Bridging Troubled Waters: Principles for teaching in times of crisis

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An opening thought

First, an important point of order and clarity: September 11th didn't change everything; nor did the landfall of Hurricane Katrina and subsequent breach of the levee that held Lake Pontchartrain back from the city of New Orleans; nor did the Tsunamis that engulfed coastal communities along the Indian Ocean; nor does the ongoing genocide of black Africans in the Darfur region of Sudan, nor do the ongoing demonstrations to extend basic civil and human rights to this nation's most recent influx of immigrants. What these events do - to the extent that we bear witness to them - is render obvious to more people than in the past the depths of challenges facing this nation and world. These challenges include: global and local poverty; local and global versions of racism and nationalism; local, national, and transnational versions of governmental incompetence; various manifestations of hatred; and the overall fragility of human life - not just of individuals, but of entire communities. In other words, we are surrounded by countless human crises that are ongoing and normally hidden, but that have in recent years become more difficult to ignore. These crises make plain the amount of work to be done to realize a world worthy of our children's best selves.

As depressing as all of this may be at first, our saving grace is the reality that the times when we acknowledge and teach through pain, suffering and human trial are often simultaneously the times when our students learn their deepest and longest lasting lessons - the lessons that they look back upon as having shaped or changed their lives. From this perspective, times of trial are simultaneously times of hope and possibility. It is precisely at those times when the violence we witness or experience is so poignant as to jolt us into a new consciousness that we have new opportunities for teaching and learning. But seizing the time requires that we are poised and operating at our thoughtful and proactive best.

For us to be at our best when our best is demanded, times of pain must become times of renewed commitment and resolve. Commitment and resolve creates space for hope, which creates space for ironic and defiant joy - even among those of us who are in the most pain. As teachers, we have the opportunity to experience joy whenever we work towards a better world for our children, our communities, and ourselves. Our students have the opportunity to experience joy when their learning is organically and perceptibly connected to their sense of making the world a better place, and to their sense that as they help improve the world (in whatever small way) they simultaneously bring about their own social, emotional and intellectual growth. Integral to this work towards better tomorrows for our students is an acknowledgement and accounting for the pain that individuals and communities experience today.

This essay

This essay provides interrelated principles for teaching and learning in times of heightened awareness of wars, disasters and human suffering. Purposeful teaching in

times of crisis should occur both with children directly impacted by catastrophic events as well as with those less directly impacted. As a direct reflection of my most recent work and experiences in a school district that includes hundreds of classrooms with students recently evacuated from New Orleans, this essay will focus on working with children directly impacted by catastrophe.

The examples I'll provide for teaching in times of crisis are drawn from the positive work of committed schoolteachers and others in Austin, Texas as they have been working with a student community that since September 2005 has come to include close to 10,000 new families and 1000 new students who came from New Orleans and other parts of Louisiana following Hurricane Katrina. Unfortunate counter-examples, *against which* this framework stands, also come from Austin educators, specifically teachers and administrators whose prejudices, fears or lack of proaction have outweighed their better selves and furthered the miseducation (Woodson, [1935] 2005) of our children.

This essay is grounded in the work of community responsive and action oriented educational anthropology undertaken between September 2005 and May 2006. It is a follow-up to an article entitled "Austin Shelter Notes," which was published in the journal, *Transforming Anthropology* (Foster, 2006). That article was a direct reproduction of fieldnotes recorded during my time as a volunteer at the Austin Convention Center/Austin Red Cross Shelter through the first half of September 2005. There I had spoken with, observed, worked with and attempted to support children and families as they navigated their new surroundings. At the recommendation of a colleague and mentor[1] at the University of Texas, I had kept field notes of that experience and shared them widely via e-mail – as a way of bearing witness, but also a means of maintaining my sanity.[2] This essay, written after our newest students' first year in Austin's public schools, continues this still unfolding story about teaching and learning in times of crisis.

