Introduction
How Cultural Learning Matters for Educators Everywhere

American educators are invariably confronting a "demographic imperative" that requires integrating more culturally responsive teaching and classroom management strategies into their practice (Banks, 1993; 1995; Cochran-Smith, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1999a; 1999b; Lowenstein, 2009; Sleeter, 2001). Three critical observations inform this argument: (1) demographic trends that predict that approximately 57% of the school-age population will be children of color by the year 2050; (2) the longstanding fact that the American teaching workforce is predominantly white, female, and from middle-class backgrounds; and (3) the observation that children from low-income and other minoritized cultural communities (LIMCCs) are disproportionately assigned to our nation's most underserved public schools (Cochran-Smith, 2003; García et al., 2009; Gay, 1993; Jupp et al., 2016; Jupp et al., 2019; Loewus, 2017; Sleeter et al., 2014; Talbert-Johnson, 2006; Yost, 2006; Weiner, 2000; Zeichner, 1993). The demographic imperative is accompanied by a "democratic imperative," which has "highlight[ed] the failure of schools to provide opportunities to learn for students who are from nondominant cultural and linguistic communities [and] are disproportionately represented in hard-to-staff schools" (Achinstein et al., 2010, p. 97; Haycock, 2001). These observations – and matching demographic discrepancies in the higher education context – reflect the reality that a predominantly white K-16 teaching workforce yields a student–teacher racial mismatch that has significant implications for developing equitable learning environments for K-16 students (Freeman et al., 1999; Gershenson et al., 2016; Johnson and Pak, 2019; LaSalle et al., 2020; McCarthy et al., 2023; McGrady and Reynolds, 2013; Redding, 2019; 2022; Renzulli et al., 2011; Rooney, 2015; Stearns et al., 2014; Weathers, 2023; Whipp and Geronime, 2017). Together, the demographic and democratic imperatives make clear that educators everywhere must reckon with the probable likelihood that they will encounter cultural differences between themselves and their students no matter their choice in where or which level of students to teach.

Student–Teacher Cultural Mismatch: An Intractable Human Capital Challenge for K-16 Educators in Urban Schools and Minority Serving Institutions

We often assume that because teachers enter urban schools and minority serving institutions (MSIs) with their best intentions for making a positive impact on their students, they are prepared to do exactly as they have planned. However, research suggests that teachers working with students from LIMCCs rarely enter the profession with the cultural knowledge and understandings they need to effectively engage students and families from communities unlike their own (Brown, 2013; Bryan and Atwater, 2002; Cochran-Smith, 2003; Chou, 2007; Craft, 2021; Eckert, 2013; Evans et al., 2020; Gay and Howard, 2000; Melnick and Zeichner, 1995; Milner, 2010; Milner and Laughter, 2015; Parkhouse et al., 2019; Villegas and Lucas, 2002). By the numbers, a student–teacher racial mismatch exists because the teaching workforce in both the K-12 and higher education sectors are disproportionately white, at 80 and 72 percent respectively (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023; 2024). Given that many white teachers come from different cultural and socioeconomic communities than their students from LIMCCs, this is also considered a cultural mismatch as more and more K-16 students are from non-white, lower-income backgrounds (Amitai and Van Houtte, 2022; Correa et al., 2014; Kozlowski, 2015; Kramarczuk Voulgarides et al., 2017; Pollack, 2013; Recknagel et al., 2022; Rogers-Sirin et al., 2013; Vinopal and Holt, 2019; Wiggan and Watson, 2016; Wiggan and Watson-Vandiver, 2019). The cultural mismatch is exacerbated by the fact that American schools tend to promote more individualistic than collectivistic cultural norms, the latter of which are more often familiar to students from LIMCCs (Castro, 2010; Davis, 1995; Fryberg and Markus, 2007; Johnson et al., 2024; Rothstein-Fisch et al., 2014; Stephens et al., 2012; Trumbull et al., 2001; 2014).

