher	Male	1	White
Victor	Teaching Assistant	Male	1	Black
Jamie	Instructional Coach	Female	6 (3 teaching)	Undisclosed

The major source of data collected for this study were semi-structured, face-to-face teacher interviews, which lasted between 45 and 110 minutes. Teachers were interviewed individually one time in their classroom. Each interview was audio-recorded and later transcribed. Interview questions were designed to explore teachers' beliefs about their students and students' cultures as well as their perceived roles as teachers. Using an interview guide approach (Patton, 2015), key questions were asked, while interviewers were open to other responses participants provided and asked probing questions to clarify ambiguous meaning or to further unpack more specific or in-depth information. Interview question examples are provided in Appendix A. Besides interviews, informal observations in the teachers' lounge, email exchanges with teachers for follow-up questions, and researchers' ongoing memos served as additional data sources.

Not only is it important to understand the context of the bounded system, but also to recognize the context of the observers. Reflecting and sharing researchers' positionalities is important and necessary as it enhances "the credibility of the findings by accounting for researcher values, beliefs, knowledge, and biases" (Cutcliffe, 2003, p.137). The research team consisted of seven members, including two faculty members and five graduate students from two different universities in the U.S. The lead author is a white graduate student in a math education program in a midwestern university in the U.S. who has extensive engagement with an international peace education program. She deeply cares about incorporating all students' linguistic and everyday cultural resources into mathematics curriculum and classroom community. She is currently working as a math teacher at a southwestern suburban area high school, while advocating English language learners' various needs and strengths. The two faculty members are a Jamaican female and a Korean American female, whose research topics include intersections of teacher education, educational psychology, and math education. Their research endeavors have been centered around understanding the multifaceted and interconnected psychological and social-historical factors that inform teachers' instructional decision-making, teaching effectiveness, and overall well-being. Three other graduate students, two white females and an East Asian female, are in a learning sciences program and one graduate student is in a math education program. While at different stages of the graduate program and working on different dissertation topics, they share the same passion and goal of improving teachers' work and lives in challenging and diversified school contexts.

Researchers analyzed interviews inductively (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993) to reduce the extensive texts into core meaning units by examining commonalities and differences among the 27 teachers' responses. First, interview transcripts were read and re-read, and each transcript was coded line-by-line by labeling significant remarks with descriptive words while preserving the essential meaning (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Then the significant remarks and codes were compared, contrasted, and aggregated in order to find similar patterns and categories. This process entailed synthesizing data "to interpret, to link (both with data and with other concepts), to see relationships, to conjecture and to verify findings" (Morse, 1994, p. 32). Data synthesis allowed us to configure emerging themes that reflect overall context and meaning.

To enhance trustworthiness of the study, we employed data analysis triangulation. Research team members paired and independently coded transcripts and then compared

the codes. The average level of agreement among paired researchers was over 85%. To reconcile discrepant or competing codes, researchers regularly met to discuss definitions and attributes of those codes, clarify assumptions each researcher brought into the coding process, and refine contextual information. Through ongoing discussions, codes and categories were added, deleted, merged, or modified, which facilitated the ongoing data analysis and final report. Example codes are listed in Appendix B.

Perceptions of Mismatch as Catalysts for Instructional Adjustment

Findings of the study included teachers' perceived cultural capital mismatch in four domains: (1) behavioral expectations, (2) experiential knowledge, (3) academic knowledge between what students brought to school and what teachers saw as prerequisites for success, and (4) a mismatch between parents or home life and the school. Also, teachers often viewed these mismatches from deficit perspectives, instead of addressing students' cultural capital. In addition, these mismatches were related to how teachers perceive their role in education, a link not previously discussed in the literature.

Behavioral Mismatch and Teachers' Perceived Roles

One of the most frequently discussed cultural capital mismatches was behavioral issues with students. For example, Jane, a first-grade teacher, described the mismatch between her upbringing and behavioral expectations and those of her students. As she said, her hometown was,

all white people, middle class. And so that's just kind of what I was used to. And so I knew what I was getting into when I came here. Title I. But the kids, they just don't even know what respect is. And they'll just like call the teacher bad names or like... if I ever did that I would have gotten grounded forever, you know? ...because that's just how they're raised. And you can't change that. I can't go into the house and teach their parents how to parent... They could be respectful here if they wanted to, but they have just never been taught that at home. And their parents probably talk to them the way they talked to teachers.