Whereas "Austin Shelter Notes" attends to circumstances in a Red Cross Shelter, this essay reflects upon the work in Austin Independent School District (AISD) during the school year following the Gulf Coast region evacuation.[3] Upon leaving the shelter, I continued working as a volunteer, helping to connect volunteer tutors and mentors to our newest students. I also worked with the District as a consultant on issues related to black student achievement. The latter work included hundreds of hours spent in schools and with principals, teachers, counselors, and AISD central office administrators. Much of my time was spent listening – to teachers, administrators, parents, students, and others. My time also included observation – of classrooms, of school staff meetings, of central office staff meetings, and of community forums. (Many of the most poignant examples I'll offer of the paradigm for teaching through crisis are drawn from one specific 5th grade class in particular). I also spent countless hours in unstructured conversation with many of these same individuals, whether after meetings, at local community events, in classrooms, or elsewhere. Finally, my time included critical engagement – participating in dialogues and problem solving discussions on campuses and district-wide, interacting with children as a tutor or other source of support, and designing campus level and district level professional development workshops. The workshops addressed needs identified by AISD leaders and myself in areas related to being as effective as possible with our new students from New Orleans (most of whom are African American), and with black students generally. In short, this essay on teaching through crisis is informed

by the events of the 2005-2006 school year, especially those surrounding the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina as it has been experienced in Austin.

Principles for teaching in times of crisis

This essay offers three interlocking principles for teaching in crisis. They are an attempt to reify hope and faith in ways that are realistic, grounded, and potentially transformational for students. To be maximally effective in times of crisis we must:

1) *know our students* - paying close attention and listening to our students and their families in order to learn, work with and respond to their stories, circumstances, needs and strengths;

2) *build community* - working with individuals in the classroom, with community organizations, and in local communities to build robust networks of need responsive support for our students;

3*) maintain reciprocal high expectations* - expecting manifestations of greatness not only from our students but from ourselves; providing space and opportunities (in and outside of class) and demonstrating the knowledge, caring, and creativity for students to do great things – both in terms of curriculum, and as morally grounded, mutually supportive community builders and citizens.

In the following sections, I'll discuss these three principles and provide examples of each as they have been practiced in pockets of humanity and teaching excellence in Austin. Each section includes two examples. One example in each section comes from a specific classroom, that of Ms. B. Taken together, the examples from Ms. B's classroom show how the three principles above can seamlessly operate together to promote classrooms characterized by deep engagement with and between students, true community, and behavioral and academic high expectations and achievement. The other examples are drawn from across AISD or from local community.

Finally, these principles are organically rooted. They are the reification and bringing together of a series of principles that many effective teachers already implicitly adhere to but may or may not have been explicit or reflexive about. The purpose here is to provide guidance and ideas, or at least to encourage discussion about the need for purposeful, proactive, and creative teaching practices for times of crisis.

Principle 1: Know our students

Among the close to 1000 new students who entered Austin Independent School District in the Fall 2005, there were as many compelling, complicated stories as there were new students. Students came in at least two major waves. The first wave included children in families that had the means to leave the Gulf Coast region before the height of the disaster. Most of these families had cars, and many had relatives to stay with in Austin or the financial means to stay in hotels. The "limits" of these kids' trauma often included having their homes destroyed, having no clothes beyond those carried with them when they left, having no idea what became of their friends, and of course, being totally uprooted from everything they knew and were accustomed to. Others came later, having survived horrendous conditions that were infinitely worse than what was shown on television, having seen dead bodies, having

experienced the indescribable of feeling like they had been left to die, having been shuttled from helicopter to bus to bus and from city to city with no knowledge of where they were being taken, and then having stayed several weeks in shelters that had been set up in states bordering the Gulf.

For teachers, counselors and principals, the challenges were huge. Among those who have been effective in working with the new population, getting to know the students and their unique circumstances has been critical. Knowledge of their newest students has facilitated trust, engagement, improved behavior, and important steps towards healing for those students most deeply and directly impacted by the tragedy surrounding the natural disaster and man-made debacle in New Orleans. Knowing students has not necessarily meant knowing all the sordid details of their most recent experiences, but rather coming to terms with those aspects of their experiences that would have an impact on their adjustment and eventual success in Austin. These included not only the harrowing experiences surrounding their departure from the Gulf Coast, but also their past experiences in a broken school system in New Orleans. Further, this “getting to know” is not a one day event, but a long process of gradually coming into relationship with children, even when those children, out of learned self-defense, are resistant to being truly known and understood by their teachers.

Principle 1, Example 1: Earl and Ms. B

Here, the example of Earl and Ms. B comes to mind. Ms. B is a 5th grade teacher whom administrators and other teachers in her school have determined is more effective than others in working with African American children and with children from New Orleans. As a result, when evacuees came to her school, those at her grade level were eventually all added to her class. A couple were placed into her class when they first came to the school; the rest were added when other teachers determined that they couldn’t handle the “Katrina Kids” (as other teachers referred to them). With six students suddenly added to her class, Ms. B’s year was one of experimentation, frustration, near despair, and ultimately hope. She served children who came to her with a wide range of traumatic experiences, a wide range of behavioral issues, and different levels of academic knowledge.

Earl was Ms. B’s most challenging student behaviorally. When the new students joined the class Ms. B explained to them that she was to be called “Ms. B,” to which Earl’s response was “OK, Bitch.” For weeks Earl refused to call Ms. B by any name other than Bitch. Other aspects of his behavior mirrored this disrespect. As will be drawn out in the Section 3 on great expectations, Ms. B’s first response was to send him to the principal’s office. When this didn’t work as a strategy Ms. B tried other means to work with and reach Earl. She eventually decided to refuse to respond directly to Earl’s cursing. She ignored him when he referred to her with a curse word, but openly engaged him whenever he behaved appropriately. As will be discussed in the section on building and engaging community, she likewise invited the class into democratic and communal conversation where behaviors such as Earl’s were openly discussed when children raised them. Over the course of weeks, and then months, Earl began to change his behavior. Sometimes he found that he wanted to contribute to conversations and be heard and that he was (apparently) tired of being ignored. At those times, the teacher known only by him as "Bitch" would suddenly become Ms. B. When Ms. B’s reaction upon being addressed politely was to turn to Earl with a

look of earnest interest and to simply offer something like, “Yes, Earl what would you like to add,” Earl’s similarly earnest and respectful engagement had been earned.

After four months in school Christmas break came. As was routine for her, Ms. B gave each student a small gift and a note that described something she appreciated about each child. Ms. B shared with me that Earl’s response to receiving a gift was one of suspicion, mild surprise, and even bewilderment. After break, however, Earl came back a different boy. Of course, he was the same boy, but with a different outlook. As he began to trust Ms. B, space was created where she was able to have a nice conversation about the cursing that plagued the first half of the school year. Earl was candid in his response; he explained that he cursed at her because in the school he came from his teacher cursed at him. He cursed at the teacher; the teacher cursed back. By his account, that was just what he was used to.[4] In short, all indications were that in addition to dealing with the trauma associated with Katrina, Earl had been subject to systematic neglect, miseducation, and even abuse in his old school. Austin offered something new, but the bridge wasn’t built over night. Ms. B is clear to say that this past year included many tears and many prayers, and even times when she wanted to quit. But the everyday heroism of working to get to know and understand a child, even when the child’s behavior was atrocious, helped her to come to see Earl as wounded and in need of healing and growth as opposed to simply bad.

Principle 1, Example 2: Journaling across the district

Of course, Earl was not the only student in Ms. B’s classroom, and just as Ms. B spent tremendous energy learning how best to respond to and get to know Earl, she had five other new students from New Orleans to get to know as well. Likewise, in public schools across Austin, teachers had to come to know, understand and develop working relationships with children who had been through all manner of trauma. Some did a better job than others. At the 2006 American Educational Research Association meetings, social justice advocates pointed out the importance of classroom discussions about all that had happened. At the same time, Austin teachers with children from New Orleans found that direct discussions were not always appropriate.[5] It was incumbent upon teachers to come to terms with their students and to determine the best ways to foster their students’ academic development while also allowing them space to address issues around Katrina where they so desired. Teachers across Austin and across the K-12 spectrum experienced a range of responses from students – from those who didn’t want to talk about the Hurricane and its aftermath, to those who did, to those who chose to journal about it, to those whose concerns remained focused on graduation and moving on to the next stage of life beyond high school.

Several teachers from elementary school through high school found that journaling assignments provided an ideal way to allow students to address events around their range of Katrina related experiences if they so desired, but to not force them to do so. In the classes I witnessed or was told about by teachers, the journals were read by the teachers, but otherwise remained private unless the student chose to share them more widely. This had the effect of offering a space for catharsis, as well as a means for caring teachers to monitor signs of students’ mental health and adjustment to their new surroundings. Journals often created the initial space for teacher and student, or student and class, to engage discussions that helped the teachers, again, come to terms with their students, understand their concerns, pains

and desires, and to understand how best to encourage their academic and communal engagement. In the next section on community building, example 1 will return to Ms. B's classroom to show how such journaling was subsequently connected to an academic and community building exercise that helped the whole class get to know each other and to eventually come to support one another's academic, social, emotional and communal growth.

Principle 2: Build and engage community (in and outside the classroom)

Teaching through crisis requires not only work with individual students. Teaching through crisis also requires community, both in the classroom and beyond. This section provides examples of each. With regards to the role and need for classroom community, many effective teachers realize that they cannot go it alone if they and their kids are going to experience a wide range of classroom success. They further realize that this fact remains even if they are the only adult in the room. Additional effective teachers do not verbalize this sentiment, but nonetheless guide their classrooms in a way that shows an implicit awareness of the need to engage and invite all of their children into mutual care and support. In both cases, teachers acknowledge, honor and utilize students as a human resource to support one another's development. Teachers help students co-construct mutually supportive classroom communities that include space to work through the social, emotional, and academic challenges they face. This aspect of community is addressed in example 1.

With regards to community beyond the classroom, educators have long recognized that student development becomes increasingly difficult to the extent that students face difficulties and instability outside of the classroom. In the context of teaching students through crisis, teachers, campus administrators, and even the local district must work together to help students and families assemble and experience a network of support that meets the range of needs they may have as survivors of trauma or as children or families who are still in the midst of crisis or instability. This issue of community beyond the classroom is addressed in example 2.

Principle 2, Example 1: Classroom Community

For our example of classroom community as the first component of Principle 2 for teaching through crisis, we turn again to Ms. B. In most schools in which I spent time, journaling was a tool that helped teachers respectfully and discreetly learn more about their students. Thus, Ms. B was just one among many teachers whose students kept journals. In Ms. B's classroom journaling also provided a bridge from personal healing and intimate sharing to communal work. In classroom gatherings that occurred once or twice a week, students read to the class freely, and by their own choice, from their journals. They read aloud and without initial comment from peers, but their choice to read was also understood as implicit consent for classroom discussion about what they chose to read. Emotionally and socially, the reading circle was a safe space for students, such that the discussions that followed readings were generally thoughtful, caring and sympathetic. In this setting, classroom community was built gradually, organically, and with empathy and human connection at its foundation.

Principle 2, Example 2: Foundation Communities

While classrooms are one community space that must be carefully constructed to facilitate healing and academic growth for students coming through crisis, supportive community and environment beyond the classroom is also critical. In Austin, one organization in particular proved especially effective at providing families with a network of support that helped move them through and out of crisis, and in the process helped create spaces where a successful school experience was at least a possibility. This organization, Foundation Communities, places families in their low-cost housing and at the same time provides a money management program, domestic relations support, job hunting assistance, interventions where chemical dependency is an issue, and even help in enrolling children in schools. Staff caseworkers identify family needs and Foundation Communities either provides assistance or connects the family to the needed assistance.

With regards to school enrollment, early in September, AISD administrators were at the Austin Convention Center, where evacuees were initially housed, to enroll children in school. Even in the context of many people doing their best in a difficult situation, it was my impression that the greatest assistance to those in need came not from any city or school employee, but rather from other evacuees and from volunteers. Ironically, people whom one would suppose would have been least equipped to provide support were sometimes the most effective. One volunteer shared with me:

I would view the school district like any other assistance, if you want it you have to find it on your own or be brought to it. Even at the Convention Center, reps from the school district weren't walking around enrolling students. Lots of kids were sitting down over at the computers [where kids gathered and played games] and weren't enrolled. I was over there picking kids up off their butts taking them to their parents and then taking them all over to get them enrolled.

An interesting thing about the person that shared this story is that she was an evacuee as well. Her house had been destroyed and she had lost all of her material possessions that hadn't fit into her car, but she still was acting in support of her own community in ways that are the backbone and precursor to teaching in times of crisis. Today, this woman, Christine, is a full time employee of Foundation Communities, where she continues to work on behalf of families from the Gulf Coast region. In a manner consistent with the idea that communities represent funds of knowledge as well as human resources (Moll, Amanti, & Gonzalez, 2005) she, and the non-profit she works for, are potential supports for children and families, and hence for the schools in which the children are enrolled. For maximum effectiveness in teaching through crisis, school administrators should seek out and partner with such agencies to insure that students experience the greatest amount of off campus stability possible and that their basic human needs (food, shelter, clothes, health services and medication, presence of a caring adult, means of transportation to vital services) are met.

Finally, even though the mission of Foundation Communities is to help families in crisis achieve self-sufficiency, the organization also at times acts as an advocate for students and parents when schools are poised to deliver inadequate service or make unjust judgments about children. In one case a child was close to being expelled and brought up on felony charges for hitting an administrator. As it turned out, the student was medically diagnosed as bipolar, but had not had his medication for months. A case worker for Foundation Communities discovered this problem, helped

the family get their child back on his medication and helped the family work with the school to put appropriate accommodations in place for the young man's situation and to head off future problems. In such cases, supports outside the school are critical for students' chances of having good experiences in their schools.

Principle 3: Reciprocal high expectations

The language of high expectations has become such a part of our vocabulary that it is almost cliché. In some cases it has an ironic ring as high expectations has been legislated to mean getting as many students as possible over the rather clumsy bar and undifferentiated of a standardized test (Sacks, 2001). Nonetheless, at its core, the idea of expecting great things from our students is appropriate. At the same time, high expectations must include an additional dimension that is very seldom discussed. Educators must not only expect great things from their students, they must have high expectations for themselves (Whitaker, 2003). In the context of teaching in times of crisis this means honoring students resilience, and knowing them well enough to understand just what should be expected of them – academically, behaviorally and in the broader community. This section contains contrasting realities within the school district. First, some teachers and administrators are trapped in deficit thinking about children they came to refer to as "the Katrina Kids." Others, who recognize and honor children's strength and courage, welcome them into community, expect them to be honored and honorable contributors to classroom and school communities, and consciously refer to students from New Orleans as "our kids" as a way to counter what they perceive as the distancing and excuse-making that takes place when students are referred to as Katrina Kids.

Principle 3, Counter-Example: the misery of deficit thinking

In AISD, maintaining high expectations has proven exceedingly difficult for teachers who were already grossly ineffective with black children and who already held opinions shaped by district wide Ruby Payne trainings[6] that emphasized poor children's "culture of poverty" and various maladaptive behaviors that teachers should help them overcome. With poverty, blackness and black culture consistently conflated, deficit views of black children are the norm that operates just below the surface of politically correct references to "training parents" and to black children's supposedly naturally high levels of energy. With achievement gaps between black and white kids hovering at 30 percentage points in the district, high expectations for the achievement of black children seems suitable to a fantasy world.

The arrival of school age children from New Orleans only added to culturally-rooted, unintentional racism of many well-meaning teachers. Teachers found that in taking in students from New Orleans they had to deal not only with the trauma of displacement and loss faced by the children, but with different cultural norms, and with a great number of kids who were well below grade level as a result of ineffective schools in New Orleans.

For some, the encounter with children from New Orleans was too much. In one instance, teachers in a school petitioned their principal to ask that all Katrina Kids be moved out of their school. In another instance, at a district wide meeting of campus administrators, and amidst challenges faced on her campus, one campus administrator blurted out to the assembled group that she hated the Katrina Kids.

While I don't believe that teachers and administrators set out to "hate," it became clear at some point that some of them had been overwhelmed, and that out of that frustration, they turned on the children – essentially blaming them for the poverty they faced, for the miseducation they had received, for the tragedies they had faced, and for the bad behavior that should have not only been unsurprising, but actually expected given all that happened.

Principle 3, Example: Earl and Ms. B, part 2: The promise of high expectations

In contrast to the sad examples above, several teachers and principals have taken an alternative and proactive stance with their children and have turned the rhetoric of deficit and defeat on its head. In what was a shock to some and caused discord on at least one campus, some teachers continued to hold their students to high standards of behavior. They likewise expect a great deal of themselves. Amidst tears, frustration and prayer, some teachers determined to work with all of their students to build classroom community, accept only respectful behavior, and to see the beauty of all children, even those whose behavior was so difficult that one impulse was to dislike them.

Here, our final example from Ms. B's classroom comes to mind. Early on, when children misbehaved she sent them to the principal's office. She quickly ended that practice as, according to Ms. B, "I would send them down and they would come back worse than when they left." What Ms. B found was that when her students from New Orleans got down to the office, they would "lay on their story" – all that they had come through – and that the assistant principal and principal would commiserate and show concern and yet ultimately fail to act with an expectation that students behave. In one of our conversations, Ms. B shared that she figured this out when she heard one student sharing with another that this was the strategy to use if ever Ms. B sent them down to the office. To Ms. B, refusing to hold black students to standards of behavior, even if they had come through trauma, was a form of racism. She shared that part of why her job was so important was that "these people" made it worse for kids by not holding them to any standards. She saw herself as a black woman who protected and cared for her kids by expecting more of them than white teachers and administrators did.

As a teacher who held all of her children to high standards of personal comportment and effort, Ms. B reminded me of a teacher in one of Michele Foster's after-school teacher training labs, where master teachers tutor students after school as other teachers observe and learn (Foster, Foster, Lewis, & Onafowara, 2005). In one instance, a student was asked why she hadn't done her work. Her response was to explain that her Daddy was in jail. "That is a shame," the teacher was said to reply, "I am sorry that your Daddy is in jail; you must really miss him. But what does that have to do with not doing your work?" To some of us, this response might seem uncaring and harsh. But in the context of helping students move through crisis, it is not. The teacher expressed care and concern, but did not accept that one tragic situation (a parent in jail) would be a reason for the perpetuation of a second (the systematic miseducation of many of our students who are poor, are minorities, experience trauma, or all three).

Ms. B's expectation for good behavior was matched with a willingness to adapt to changing circumstances and with specific strategies that emphasized hard work, not

compliance with rules for rules' sake. First, her main requirement was that students do their work. They could do it laying down, standing up, or at a desk. She often allowed her students to work in small groups if the small groups were working together to solve problems and, in the process, teach one another. There was no punishment for failure to do work, only the understanding that you couldn't go outside to play if you weren't done. Second, after sending kids to the principal's office proved ineffective, a strategy that proved more effective for routine instances of misbehavior was to refuse to honor disrespectful students during their times of disrespect. Though an admittedly gradual and frustrating process, in Ms. B's class children gradually learned that they received more attention for their good behavior than for bad. They then acted accordingly. Third, Ms. B expected her kids to act in community and to "police" one another through caring relationships as opposed to draconian means. One space where this took place was the weekly class meeting. Students discussed appropriate behavior and punishments for breaking various rules and worked to reason with fellow students when they were out of line. Again, though a long process, those students for whom following class rules was most difficult gradually came to better and better behavior as they found themselves in a community of caring peers. And here, the caring of fellow students was key. In one poignant moment, one student shared with concern and hope that the class had to understand that students who came from somewhere else might not know or be used to the way they do things and so they should be understanding if adjustment took time. Though impossible to look inside a student to see the impact of such a statement, it is likely that Earl's gradual behavioral changes were not due alone to Ms. B's work, but also to the caring support of the class, whose members wanted and expected better behavior from Earl than he exhibited at first, but also showed the great patience and understanding that helped him get there.

Conclusion

In Austin, we close out the school year with a little less than 700 students from the Gulf Coast still with us. Thousands of families, I am happy to say, have decided to make Austin their home. One child shared with me that he didn't want to go back to New Orleans, because his new school was cleaner and better and his teacher was nice. Another family shared with me that they had lived in New Orleans all of their lives, and after several months in Austin, they feel like they had been in abusive relationship for all their lives but had never realized it until they experienced something different. Countless others share similar sentiments.[7]

At the same time, the challenges we face, as a slightly larger community than before, are daunting. Many students from the Gulf Coast perform far below their academic grade level and are in need of extra support and attention. Untold others are suffering or will suffer from post-traumatic disorders. In one instance, a student had seemed to adjust very well to his new school and surroundings, but became noticeably depressed after he went back to New Orleans and for the first time saw not only the sheer devastation that remains to this day, but also his former home, which had been effectively destroyed. Then there is, of course, a great deal of prejudice to overcome. As mentioned early on in this article, few teachers are effective teaching black children at any rate. Thus, it should be no surprise that the reality of a large group of black children, coming mostly from high poverty, and with different backgrounds and with high needs, has been more than many of our teachers have been able to handle with anything even close to effectiveness. In Texas, halfway through the year, some even began to speak of "compassion fatigue"

(Radcliffe, 2005), of (by my read) basically being tired of having to care more than they normally would for children who were different than them and yet needed them.

The last challenge mentioned above, dealing with the reality of ineffective and prejudiced teachers, and of teachers invited to think of their circumstances in terms of compassion fatigue, leads to a final point to close out this essay. Specifically, it is possible that a fourth principle could be added to this framework. Sharing this paper with one of the principals with whom I have spent dozens of hours this year, he agreed wholeheartedly with the article and asked if he could use as a reading for staff development in the complicated and challenging middle school to which he has been assigned for the 2006-2007 school year. He added, however, that the framework offered here cannot be effectively adhered to by teachers who are not willing to be reflexive about their work, to learn about their own prejudices, and, where necessary, be willing to grow and change. Honoring the wisdom of that principal, the closing caveat to this essay is that for success in teaching in times of crisis, in addition to 1) knowing their students, 2) building and engaging community, and 3) expecting great things from their students, teachers must also know themselves, and where necessary, be willing to grow and change.

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[1]Dr. Ted Gordon, Director of the University of Texas at Austin Center for African and African American Studies, is a role model for action oriented anthropological research and community engagement. I aspire to his example of a life that is guided by service, intellectual rigor, and purposeful action to make this world a better place.

[2]The field notes were originally shared on-line and in real-time with colleagues from the Council on Anthropology and Education.

[3]I am grateful to Bret Cormier, who, as an AISD employee, secured for me full access to AISD classrooms, and campus and administrative meetings, and kept me abreast of activities, decision-making processes, and decisions that impacted students from New Orleans.

[4]I asked a former New Orleans schoolteacher who now lives in Austin about the likelihood that this could have happened. She expressed no surprise at the student story of being cursed at and said that there were indeed teachers in the New Orleans public school system who had treated their children horribly and who were, in her opinion, openly abusive. I asked an Austin social worker – a person who had also come from New Orleans after the hurricane – about this as well. Her response was similar to the schoolteacher. She hadn't seen cursing at students herself, but said she had no doubt that it happened in some New Orleans classrooms.

[5]Mica Pollock, author of *Colormute: Race talk dilemmas in an American School* (2005) organized a powerful set of sessions related to the types of conversations that we should be having in our classrooms following Katrina.

[6]Ruby Payne trainings are professional development workshops that emphasize the notion that children in poverty come from cultures that are maladapted to mainstream success and that teachers need to teach middle values and behaviors to children to help them be successful.

[7]On a personal note, this is troubling and ironic. As a frequent visitor to New Orleans, I enjoyed the food, hospitality and tourist attractions the city offered, and was indirectly aware of many of the city's problems, and yet had never truly connected to the pain and suffering that existed below the surface and that I supported through my commerce.