Cultural-mismatch theory states that when educational institutions promote independent cultural values as normative, they reinforce structural and systemic inequalities that disadvantage students from LIMCCs both in school and outside the classroom in American society (Stephens and Townsend, 2015; Stephens et al., 2012; 2012; 2019). Though this theory was originally developed through research focused on the harmful effects of cultural mismatch for first-generation college students, there is evidence that K-16 educators also have negative experiences in response to cultural differences between themselves and their students. Student–teacher racial mismatch is a frequently cited source of job stress amongst

K-12 urban teachers (Achinstein and Barrett, 2004; Bottiani et al., 2019; Gutentag et al., 2018; McCarthy et al., 2023), and it has been shown to evoke negative emotions such as shame, anxiety, guilt, depression, and anger in them as well (Bettini and Park, 2021; Ladson-Billings, 1999a; Sugrue, 2020; Utt and Tochluk, 2020). Cultural mismatch invokes job stress and anxiety in K-12 urban teachers and higher education faculty working with students from LIMCCs alike. Like their K-12 counterparts in urban schools, college faculty working in MSIs typically have little to no opportunity for engaging in critical reflection on their own cultural competencies and perspectives at work (Bottiani et al., 2019; Cochran-Smith and Villegas, 2016; Goldenberg, 2014; Grant and Gibson, 2011; Hambacher and Ginn, 2021; Howard, 2003; Jackson and Knight-Manuel, 2019; Larrivee, 2000; McAllister and Irvine, 2002; Villegas, 2007). The totality of these circumstances has generated a human capital challenge for schools serving students from LIMCCs of all ages: how to attract and retain not only well-intentioned teachers, but those who can enact cultural responsivity through their teaching and classroom management strategies.

Modeling Implications of K-16 Student–Teacher Cultural Mismatch as a Knowing–Doing Gap

In Figure I.1, I model this human capital challenge as a knowing–doing gap (Pfeffer and Sutton, 2000), which is a framework in the organizational literature used to describe the gap between what individuals and organizations know to do in theory and what they are able to do in practice. While the knowing–doing gap has been explored as a gap between researchers and practitioners in the educational literature (Ball, 2012; Donovan, 2013; Marsh and Farrell, 2015), this book is concerned with the knowing–doing gap that precludes well-intentioned teachers who know the importance of culturally responsive teaching and classroom management in theory from implementing those culturally responsive practices at work. I model this gap for K-16 educators together because although K-12 teachers and college faculty work in very different institutional contexts, research shows they share psychosocial challenges associated with managing cultural differences between themselves and students from LIMCCs. Box 1 in this figure represents a primary driver of this challenge that we have been discussing to this point: K-16 educators are aware of the cultural differences between themselves and their students, and are at minimum exposed to the concepts of culturally responsive pedagogy and teaching through teacher education. Box Two represents what we do not know about K-16

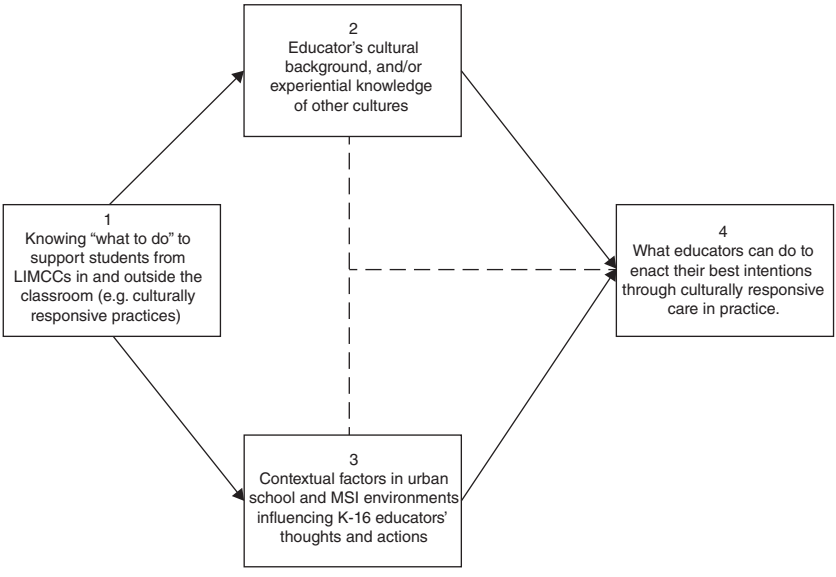

Figure I.1 Modeling a knowing–doing gap for K-16 educators working with students from LIMCCs, with effect of an interaction between mediating variables.

