On July 1, 2018, I joined the School of Education as the third Helen S. Faison Endowed Chair and Director of the Center for Urban Education. I thank the School of Education (SOE) Dean, Dr. Valerie Kinloch, the dean’s office staff, and several SOE faculty for their labor and support in the on-boarding process. I am also indebted to the immediate past CUE Director, Dr. H. Richard Milner IV, and my faculty colleagues in the urban education program for their kind and helpful efforts in support of a smooth transition.

Broadly, I see the Pitt Center for Urban Education as a coordinating site for principles of equity and justice, collective praxis, and liberatory education, and I am honored to join you in working toward these principles in the City of Pittsburgh and across locales. We must concurrently grapple with our visitor status on land placed in the care and protection of several Native tribes who gathered and exchanged in what is known as Pittsburgh—the Adena, the Hopewell, the Iroquois, the Lenape, and the Shawnee. A related obligation is acknowledging and contending with ongoing African struggle and world-making in the west. For instance, the remains of local Underground Railroad stations bear witness to the forging of an empire through the plunder of Black life. A vision for our work then must recognize the ways schools and schooling embed the realities of disenfranchisement in Pennsylvania and the U.S. Today, I believe strategic organizing and collaborating with various freedom-minded communities is a required investment for rethinking and enriching research, teaching, and service.
In addition to mounds of data, my own lived experience informs an urgency to ally the most vulnerable masses in their struggle for justice. Several of my ancestors taught and led schools across the Jim Crow Alabama south following the Civil War. My mother, a retired schoolteacher and principal in Arkansas, is my first teacher. In so many ways, she has taught me how to read the word and the world. I am an education sociologist and critical theorist who draws upon various research methods to 1) chart the power arrangements of U.S. educational institutions through the experience of Black populations and 2) locate the possibilities for transformational educational praxis. My most recent published book is Historically Black Colleges and Universities across the Diaspora: Race and Stratification in Postsecondary Education (Emerald, 2018). My current projects are: 1) examinations of anti-affirmative action discourse in Michigan, California, and Texas and 2) advancing a theory of anti-blackness on college campuses.

Prior to my current role, I held administrative positions at the University of Oklahoma: associate dean for community engagement and academic inclusion in the Jeannine Rainbolt College of Education, fellow in the Office of the Senior Vice-President and Provost, and graduate programs co-director in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies. In addition, I have served as senior editor and/or associate editor for prominent international peer-reviewed journals and book series. As a professor in various institutional types, I have developed curriculum and taught courses related to the sociology of education, critical literature in education, research design, and leadership. I am humbled to think with communities both within and beyond the university, and my first year began this exciting work.

Our 2018-2019 theme encouraged us to contemplate urban education as a research field and focus of our center and identify pathways for structural transformation and resource redistribution. We asked ourselves: In what ways is education urban(ized), or, a project and process to preserve power relations? We launched the theme’s programming with emphasis on the significance and value of history as essential to projects of educational re-imagination. Dr. Vanessa Siddle-Walker’s (Emory University) analysis guided our engagement around the following questions: How did Black communities advocate for Black education access following desegregation? How might we apply this knowledge to Pittsburgh organizing and resistance efforts? I invite you to read more about this event and the several other projects and initiatives highlighted in this newsletter as our rigorous engagement of these questions.

Finally, please know that I am deeply grateful to the university faculty, staff, students, and administrators who have entrusted me with this important role. I look forward to working with you and learning alongside you as we forge ahead, endeavoring together to learn, share, and transform.
ABOUT THE CENTER

CUE's vision is to be a space of learning and sharing with communities to positively transform educational opportunities and experiences.