In this quote, Jane compares how she was parented with her assumptions of the parenting style of her students' parents, making a social class and racial distinction between the two and categorizing this style as one that lacks respect. She considers the lack of respect as the root of her classroom management issues, rather than considering her students may have a different understanding of respect and engaging in conversations about this with them.

Because of the behavioral cultural capital mismatch between students and teachers, some teachers described conceptions of their roles in bridging these mismatches, or rather filling in perceived gaps. Those who viewed their students as socially and emotionally immature saw themselves as surrogate parents, attending more to behavioral and moral issues than academic engagement. Although social and emotional development is an important part of education, especially at the elementary level, these teachers seemed to see this as significantly more important than maintaining

high expectations for academic development. This seemed to influence the role they chose to take on – that of a friend or a parent rather than a teacher. For example, Kelly felt she was, “recognizing that... there’s a greater need than their academics. Academics can come second to some of the other issues that they might have.” Jane described her relationship with students as,

more like a friendship than an authoritative relationship. Like, I want to be their friend too. And I want them to know that I am not just telling them what to do all day... I feel like they love me and I told them I loved them every day when they leave.

While caring relationships are important for student success, friendships do not necessarily provide the structure and challenge that students need.

Experiential Mismatch and Teachers’ Perceived Roles

Experiential knowledge, or background knowledge, is another site of mismatch that teachers often described. For instance, Jackie, a fourth-grade teacher, saw this as a deficiency, a common view among teachers.

We’re in a high poverty area. So, they don’t have... that background knowledge that if we go somewhere else, even a middle-class neighborhood, they’re going to have experiences going to different places. I had one boy just the other day who asked me what it was like to go to the movies. He’d never been to the movies. So, I was trying to describe it. But they just have less background knowledge. So, we have to build it however we can.

Whether we believe that movie attendance is necessary for learning, not having this experience was an issue for Jackie.

Similarly, Kristen gave the example of going to the zoo and talked about trying to help students make connections to academic content since they do not have the middle-class background knowledge:

I always try to help the kids make connections with what I’m teaching. It’s hard because they don’t have the background knowledge and haven’t been, like, to the places that, like, middle-class people have been. Like the zoo, maybe they’ve been there one time or things like that. It’s hard for them to make those connections because they haven’t been in very many places.

Jackie seemed to see her role in education as “filling in gaps” of middle-class background knowledge rather than drawing on the cultural and experiential knowledge the students possess, or their cultural toolkits. This not only affected her role, but also lowered her expectations. To illustrate this, Jackie stated,

We think we work a lot harder than some others might trying to fill in those gaps. On paper, just looking at numbers, our kids are not going to score the same as the others, so that’s pretty much what it boils down to is what people look at.

Although prior knowledge is important to make lasting connections with new academic content, these teachers tried to fill in the gaps of middle-class knowledge rather than

identifying ways to leverage students' existing knowledge to teach them something new. The preoccupation with students' lack of "appropriate" knowledge and experiences influenced some teachers' expectations of the students' academic potential.

Academic Knowledge and Teachers' Perceived Roles

Teachers also saw a gap in academic knowledge that students brought to school, especially in the younger grades. Yesenia, for example, responded that in preschool,

the student achievement, a lot of my kids don't know very much when they get here. They know just how to talk. They don't know shapes, most of them don't know numbers. They've never seen it before, so it's always starting like super... from scratch.

Even by first grade, Ashley lamented, "the fact that they come to school already about four years behind because they haven't had the oral language development, the vocabulary development that other kids have had since they were born." Teachers were focusing on what students did not know, rather than what they already had learned from their parents and community.

In addition to academic knowledge, many of the teachers perceived the students' knowledge of their first language, Spanish, as an intellectual deficit. Being Spanish-speaking was holding the students back because it is not the right language – not what they teach in school. Taylor exemplified this while talking about her third-grade students:

But because we are quite Hispanic, some of our kids are really low because they are learning English. They're learning to read. So, like, I have a girl in my class who is a beginner level reader but you give her math, she flies through it. She's very smart, and my guess is that if I gave her something in Spanish, she could do it real fast. But I don't speak Spanish. That's not what we're learning here.

Language development was a recurring topic across the conversations and elicited frustration for teachers, as many students at the school are English language learners.

A significant number of the students in the teachers' classes needed help with English, but several teachers focused more on their limited English instead of building on their Spanish skills or allowing students to use it as an asset to demonstrate proficiency. Although 3 teachers out of 27 identified their own Spanish abilities as a strength, and one mentioned bilingual students as helpful to communicate her instructions to English language learners, no teacher talked about any other advantages of students' second language skills, again demonstrating a deficit rather than asset-based understanding.

These views seemed to lead teachers to believe that academic success was not really a possibility. For example, Ashley stated,

It's really challenging to teach kids here, and so I think I'm constantly looking for something. We always joke that there's no silver bullet. But I think everyone still looks for it, everyone is still trying to figure out the best way to meet the needs of all of your students, while also teaching them the academics. Unfortunately, there's

such a large achievement gap between students who come from affluent areas and students who come from poverty that it's like you'll never catch up.

Home to School Mismatch and Teachers' Perceived Roles

Another area of cultural capital mismatch teachers discussed was between parents and the school. Lack of parent involvement was a repeated complaint throughout the interviews. Molly, a kindergarten teacher, shared her perspective on the problem:

It's probably a little bit of a lack of support either because the parents don't know how to help them, even though we try to give them the tools they still maybe don't feel comfortable. And a lot of our parents work a lot and they'll be single family homes and the mom is working a lot so they spend time with family members that are babysitting rather than trying to teach them or they spend a lot of time in day cares.

Molly perceived that parent involvement was not ideal because parents' work precluded it and also that there was a mismatch between the school's expectations and the parents' cultures and skillsets; thus, involvement in school made them uncomfortable. Some teachers had essentially given up on parents and did not consider their contributions valuable to the children's schooling. Marla, a first-grade teacher, shared her perspective:

I'm super impressed with my school and I love teaching here and I love helping my kids because this is all they have. Their parents don't have college, this is for them and their family... They do a lot at the school because nothing's given. Parents can't really help.

In addition to viewing parents as unable to support their children's education, several teachers also carried negative views of their students' cultures and home lives. Lola, a third-grade teacher, hypothesized,

I would say 75%, at least, parents are either divorced and, like, one of those parents is completely not in the picture or parents are in and out of jail. That is very common. A lot of my kids, their parents are in jail, their uncles are in jail or aunts... It's normal for them, which I'm like, uhhh, that's not normal.... Um, I think maybe five of my kids have a normal home with a mom and dad, maybe five.

For Lola, the way of life of students of color was synonymous with divorced households and incarceration.

Teachers who viewed parents as deficient and homes as toxic often saw the need to take on a parental role – this role often superseded their teacher role. Shelby, a preschool teacher, saw herself as a better parent than her students' guardians, saying that,

Knowing that when they're with me they're safe, and they're cared for and they're loved is a really big thing for me. Because when I put them in the car they're out of my control. When they're with me I can make sure they're eating to the best of my ability, "Come on you need to be taking bites, you need to be drinking milk." I can

be doing that. But when they go home, I don't know if they're going to get dinner or things like that.

Shelby included parenting duties in her role based on her perception that students were not receiving enough love and care at home. She continued, "I love the kids because, again, they need someone to love them so much. They need an adult who will love them unconditionally and I like being able to be that for them."

Similarly, Jamie described the caregiving aspects of her role and the importance she placed on being the adult in their lives who was reliable and trustworthy.

They have to trust us and a lot of them come in and they don't trust anybody. You have to be the adult in their life that they can trust you enough to let you teach them. Because a lot of them come in just not trusting adults. They don't eat. They're hungry. Mondays are horrible. We have them back in shape by Friday because we're their constant.

Although there were two teachers out of 27 who held positive views on students' home life and culture, most of the teachers expressed home to school cultural capital mismatch and related deficit perspectives, which seemed to foreground a parenting role over their instructional capacity.

Building Bridges to Students, Rather than Filling in Gaps

In summary, teachers' comments about students and their cultures reflected cultural capital mismatch where students' behaviors and aspects of their culture were characterized as deficiencies when compared to teachers' views of necessary norms. In behavioral norms, experiential knowledge, academic knowledge, and home lives, teachers often problematized their students' backgrounds and sought to mold students and parents to their own expectations. Some teachers aimed to address behavioral mismatch by socializing students in ways that aligned with their own views of proper school behavior or by taking on the role of parent or friend, which does not provide the academic structure that students need to succeed (Aultman et al., 2009; Noddings, 2005). To combat experiential mismatch, teachers saw their roles as "filling in the gaps" by teaching and transmitting aspects of white, middle-class cultural knowledge and norms. In the face of academic mismatch, although some teachers focused on instructional strategies and maintained high expectations, most of the teachers held deficit views, believing that the students would always struggle academically. As teacher expectations have consistently been found to predict student achievement, the number of teachers in this school who lowered expectations based on perceived cultural backgrounds and home situations is concerning (Babad, 1993; Weinstein, 2002; Peterson et al., 2016). Teachers also did not recognize the academic resources of bilingual students or make attempts to utilize their knowledge from their first language, features of effective education for English language learners (Wright, 2015). For parent/home to school mismatch, some teachers saw their roles as surrogate parents to their students rather than instructors. They also felt an obligation to protect their students from the dangers they perceived occurring at home and in their neighborhoods. These teachers considered their efforts sincere attempts to help; but, they seemed oblivious to the dangers of assimilation they were

asking of their students and families. Instead of leveraging the knowledge resources students bring from home (González et al., 2005) and learning about the students they teach, teachers sought to assimilate them into their own social and cultural worlds. Teachers consistently made these types of comments, across years of teaching, age, race, and gender. These results shed light on root causes of low-income minority students' experiences of marginalization and overall lower educational outcomes.

All teachers will teach students who come from different backgrounds than themselves. For this reason, cultural capital mismatch should be expected and be taken up as an asset to the learning process, catalyzing differentiation of instruction and flexible teaching. Culturally relevant pedagogy has been widely accepted as a way to align education to students' cultures and experiences, directly targeting the potentially negative repercussions of behavioral, experiential, and academic mismatch (Ladson-Billings, 1994). This instructional approach draws on students' cultural understanding and experiences as a conduit for learning, fosters a classroom environment designed around existing cultural orientations, utilizes a variety of assessment techniques, and teaches skills for students to function in the dominant culture while also fostering development of their cultural consciousness (Kelley et al., 2015).

Culturally relevant pedagogy can also change relationships with parents. Seemingly well-intentioned teachers attempted to resolve mismatch with parents by communicating what they thought was appropriate behavior for parents – asking them to volunteer and attend parent-teacher conferences. When there was non-compliance, some teachers chose to disregard parents entirely. It is important for teachers to begin with the assumption that parents do have expertise. Recognizing families' cultural capital makes it less likely that teachers will fall into stereotyping parenting styles and practices related to childcare. This will allow teachers not to undertake parental caring or friendship as the main focus of their roles, but to leverage students' and parents' cultural tools as a springboard for more productive parental involvement and instruction, which has been shown to improve student outcomes (Wood & Bauman, 2017). More recently, Miller (2019) has proposed a reconceptualization of family-school partnerships with diverse families that recognizes both community cultural wealth and ecological resistance as school workers interact with and authentically value families as trusted partners in the education of their children. As noted above, there were two teachers in this study whose approaches were aligned with these family-school partnerships by holding positive views about students' home cultures and cultivating trusting relationships with families. Future research is needed to further unpack and identify contributing factors to these beliefs and values that are aligned with culturally sustaining pedagogy.

Changing the face of instruction to resolve cultural mismatch is no simple task. First, professional developers, teacher educators, and administrators must recognize that cultural mismatch is a complex problem that requires complex strategies, including institutional structural changes that reflect an understanding of the needs of all students. A positive school climate is an indicator of whether a school promotes an inclusive environment with respect to diversity. For students in schools where they are racially or culturally minoritized with respect to the teacher and student population, a positive climate is essential for achievement, feelings of connectedness, and lower incidences of behavioral problems (La Salle et al., 2020, Wang & Degol, 2016; Worrell & Hale, 2001).

Administrators can promote a positive school climate by implementing Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS). PBIS provides a framework for constructing systemwide behavior expectations that are not solely based on norms of the white middle class but acknowledge that cultural differences may contribute to student behaviors that are not consistent with mainstream norms (Fallon et al., 2012).

At the organizational level, it is imperative that concerted efforts are made to attract a more diverse teacher workforce that reflects the existing demographic profile of schools. Teacher education programs should be designed to develop knowledge of the cultures and communities of students across the nation, and communicate that a teacher's central role is to nurture, support, and encourage students in ways that honor and respect them as individuals (Fryberg et al, 2012).

Providing professional development to equip in-service teachers to make these changes requires deep reflection on individual beliefs even before changing practice. It is critical to promote and embrace cultural and racial consciousness. Teachers must acknowledge the prevailing dominant narratives about poor children of color and critically analyze the extent to which these narratives may explicitly or tacitly shape their ideas, thoughts, and actions towards students of color (Delpit, 2012). In particular, professional development can be designed to support teachers in developing and incorporating approaches that maintain high expectations for all students, as high expectations have been shown to have overwhelmingly positive effects on the identity and achievement of students of color (e.g., Ladson-Billings, 1994; Rubie-Davies et al., 2015).

Teachers must also acknowledge that the educational system is normed on the dominant class and often does not acknowledge or meet the needs of students from culturally and racially diverse backgrounds (Byrd, 2017). This can result in a culturally incompatible system of teacher and student interactions. To create culturally sustaining classrooms, teachers must develop cultural acceptance and competence that serve as a foundation for developing mindsets and strategies that value students and their cultures (La Salle et al., 2020). Valuing others' cultures involves being open to learning new cultural truths, such as believing that 1) racially minoritized parents value their children's education despite not engaging in traditional ways; 2) communities socialize children differently even if it results in differently normed school behavior; and 3) organized, structural systems of inequities perpetuate underachievement, not innate inferiority.

Teacher education and professional development programs need to incorporate racial consciousness and cultural competence as core teacher outcomes and support teachers to develop practical strategies for operationalizing culturally relevant pedagogy as a fundamental tool in their instructional toolkits. If we are to see positive shifts in the educational outcomes of working-class students of color, then these teacher development approaches must become standard practice.

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Appendix A: Interview Question Examples

1. How would you describe your teaching at this school?
2. How would you describe your students' characteristics?
3. How would you describe your relationship with students?
4. How do you think your students' backgrounds impact your teaching?
5. What kind of social and emotional needs do you see from your students?
6. What are the major challenges of working at this school?
7. How do you handle the challenges?
8. What are the most rewarding aspects of working at this school?
9. What is your connection with the community?
10. How do you view and interact with students' parents?

Appendix B: Code Examples

Categories	Codes
Behavioral mismatch	Lack of foundational social skills
	Not knowing how to interact with each other
	Violent behaviors
	Too much socializing in classroom
	Not respecting adults
Experiential mismatch	Lack of life experiences
	Not knowing “common” vocabulary
	Normalizing violent environments
Academic mismatch	Academically behind
	High street knowledge and low academic knowledge
	Second language as a barrier
	Lack of motivation to learn
	Need to learn how to have academic conversations
Home to school mismatch	Parents’ lack of attention
	Parents’ lack of support
	Parents’ lack of ability to help
	Experience of rough things
Teacher roles	Surrogate parents
	Saving kids
	Supporting academic learning
	Caregiver for students
	Emotionally uplifting students
	Supporting students to grow in all areas, beyond academics
	Parents are primary, teachers are secondary
	Actively bridging mismatch

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