educators beyond the racial demographic composition of the teaching workforce – specifically, how does an educator's personal background or experiential knowledge of other cultures impact their interpretation of what it means to be culturally responsive through their actions? This box represents something we know that K-12 teachers and college faculty working with students have in common: their thinking and actions at work are strongly informed by culturally biased attitudes cultivated across their personal, professional, and social lives outside the classroom (Askell-Williams et al., 2007; Canning et al., 2019; Chang and Viesca, 2022; Chesler et al., 2005; Davis, 1995; Demoiny, 2017; Dunac and Demir, 2017; Espinoza and Rincón, 2023; Flores and Rodriguez, 2006; Gehrke, 2005; Gershenson et al., 2016; Hampton et al., 2008; Han et al., 2014; Hubbard and Stage, 2009; Kennedy, 2008; Kezar, 2001; Kunesh and Noltemeyer, 2019; Liston and Zeichner, 1990; Long, 2023; Lytle et al., 2009; McAllister, 1999; Morton et al., 2020; Park et al., 2024; Payne, 1994; Pendakur and Furr, 2016; Rockoff et al., 2011; Shultz et al., 2022; Sirin et al., 2009; Smylie and Kahne, 1997; Tatto, 1998; Vanlommel and Schildkamp, 2019; Vázquez-Montilla et al., 2014; Warren et al., 2020; Welch et al., 2010; Zembylas, 2003).

This can be particularly counterproductive where educators are missing opportunities to engage in critical reflection about the limits of their knowledge and understanding with regards to how students' cultural differences shape their academic experiences in urban schools and MSIs (Bergeron, 2008; Bennett et al., 2019; Boutte and Jackson, 2014; Housel and Harvey, 2009; Sondel et al., 2022; Warren, 2018; Young, 2011; Zhu, 2023). There is also research in the K-12 literature that suggests that educators working with students from LIMCCs rely on deficit narratives and stereotypes to justify blaming students, their families, and their cultural communities for their academic failures rather than self-examining their own beliefs and actions (Day and Hong, 2016; Obidah and Howard, 2005). Deficit dialogue reinforces self-fulfilling prophecies about students' academic potential rooted in beliefs that LIMCCs are "dysfunctional, and therefore the reason for [their students'] low educational and later occupational attainment" (Solorzano, 1997, p. 13; also Aronson, 2020; Halvorsen et al., 2009; Jussim and Harber, 2005; López, 2017; McKown et al., 2010; Patton, 2016; Rojas and Liou, 2017; Solorzano and Yosso, 2001; Villegas and Lucas, 2002; Watson et al., 2006; Weinstein et al., 2004; Zirkel and Pollack, 2016).

Deficit assumptions about LIMCCs are such consistent influences on the interpersonal dynamics students from LIMCCs share with their teachers across K-16 contexts that by the time they get to college they themselves are considered the problem. This is evident in the higher education literature where student–teacher conflict involving students from LIMCCs is made attributable to students' "social disabilities," or cause for labeling them as "disruptive" or "uncivil" with the reasoning that their behavior is an extension of the dysfunction they experience at home (Burke et al., 2014; Gallagher and Haan, 2018; McKinne and Martin, 2010; McNaughton-Cassill, 2013; Morrissette, 2001; Nordstrom et al., 2009; Rehling and Bjorklund, 2010; Seeman, 2009). Only recently have concerted efforts been made to standardize professional learning opportunities through which teachers and faculty working with students from LIMCCs can engage in critical reflection on their cultural lenses and perspectives (Bhabha et al., 2020; Freda et al., 2016; Gorski and Dalton, 2020; Liu, 2015; Russo-Tait, 2022; Waite, 2021; Zeichner and Liston, 2013).

Much of the research that has been done on the gap between what K-12 teachers of students from LIMCCs intend to do and what they are able to do in practice is focused on the contextual factors in and surrounding urban schools that make it difficult for them to do their best work (Cucchiara et al., 2015; Johnson et al., 2012; Kardos et al., 2001; Kraft et al., 2015; Kukla-Acevedo, 2009; Mirra and Rogers, 2020; Ni, 2012;

Tractenberg, 1973). An analogous void exists in the higher education literature, where discussions of instructors' personal backgrounds are largely deprioritized in comparison to their perceived difficulties working through situational challenges specific to their institutional contexts. As a result, there has been little inquiry as to how interpersonal consequences of the student–teacher racial mismatch may be exacerbated by the socialization processes K-16 educators experience prior to joining the profession – specifically in how these processes shape teachers' work attitudes and beliefs about their students' cultures. More, developing such opportunity for reflection on teacher socialization with regards to beliefs about students from LIMCCs in particular seems increasingly harder to implement as academia experiences a "diversity fatigue," whereby even people who are well-intentioned and interested in diversity-related issues become demotivated to do diversity-related work (Smith et al., 2021).