To better work toward this vision, we adhere to a list of six core beliefs. We believe in:

- **Learning** – Learning from and with others is essential for building knowledge and understanding
- **Relationships** – Relationships are at the core of effective educational policies and practices
- **Assets** – People and communities have a wide range of strengths and assets from which we should recognize, cultivate, and build
- **Sharing** – Sharing what we know and possess to enrich communities and collective interests
- **Equity** – Striving and advocating for equitable and justice-centered policies and practices
- **Action** – Moving our knowledge, understanding, and skills into actions to improve education and society
RESEARCH SPOTLIGHT
The Influence of Families on Educators' Discussions about Race
Lori Delale-O’Connor and DaVonna Graham

The curriculum that children experience at school each day is the result of myriad decisions made by teachers, school leaders, and policy makers. What gets conveyed in classrooms sends messages to students and their families about what topics and content matter, but also whose voice and experiences matter in the classroom. Race and racial violence are topics that, despite their demonstrated importance, are actively excluded from the curriculum of schools and classrooms (Milner & Laughter, 2015). A variety of factors go into teachers’ decisions to discuss race, including their preparation and feelings of preparedness, administrator support, and their personal beliefs and experiences around race (Delale-O’Connor, Alvarez, Murray, & Milner, 2017; Milner, 2010a; Milner & Laughter, 2015; Sue, Lin, Torino, Capodilupo, & Rivera, 2009). But, one potential area of influence that has been underexplored is the influence of students’ parents and caregivers on these decisions.

Race is a touchy subject right now and bringing it up in class might anger some parents that wish to shelter their kids rather than expose them to what is going on currently.

In a recently published article in the journal Urban Education, “Teachers’ Talk About Race and Caregiver Support: “You Can NEVER Be Too Sure About Parents,”” (Also featured in an EdWeek blog post) Dr. Lori Delale-O’Connor and Ms. DaVonna Graham focused on addressing the potential influences of caregivers on educators’ decisions to discuss (or not discuss) race and racial violence in the classroom. Addressing the research question, “What do teachers report about their views of parents’ support of curriculum and instructional moves that center race?”, in this study, they focus on teachers’ reported beliefs about parental support for discussing race in their classrooms. This article drew from data from the Teachers’ Race Talk Survey (TRTS, 2016), an exploratory survey that examined teachers’ perceptions about discussing race and racial violence in the classroom. The majority (more than 85%) of educators in the sample indicated that they believed race was an important topic to discuss with students and broadly that teachers should discuss racism and racial discrimination with their students.

However, teachers indicated broad uncertainty for talking about race with regard to parental support. Indeed, nearly 60% of survey respondents were “not sure” about whether or not parents would support conversations of race in the classroom. In short answer responses to explain their perceptions, they drew on four primary logics to explain the perceived support from caregivers. In particular, educators talked about:

(a) context characteristics—assumptions, assessment, and perceptions of the location, place, and broader school, district, and/or community in which educators taught.
(b) family characteristics—perceived characteristics of families and children as sites of support or lack of support for conversations about race.
(c) teacher characteristics—aspects of educators’ own identities (including race and gender) and experiences.
(d) subject.—perceived characteristics of the subject of race itself.

The data in this study illustrated the importance of teachers’ perceptions of caregivers’ support for discussing race in their classrooms. The insights offered here pointed back to the importance of building teacher-caregiver relationships. Findings further demonstrated, however, that knowing and connecting families, students, and communities was not enough. Teachers may know all these groups very well and still correctly understand that they will not be supported in discussing race in their classroom. It is essential to pair a commitment to critical content—in this case, race—with an understanding of the importance of knowing the context and the individual families and students. Because parents are underspecified as influencers of teacher decisions, this study shed light on some of the ways caregivers may influence in-class practices and the ways teachers, administrators, and caregivers should consider this influence.
Gentrification and Institutional Displacement

F. Alvin Pearman

For much of the twentieth century, urban neighborhoods were plagued by economic neglect and segregation. In recent years, many urban neighborhoods have seen a reversal of this pattern. Wealthier households who once fled these neighborhoods for the suburbs are returning en masse. Large and small scale developers have come to see low-income urban neighborhoods not as places to avoid but rather as lucrative investment opportunities. These trends have caused considerable shifts and the demography and built environment of low-income neighborhoods and have prompted a heated debate about the pros and cons of gentrification.

Much of this debate revolves around the displacement of low-income people. And for good reason. Neighborhoods are made up of people, after all. And people need places to live. But as neighborhoods churn and change, an equally important question for matters of equitable community development concerns the displacement of existing community institutions.

If you stroll through a neighborhood on any given day, its public institutions are typically on full display. This is generally a good thing. Local businesses, churches, schools, recreational facilities, barbershops, and grocery stores structure and support peoples’ lives. And it turns out that the fewer resources that people have, the more reliant they are on local institutions for social, spiritual, emotional, economic, and educational support. Indeed, vibrant community institutions are a lifeblood in many low-income neighborhoods.

But as neighborhoods experience gentrification, what happens to these institutions? How do they change? Are they better or worse off? And what about the people who need them? The limited research that has been done in this area has painted a rather ominous picture about the long-term viability of existing institutions in gentrifying neighborhoods.

Consider first the neighborhood school. In my own prior work, I’ve found that the affluent households who gentrify low-income neighborhoods often opt out of neighborhood schools, preferring to send their children to charter, magnet, or private schools. Moreover, there is evidence that neighborhood schools in gentrifying areas see declines not only in enrollment but also in per-pupil spending.

But these concerns aren’t limited to schools. In research I’ve done here in Pittsburgh, I’ve found that neighborhoods that have undergone gentrification in recent years—neighborhoods like East Liberty and Mexican War Streets—have seen a decline in the per-pupil number of social service providers. The same holds for non-profit organizations that work exclusively with children and adolescents. This research reveals that existing institutions rarely experience the upside of gentrification and may, over time, find themselves displaced, just like the low-income residents they formerly served.

None of this denies the reality that as gentrification alters the demographics of a neighborhood that its institutions will naturally change as a result. If there are no more low-income people in a neighborhood, there is less need for a public health facility, for example. But this understanding privileges a particular direction of cause and effect without acknowledging the legitimacy of the other: That supporting neighborhood institutions, by themselves, can promote residential stability.

For instance, it is reasonable to suspect that long-term residents of gentrifying neighborhoods may find the justification, support, and perhaps even the means to stay put if their local community engagement center receives a grant to provide legal counsel for renters and first-time homebuyers. Similar effects could be brought about by strategic investments in other neighborhood institutions, like schools or churches. With the right investments, in other words, existing community institutions could serve as a stabilizing force amidst a broader sea of change.

There is no single approach for addressing the downsides of gentrification. The challenges that gentrification brings about are complex and local, so the exact shape and scope of the right policy will necessarily vary by community. However, it is becoming increasingly apparent that place-based policies should ensure the continuity and vitality of not only long-term residents but also the neighborhood institutions that serve them.
The CUE Lunch & Learn Series is a monthly gathering open to university and local community members. Its goal is to stimulate dialogue about pertinent issues in urban education, and for colleagues to develop possible research collaborations with an urban education focus. This year, CUE invited some of the top scholars in urban education from across the country to lead the research-grounded sessions.

**Insurgent Knowledges**  
*April 18, 2019*  
Facilitated by Dr. Sabina Vaught, Department of Educational Policy Studies Chairperson and Dr. Damien Sojoyner, Associate Professor at University of California, Irvine

**Critical Language Pedagogy: Reimagining Dialects, Identity and Power in Urban Education**  
*December 6, 2018*  
Facilitated by Dr. Amanda J. Godley, University of Pittsburgh School of Education

**Schooling in Racist America: White Teachers and Whiteness with a Soft Touch**  
*November 8, 2018*  
Facilitated by Dr. Zeus Leonardo, Associate Professor at the University of California Berkeley

**Who Does Aid Help? Examining Heterogeneity in the Effect of Student Aid on Achievement**  
*October 4, 2018*  
Facilitated by Breyon J. Williams  
Ph.D. candidate in Economics at the University of South Carolina

**Meet the CUE Director**  
*Thursday, September 20*  
Facilitated by Dr. T. Elon Dancy, II
Responding to Reality is designed to engage and respond to recent events with concrete strategies to make society more equitable for those in urban education.

Responding to Reality: The Browning of Education: Latinx Myths and Realities in Urban Education
Moderated by Dr. Gina Garcia
October 11, 2018
Co-sponsored by the School of Education Dean's Office, this Responding to Reality examined Latinx issues and experiences across the education pipeline as we celebrated Hispanic Heritage Month (HHM). HHM is annually celebrated Sept. 15-Oct.15 to acknowledge the history, culture, and contributions of Americans whose ancestry can be traced to Mexico, Central and South America, the Caribbean, and Spain. In the United States, there are approximately 58.5 million people who have ancestries connected to these countries, yet they reside in the United States.

Our four distinguished panelists included Dr. Susana Muñoz (Assistant Professor of Higher Education in the School of Education at Colorado State University and co-director of the Higher Education Leadership program), Dr. Rosa Clemente (journalist, political commentator, scholar-activist), Dr. Cati de los Ríos (assistant professor in the School of Education at University of California, Davis), and Dr. Mirelsie Velázquez (Assistant Professor of Educational Studies and Women’s and Gender Studies at the University of Oklahoma).

Responding to Reality: Film Screening of "East of Liberty"
Moderated by Jawanza Rand, CUE Graduate Fellow with discussions of topic significance by Dr. T. Elon Dancy II, CUE Director, and Dr. Leigh Patel, Associate Dean for Equity and Justice, School of Education.
Co-sponsored by the School of Education's Dean's Office
February 21, 2019
This unique documentary, called "East of Liberty," explores issues of race and class and addresses resident’s fears about gentrification. The goal has been to create a historical record that captures the essence of community change and exposes taboos in frank conversation—from displacement to neighborhood violence to discussions of race and class—which most redevelopment efforts ignore. This series has been used in classrooms of higher education to engage students in a timely debate and discussion about urban redevelopment, gentrification, and related social and economic issues. It serves as an ideal teaching tool for courses including those in urban studies, public policy, race and ethnicity, sociology, and others.

Our distinguished panelists included Dr. Alvin Pearman (Assistant Professor of Urban Education, University of Pittsburgh), Dr. Harley Etienne (Assistant Professor of Urban and Regional Planning at the University of Michigan), and Medina Jackson, M.S.W. (PRIDE Director of Engagement at the School of Education's Office of Child Development).
Every semester, the #CUEtalks Lecture Series provides an opportunity for faculty, staff, students, and community members to learn from a prominent, established researcher about an issue salient to urban education.

Lost Strategies for Community Agency
Dr. Vanessa Siddle Walker
Samuel Candler Dobbs Professor of African American Educational Studies, Emory University, president-elect, American Educational Research Association (AERA).
October 16, 2018

The event opened with a performance by the Pittsburgh Cultural Arts Collective Percussion Ensemble, directed by Thomas Chatman as well as a poem by Harmony McDonald, a scholar at Margaret Milliones, University Preparatory School.

In her lecture, Dr. Siddle Walker used the critical findings from her book "The Lost Education of Horace Tate" to discuss the tri-fold implication of the loss of aspiration, advocacy, and access in the schooling of children today, and to highlight specific strategies from African American history that might provide useful maps for universities and communities today who wish to forge more successful educational opportunities for children.
Dr. Alim addressed the ongoing White cultural and linguistic hegemony, as he discussed new paradigms for the study of language, race, culture, and education through 20 years of collected data. Dr. Alim referenced his research within the U.S. and South Africa to demonstrate how paradigms like raciolinguistics and culturally sustaining pedagogies, among others, can offer a substantive break from mainstream educational thought and help move us toward educational justice.
Reflection into Action sessions occur at community locations outside the University, and are designed to create collective strategies for advancing the ideas presented during the CUETalks Lecture Series into actionable plans for improving our schools and communities.

Reflection into Action discussion bridges the gaps between theory and practice by connecting CUE with local schools, districts, student groups, parents, and communities.

To move reflection into action, we hosted two successful community forums to advance recommendations brought up in the lectures. Educators in attendance shared their classroom practices, and collaborated with students, parents, and community members to devise new strategies.

**Fall Reflection into Action - Community Conversations: Finding Lost Strategies in the Quest for Education Justice**

Blakey Program Center
October 17, 2018

Following her lecture, historian Dr. Vanessa Siddle Walker and local education professionals participated in a dialogue about community power in education advocacy. In this forum, our participants learned from the strategies of ancestors past, discussed the challenges of the present, and charted a course for the future.

**Spring Reflection into Action:**

Kingsley Association
March 27, 2019

The Spring Reflection into Action took place at the Kingsley Association. Panelists included Dr. Amanda J. Godley (Faculty member at the School of Education), Dr. Tanja J. Burkhard (Postdoctoral Associate at the University of Pittsburgh), and a student from Westinghouse High School.

They shared reflections on discrimination and linguistics, as discussed throughout Dr. H. Samy Alim's CUE Talk: "Sorry to Bother You: Education and the Disruption of White Cultural and Linguistic Hegemony in the U.S. and South Africa."
The Heinz Fellows Program is a joint collaboration between the University of Pittsburgh Center for Urban Education and The Heinz Endowments. The program, which kicked off in June of 2018, advances CUE’s commitment to improving the landscape of urban education, increasing the teacher-of-color pipeline, and improving the quality of instruction of educators in the Pittsburgh region. Dr. Kenny Donaldson, Associate Director of Strategic Programming, led the program during the 2018-2019 academic year.

The Heinz Fellows Program offers an extraordinary, year-long opportunity for forward-thinking, social justice-oriented individuals who are interested in advancing equity in education. Fellows will work in urban schools in collaboration with teachers, staff, and school leaders to support students in academic, social, and emotional growth while building knowledge and skills necessary to work in urban contexts.

During the school year, the Fellows provided tutoring, mentoring, and support for Pittsburgh Public Schools students, teachers, and staff in neighborhood schools in Pittsburgh’s Hill District. They also participated in weekly community visits to locations that work with youth and took part in weekly professional development sessions at CUE.

Heinz Fellows working at Weil Elementary school created the Eagle's Nest, a student-centered resource room where students can acquire donated items, learn new skills, develop creative projects, and engage with the community.
#FellowsFridays

Fridays are for the Fellows! Every Friday of the academic year, we checked in with the Heinz Fellows to catch up on all of the amazing work that they had been doing the week before.
1. The Heinz Fellows visited Manchester Academic Charter School to discuss equitable education and promising practices for young marginalized students.

2. In the Center for Teaching and Learning studio, program director Kenny Donaldson and two Heinz Fellows record CUE's first podcast "CUEcast."

3. The Heinz Fellows helped out with the first-day-of-school party at Pittsburgh Miller African Centered Academy this past fall!

4. The Heinz Fellows visited Penn Hills Charter School of Entrepreneurship for a site observation and to discuss potential ways to collaborate around their entrepreneurial initiatives for K-8 students.


6. The Fellows participated in the community's trunk-or-treat Halloween event.

7. Heinz Fellows alumni visited to give advice, reflect on their time in the program, and share ideas with the current fellows.

8. The Fellows spoke with Associate Dean of Equity and Justice Leigh Patel about education as an institution, how it is interwoven with other institutions, and how it contributes to imagining freedom and liberation for all.

Stay up to date with the Heinz Fellows and everything CUE by checking us out on Twitter (@PittCUE), Facebook (CUEatPitt), Instagram (PittUrbanEd), and YouTube (Center for Urban Education).
In too many public schools across the country, the educational system functions more like a pipeline to prison than it does a bridge to opportunity.

This grim phenomenon was the focus of the 2019 Summer Educator Forum that was held in July by the Center for Urban Education at the University of Pittsburgh School of Education.

During the three-day conference (known as CUESEF) on Pitt’s campus, more than 500 participants from around the world—including as far away as Turkey—explored the theme of “Dismantling the School-to-Prison Pipeline: Reimagining Policies, Practices, and Politics in Education.” The discussions, which sometimes involved stories of heartbreak and other times stories of resilience and perseverance, involved teachers and educators, college faculty, community members, students, and also those who were formerly incarcerated.

The conference featured over 50 presentations, including such leading thinkers as:

**Moderators** – Clint Smith III, host of the podcasts “Justice in America” and “Pod Save the People,” and Crystal Laura, award-winning author of the book "Being Bad: My Baby Brother and the School-to-Prison Pipeline."

**Featured Panelists** – Yolanda Sealey-Ruiz, Associate Professor of English Education at Teachers College, Columbia University; Marc Lamont Hill, Professor and Steve Charles Chair in Media Cities and Solutions, Temple University; Carla Shedd, Associate Professor of Sociology and Urban Education at The Graduate Center, City University of New York and award-winning author of "Unequal City: Race, Schools, and Perceptions of Injustice"; David Stovall, Professor of African American Studies and Criminology and Law and Justice at the University of Illinois at Chicago; and Mariame Kaba, Founder and Director of Project NIA ("nia" meaning “with purpose” in Swahili).

Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness,” and Judith Browne-Dianis, lawyer, professor and Executive Director of Advancement of The Advancement Project.

In her talk, Alexander mentioned that one of the “for-life” inmates she visited while researching her book was in the audience that day. The room erupted into applause.

Moments later, Alexander posed the question, “Rather than inflicting more violence on a child who has suffered, shouldn’t we be looking to reduce harm and to focus on transforming, healing, and restoring?”

Alexander also spoke about the importance of people effecting change from within their own schools.

“It is absolutely essential for us to think about organizing right where you are in your school and to have a conversation with like-minded people about what is happening in our schools to see what we can do here to help young people in our schools,” Alexander told the audience.

“That requires the act of courage to speak the truth about their own experiences, what they witness, [and] how they themselves have been complicit, asking ‘Have I been thinking about my classroom in a way I’m not proud of?” said Alexander.

Other featured panels included the unique perspectives from three men who were sentenced to life in prison as youth—but have since been released from prison. There was also a student panel, led by high school student activist Kahlil Darden, creator of Young Black Motivated Kings and Queens(YBMKQ) of 1Hood Media.

Valerie Kinloch, the Renée and Richard Goldman Dean of the Pitt School of Education, opened the CUESEF conference by noting how its focus on restorative justice aligned with the school’s new mission-vision statement.

She shared the opening lines of the school’s mission-vision when she told the audience that the purpose of the Pitt School of Education was “to ignite learning, to strive for well-being for all, to commit to student, family and community success, and to strive for educational equity for all.”

The Heinz Endowments was the primary sponsor of the CUESEF conference. The sponsorship represented another example of how the Heinz Endowments supports the Center for Urban Education—as it also funds the Heinz Fellows Program, which is a year-long opportunity for individuals to work in urban schools in collaboration with teachers, staff and school leaders.

Many presenters at the CUESEF conference reminded the audience that it was impossible to do the work of dismantling the school-to-prison pipeline by themselves. Instead, it would take a collective effort.

“We are here not to problem solve but to gather information to better understand how the experience is situated in context of community, in context of mass incarceration, and in context of responsibility—and this is not something we can do alone,” said Alexander.
CUE presents the Lesgold Award for Excellence in Urban Education in recognition of an individual, organization, or initiative emphasizing, advancing, or supporting the work of urban education. CUE applauds trailblazers — locally, regionally, and nationally — who are committed to improving educational experiences and opportunities for those in urban schools, districts, and communities. The award is named for Alan Lesgold, former dean of the School of Education and founder of CUE.

**1Hood Media**

is an organization centered on using media arts, activism and education to shift the narrative of black people in the world. Media literacy, personal agency, and critical consciousness live at the core of their work.

**Dr. John M. Wallace, Jr.**

is the David E. Epperson Endowed Chair and professor at the University of Pittsburgh, with appointments in the School of Social Work, the Katz Graduate School of Business and the Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences (Sociology). He is also the senior pastor of Bible Center Church.

**Dr. Gretchen Givens Generett**

is an Associate Professor in the Department of Foundations and Leadership and the Director of the UCEA Center for Educational Leadership and Social Justice at Duquesne University.

**Rev. Glenn Grayson**

founded Center That CARES (Children/Adults Recreational and Educational Services), an organization that serves students and their families. It is recognized for its after-school tutorial and enrichment.

**Terri Baltimore**

is the Director of Community Engagement for the Hill House Association and has worked for the agency for over 20 years.

**Previous Honorees**

Michelle King  
Jason Rivers  
Dr. Jerome Taylor  
Malcom Thomas  
Dr. Shirley Biggs  
A+ Schools  
Rev. Lee Walls  
Dr. Patricia Beeson  
Dr. Larry Davis  
Saleem Ghubril  
Lynne Hayes-Freeland  
Dr. Linda Lane  
1Nation Mentoring  
Dr. Rich Milner  
The PRIDE Program
CUE FELLOWS

To foster a community of interdisciplinary scholars engaged in urban education research, theory, policy, and practice, the Center for Urban Education offers faculty and graduate students in the School of Education at the University of Pittsburgh the opportunity to apply to become CUE Fellows. Those outside the School of Education are invited to apply. CUE affiliation provides fellows with the opportunity to build collaborative research projects, share and discuss issues and solutions in urban education, and showcase research and development projects. To learn more about becoming a CUE fellow, contact cue@pitt.edu.

CUE Faculty Fellows
Tom Akiva, Anna Arlotta-Guerrero, Heather Bachman, Mario Browne, Tanja Burkhard, Trish Crawford, Linda DeAngelo, Ellice Forman, Gina Garcia, Amanda Godley, Michael Gunzenhauser, Jennifer Iriti, Katrina Bartow Jacobs, Sean Kelly, Mary Margaret Kerr, Kari Kokka, Linda Kucan, Lindsay Clare Matsumura, Jason Mendez, Barbara Kimes Myers, J. Meagan O'Brien, Maureen Porter, Emily Rainey, Michele Reid, Rachel Robertson, Katherine Sukenik Pohl, Laura Roop, Sharon Ross, Veronica Sardegna, Michelle Sobolak, Beth Sondel, John Wallace Jr., Tanner Wallace, Shannon Wanless, and Carol Wooten.

CUE Graduate Student Fellows
The Ready to Learn Program is a tutoring and mentoring initiative and research study that connects Pitt undergraduate students with Pittsburgh Public School students.

By Cassia Crogan

While their friends were enjoying summer days at the pool, a small group of local middle school students were testing samples of the pool water—and other water sources from the environment, like tap water and bottled water—for bacteria and lead.

The cohort of 12 students who attend Pittsburgh Public Schools University Prep Middle School and/or reside in the Hill District participated in an environmental social justice math project-based unit that explored water quality in Pittsburgh.

The program was offered this past summer at the Pitt School of Education through the Center for Urban Education’s (CUE) Ready to Learn (RTL) program after receiving a Chan Zuckerberg grant earlier this year.

Under the direction of CUE Associate Director of Strategic Programming and Initiatives, Dr. Kenny Donaldson, and RTL Program Manager Cassandra Brentley, the middle school students met with Heinz Fellows who served as math mentors at the Jeron X Grayson Center over the course of six weeks. Pitt Education mathematics education assistant professor, Kari Kokka, designed the curriculum.

“‘The students had a great desire to learn and really rose to the occasion during the student exhibition,’” said Brentley. “‘They were super engaged and showed up every week during their summer when they could’ve done other things.’”

RTL is a research-practice partnership that supports personalized learning through tutoring and mentoring while providing middle school students with experiences to support their academic improvement in mathematics and social skill development.

The culmination of their hard work and dedication was the Summer Student Exhibition. The students presented in small groups to community members, CUE faculty, staff, and students, and their parents. Representing responsibility with action and civic engagement, the students’ work connected to Flint, Mich. and water crises in third-world countries.
Presentation topics included “Why is There Lead and Why it’s Important” and “Harmful Bacteria in Water and How is It Treated?”

“You could see the confidence in each and every student,” said Brentley. “When students are given opportunities for engaging academic enrichment, the possibilities are limitless in terms of what they can achieve.”

Another element of the RTL program’s math tutoring is the use of a cutting-edge app. The overarching goal is to develop scalable learning personalization by integrating the strengths of human-mediated and computer-mediated techniques to develop benefits for adapting to the cognitive/content conditions and social-motivational conditions.

The University of Pittsburgh has been collaborating with Carnegie Mellon University to develop the PL^2 app which allows mentors to track and support student goals and progress in conjunction with curriculum, (or more specifically in this particular case, the Mathia program that is used as a study tool).

In addition to utilizing the app to set goals with her students, Heinz Fellow and RTL mentor Imani LaGrone also participated in the development of the app. She met regularly with the PL^2 developers at CMU in an effort to shape the app to fit the ever-changing needs of a mentor-mentee relationship and math tutoring.

“I learned how to be more adaptable when working and learning with youth,” LaGrone said of her experience using the app. “I initially wanted to teach them in ways that I understood, but I learned after listening to them that I needed to reframe things to help students better understand.”

The vision for the Ready to Learn program is that it might serve as a model that other out of school time programs can use to support students’ math learning. With the addition of the PL^2 app people who may not be trained math educators, like parents or mentors, will now have resources available to empower them to better support the students’ math learning. The independent self-directed learning is meant to foster the growth mindset, helping students to be comfortable with being willing to fail and to go through the “productive struggle” in order to build through it for a more vigorous learning space.

“The [RTL] program not only works to increase math competencies but also emphasizes the importance of relationships and holding youth accountable for their learning,” said LaGrone, “If those themes were the emphasis of all educational spaces, we would see a drastic difference in the outcomes of education in all schools and particularly in urban school settings.”

RTL will begin its next session with Westinghouse Academy and University Preparatory School at Margaret Milliones middle school students in the fall for eight weeks, from September to November.
As the field of urban education grows, new works are consistently instrumental in conceptualizing the field’s challenges and solutions. This section is dedicated to highlighting books that help shape our knowledge about urban education, and suggest ways to improve policies, practices, and programs that have a real bearing on students, teachers, administrators, and community success. CUE hopes that you will add these books to their libraries to update and enhance their knowledge on transforming urban education, schools, and communities.

CUE’s 2018-2019 must-read title in urban education is “We Want To Do More Than Survive: Abolitionist Teaching and the Pursuit of Educational Freedom” by Dr. Bettina L. Love.

Every year, the Pitt School of Education hosts a School-Wide Read. The purpose is to bring together the entire school community — students, faculty, and staff — for the study and discussion of important topics in education. The engagement supports our school’s mission, which is to ignite learning and to work for equity and justice in education.

Love, the book’s author, is an associate professor in the Department of Educational Theory and Practice at the University of Georgia. Her book brings issues of equity and justice into a new, powerful, and profound light by positioning them within an abolitionist teaching lens. Bettina Love is an alumna of the School of Education.

"Rarely has a book engaged me on so many levels, and I wholeheartedly encourage anyone who loves children to read it. White folks who want a better understanding of the personal and structural work we have to do every day till we die towards being fuller, less racist, and more co-conspiring, loving human beings. Dr. Bettina Love’s book is lyrical, spiritual, analytical, and not a miracle cause she worked her heart out to give this to us. Teachers in the U.S. (the vast majority of whom are White) are upholding and propagating the school-to-prison pipeline; yet school policies and practices target children’s behaviors and grades for remediation rather than the attitudes and practices of their teachers. How do we teach the people responsible for our children’s lives every school day that Black lives matter? That queer lives matter? That Black, queer, non-cis, dis/abled lives matter? While the answer is neither singular nor simple, Love describes the ways in which the concept of “abolitionist teaching” encapsulates some of the actions necessary for working towards truly transformational changes. With this critically important book, Dr. Love provides us with a space to freedom-dream as a community of educators and parents; of coaches and social workers; of aunts, uncles, and cousins; and of people who love children and want them to thrive, not just survive."
IN URBAN EDUCATION

A Note from the Author: 
Bettina Love

I am always reminding myself of the words of Angela Y. Davis that “freedom is a constant struggle.” I wrote "We Want To Do More Than Survive" with those words in my ear. So, the book became about mattering, resisting, thriving, healing, imagining, freedom, love, and joy because we have to learn how to struggle together, which is why the work of abolitionist is so important. Abolitionists give us a playbook, and I wanted to write about that playbook. Studying abolitionists grew the idea of Abolitionist teaching. Abolitionist teaching is the practice of working in solidarity with communities of color while drawing on the imagination, creativity, refusal, (re)membering, visionary thinking, healing, rebellious spirit, boldness, determination, and subversiveness of abolitionists to eradicate injustice in and outside of schools. It is time we do what Bill Ayers says, “demand the impossible”; this is how we get educational freedom.

We cannot pursue educational freedom without a model of democracy that empowers all. This is why the work of Ella Baker is critical to understanding how grassroots organizing can challenge power structures and win. Baker was driven by the idea of a radical democratic practice in which the oppressed, excluded, and powerless became active in positions of power with decision-making opportunities. We all thrive when everyday people resist, when everyday people find their voice, and when everyday people demand schools that are spaces of joy and healing.

"We Want To Do More Than Survive" was written to be one of the many blueprints to educational freedom.
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