Box Three represents these and other contextual factors in schools serving students from LIMCCs influencing K-16 educators' thinking and actions at work. The dotted lines between Boxes Two, Three, and Four represent the vastly underexplored interaction between these contextual factors and educators' personal backgrounds, as well as the impact of that interaction on what educators are able to do in terms of enacting their best intentions to provide culturally responsive care through their actions. Box Four represents the data I mine throughout this book to address the central question of the extent to which educators' actions in urban schools and MSIs represent their beliefs about the importance of providing culturally responsive care as moderated by the interaction between their personal backgrounds and contextual factors in their workplace environments.

Overview of the Book

Across the first six chapters of this book, I reconceptualize cultural learning as a process of inferential thinking through which K-16 educators learn to develop conclusions about their students' cultural communities and cultural differences based on evidence and reasoning through various socialization processes. Cultural learning is a term borrowed from the cultural psychology literature, but I theorize that – by its own definition – cultural learning requires that individuals engage in processes of inferential thinking, by selecting data from their environments and applying learned reasoning to that data in order to draw conclusions. Thus, cultural learning is critical for K-16 educators interested in developing a "critical cultural consciousness [that] involves thoroughly analyzing and carefully

monitoring both personal beliefs and instructional behaviors about the value of cultural diversity, and the best ways to teach ethnically different students for maximum positive effects" (Gay and Kirkland, 2003, p. 182; Olmedo, 1997; Valentíin, 2006). College faculty working with students from LIMCCs are in particularly urgent need of new strategies for providing the psychosocial supports these students need to be successful in college (Delima, 2019; Engstrom and Tinto, 2008; Kiyama and Rios-Aguilar, 2017; Stebleton et al., 2012).

Chapter 1 provides a brief overview of action science, the organizational discipline whose conceptual and theoretical frameworks heavily inform every aspect of this book from its structure to the data analysis featured in later chapters. I explain that it makes sense to apply action science to the knowing–doing gap posing a human capital challenge for K-16 educators working with students from LIMCCs, because it is focused on the gap between what people think they can do in theory and what they are actually able to do in practice. Action science and its ladder-of-inference framework offer one set of tools for examining how educators in urban schools and MSIs learn what constitutes "normal" student behavior, and to adhere to underlying beliefs and espoused values embedded in their organizational (school) cultures in general. Chapters 2 through 6 are organized using a modified version of the ladder of inference that I adapt for use in evaluating various social, organizational, and psychological factors influencing K-12 educators as gleaned through a systematic review of the educational research on urban teacher thinking. The literature review includes studies focused on more traditional notions of variance amongst students from LIMCCs, in terms of their race and class. Chapter 7 outlines some theory-driven ways in which this literature review supplies evidence that cultural learning is a viable antidote to the intractability of this knowing–doing gap through future research, especially as it appears teachers are more likely to leave schools serving students from LIMCCs, and teachers of color are leaving the profession in droves (Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond, 2017; Grooms et al., 2021; Ingersoll and May, 2011; Ingersoll et al., 2019; Podolsky et al., 2016; Simon and Johnson, 2015; Sutcher et al., 2016).

Chapter 8 introduces the empirical work featured in the second half of the book; it elaborates on how teachers' cultural learning challenges follow students from LIMCCs across K-16 education contexts, and details the study context and methods used for the research featured in the following chapters. Chapters 9 through 13 are focused on fieldwork I conducted at the City University of New York (CUNY), through interviews with sixty-two

part- and full-time instructional faculty who were asked their impressions of six situations representing common challenges CUNY students experience managing culturally specific responsibilities outside the classroom alongside their academic work. These chapters expand the traditional notion of variance amongst students from LIMCCS to include subgroups defined by their intersectional identities, specifically as student-workers, student-parents, and as members of their cultural communities in their everyday lives. Consistent with my interest in the gap between teacher knowledge and teacher action in urban schools and MSIs, these chapters explore how instructional staff varied by: (1) their orientations for learning about students' cultures, as demonstrated through the espoused and enacted values guiding their action strategies and (2) their use of traditional and culturally responsive classroom management (CRCM) strategies in response to these situations.

Through a comprehensive review of the social and organizational factors influencing K-12 urban teachers' cultural learning processes at work and interviews with instructional staff working at a high-performing MSI, this book highlights parallel challenges K-16 educators experience learning across cultural differences between themselves and their students through imitative, instructed, and collaborative cultural learning processes at work. In Chapter 13, I conclude the empirical inquiries by reviewing evidence in the data that faculty working on this CUNY campus variably experience features of two types of learning systems outlined in the action science literature that impact their abilities to learn about their students' cultures at work. I conclude with some recommendations for developing future research on this knowing–doing gap towards the purpose of facilitating organizational learning systems in K-16 contexts that facilitate both error detection and correction in safe spaces for instructors to explore their mistakes without fear.

CHAPTER 1

An Action Science Approach to Cultural Learning in Urban Schools and Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs)

Action Science: Central Tenets and Evidence of Its Influence in the Extant Educational Literature

Action science is the study of the gap between what people intend to do and what they are actually able to do in practice (Argyris and Schön, 1996). Research in this field aims to produce "valid generalizations about how individuals and social systems – whether groups, intergroup, or organizations – can (through [individual] agents) design and implement their intentions in everyday life" (Argyris, 1982, p. 469). Tracing inwards from an individual's outward actions to discern the tacit beliefs and values informing them, action scientists begin with the premise that the "evaluations or judgements people make automatically are not concrete or obvious [but] abstract and highly inferential" (Argyris, 1990, p. 89). Chris Argyris – the organizational scholar whose seminal research established action science as a subdiscipline in the literature – identified some primary goals for the field with his frequent collaborator Donald Schön, including:

- Surface the underlying rationales individuals use to justify their reasoning processes.
- Understand the origins of underlying theories individuals use to make sense of situations or reach intended outcomes.
- Identify any contradictions in an individual's reasoning processes that may diminish their effectiveness.
- Help individuals and organizations design action strategies for achieving valued organizational outcomes that better reflect their best intentions.
- Framebreaking, the process by which people learn to identify (and potentially change) the frames of reference they use to make sense of and act in their worlds. (Argyris, 1982; 1993; Argyris and Schön, 1996; 1997; Argyris et al., 1985)

Examining organizational members' implicit reasoning processes helps us understand how various interpersonal, social, and psychological influences shape the meaning-making processes they use to make sense of directly observable data in their organizational environments. Action scientists are primarily concerned with understanding how individuals develop what they call "theories of action," which "specify the behavior required to implement the intended consequences [and] describe the universe as it is with the intention of reconstructing the world as it should be" (Argyris, 1991, p. 351). Theories of action are strategies for maintaining control in situations that can be embarrassing or threatening; they are taught to us early in life and revised as they are implemented through action over the course of a lifetime (Argyris, 1990). They "can be understood both as a disposition of an agent and as a theory of causal responsibility held by an agent" (Argyris et al., 1985, p. 83).

Action science delineates between two types of theories of action. Individuals (and organizations) may state they are acting according to one set of beliefs – their espoused theories – but act in ways that implicitly contradict that set of beliefs, revealing the beliefs they truly value, which constitute their theories-in-use (Argyris, 1976; 1982; 1985; Argyris and Schön, 1974; 1996). Argyris (1993) later elaborated on how this concept represents a process through which humans convert knowledge to action:

> Human beings are designing beings. They create, store, and retrieve designs that advise them how to act how to act if they are to achieve their intentions and act consistently with their governing values. These designs, or theories of action, are the key to understanding human action. (pp. 50–51)

Action scientists explore discernible discrepancies between espoused theories and theories-in-use to determine whether an individual is using one of two types of theories-in-use: Model I or Model II.

Tables 1.1 and 1.2 are reproductions of the tables action scientists reference to map out the "master programs" associated with each of these types of theories-in-use. Master programs are "theories of action that inform actors of the strategies they should use to achieve their intended consequences" (Argyris, 1993, p. 50). Both tables outline how an individual's governing values (also called variables; column A) motivate their actions (column B), which have consequences for their behavioral worlds (column C), for how they learn (column D), and ultimately for their individual effectiveness (column E). Argyris et al. (1975) elaborated on the nature of these consequences as follows: