1 Fear, Income, Gender, and Other Issues

Why Your Teaching Self-Confidence Matters

MEET MICHAELA, A FRUSTRATED NEW TEACHER

In August 2012, Michaela was frustrated. The previous June—at the end of her first year of full-time teaching—she had received a "pink slip" notifying her that she would be laid off. Although the principal at the underperforming urban high school where she had worked had told her that she had done a great job, budget problems forced school district officials to lay off Michaela and all of the teachers who lacked seniority. For 24-year-old Michaela, the pink slip was the final slap in the face.

Michaela was disappointed and wondered if she'd have a job during the next school term. She was also angry. Her first full year of teaching had been extremely difficult. In one of her classes, two pregnant ninth graders almost had a fistfight one day. Furthermore, several of her students were arrested during the school year or were placed in her class after they were released from a local juvenile detention facility. No matter how hard she tried, some students refused to cooperate and defied her class rules. None of her teacher education training had prepared her for this! In fact, during the school year, Michaela often wondered whether or not she had chosen the right career. By the end of the year, she was even thinking that she would eventually change careers and abandon teaching completely.

But in August, Michaela received the great news that school district officials would rehire her. One official informed her that her former principal had requested

that she be reassigned to the same high school. A few weeks later, the principal notified her that once again, she would be teaching freshman English. However, she would also be teaching eleventh-grade English for the first time. Although Michaela was happy to have her job back, she was terrified about teaching a higher grade level, especially when she only had a short time to prepare lesson plans and move into her classroom before the first day of school arrived.

EXERCISE Now It's Your Turn

1. If you were Michaela, what would you do to make the beginning of the new school year as stress free as possible?

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2. If you were one of Michaela's colleagues, what advice would you give her about teaching a new grade level for the first time?

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CHAPTER HIGHLIGHTS

In the previous exercise, we asked you to put yourself in Michaela's shoes and to think of advice that you could give her, because as a teacher—especially if you are a beginning teacher—there will be times when you will feel just as Michaela did: uncertain about one or more aspects of your job. Also, after you gain more teaching experience, you might be asked to serve as a mentor to one or more beginning teachers or you may voluntarily choose to mentor new teachers at your school. Throughout this book, we will give you advice that can make your teaching career (especially your first years) less stressful. In this chapter, we will share some basic facts about teaching, describe the Teacher Confidence (TC) Study, ask you to complete several professional growth exercises, and explain why you need to examine your confidence levels about (a) your ability to treat all students fairly, (b) your ability to teach students from various income levels, and (c) your ability to teach males and

females. We conclude the chapter with a summary and practical advice pertaining to the main topics of this chapter.

Six Basic Facts About Teaching

Before we describe the TC Study, here are some basic facts that you should keep in mind:

1. Yes, you made a wise decision.

In case you are wondering, as Michaela did, whether or not you made the right decision by becoming a teacher, we can assure you that you did. During the time that I (Gail) was a Peace Corps Volunteer in Africa, the Peace Corps' motto was "The Toughest Job You'll Ever Love." We believe that this motto also applies to teaching. Teaching is difficult for many of the reasons that we mentioned in the Introduction and others that we'll explain later. However, if you stick with it, you can definitely learn to love it, and you can have a very rewarding teaching career. In fact, it can become "the toughest job that you'll ever love."

2. No teacher is perfect.

If you strive to do your best and refuse to give up, you can become a good teacher and possibly even a great teacher. However, you will never become a perfect teacher, because no human being is perfect. In fact, when you read stories about mistakes that we made and that other educators have made, this will become even more apparent to you.

3. No teacher knows everything.

Good teachers realize that life is a learning experience, that they don't know everything, and that no matter how long they've been teaching or how much experience they have, they must be willing to learn new information, strategies, and so on.

4. Through hard work, you can become an outstanding teacher.

The strategies and professional growth exercises throughout this book will move you closer to the goal of becoming an outstanding teacher of all students, especially African American students and other students of color. So don't take shortcuts. We hope that you will complete every exercise and be as honest with yourself as possible.

5. Choosing to become a successful teacher of all students, especially African American students and other students of color, is a great confidence-building mindset to adopt.

A good foundation can be built upon many times. As a baseball player, I (Rufus) failed seven out of 10 times. Nevertheless, for a hitter in baseball,

that is considered to be very, very, successful! It is all about how we view success. We pay millions of dollars per year to watch players fail seven out of 10 times! In education, we can't let this happen. My point to you is that from the very beginning of your teaching career until the end, success should be your goal. Striving for success will build your self-confidence. However, it is important not to have unrealistic expectations. Your bar should be very high for situations that you have control over: how you treat and view students, the quality of instruction that you provide to them, developing a fair and effective classroom management system, how you treat and view students' parents; and so on. Adopting the correct mindset is one of the main factors that will determine the degree of your success with all students, but especially with African American students and other students of color.

6. Fearfulness and a refusal to face your fears can prevent you from becoming a successful teacher, especially of African American students and other students of color.

Fear is such an important topic that in the next sections, we elaborate on it and give you opportunities to examine any fears or uncertainties that you have about your teaching ability.

EXERCISE Exploring Your Fears and Concerns About Teaching

1. What aspects of being a teacher do you fear or are you most uncertain about and why?

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2. Whom, if anyone (parents, specific types of students, other teachers, specific types of staff, school leaders, etc.), do you fear and why?

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(Continued)

3. Where did these fears come from?

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4. Now, examine your answers to the previous questions and explain what you can learn from them.

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THE LINK BETWEEN FEAR AND SELF-CONFIDENCE

Michaela, the beginning teacher whom we described earlier, lacked confidence about her ability to teach eleventh graders for two main reasons: She had never taught this grade level before, and she also admitted to us that eleventh graders tend to be physically bigger than ninth graders. But underneath these concerns lurked fear. Fear and a lack of confidence are closely related. In Michaela's case, as a teacher in her twenties, she feared that older students might not treat a young teacher respectfully. More importantly, she feared that she would not be successful in working with this grade level of students. As in Michaela's case, often when teachers lack confidence about their ability to effectively perform a job-related task, the real issue is that they are fearful. Fear can lead to a lack of self-confidence and a lack of self-efficacy. It can also result in defensiveness, unfair treatment, and other problems. In order to work effectively with all students (especially African American students and other students of color), you must treat all students fairly.

Wanting to be treated fairly is a basic human desire, and K–12 students are no different. However, various students, such as African Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans—groups that have historically been subjected to racism, oppression, and unfair treatment in the United States—may be more likely than other students to view teacher attitudes and behaviors as unfair, even if teachers

may not realize this.[1] As a teacher, you may assume that you are treating all students fairly, but students may infer the opposite. By making a conscious decision to treat all students fairly, you can avoid a lot of problems, especially in terms of discipline problems, which we'll talk about extensively in Part II. Therefore, in addition to knowing *what* you fear about teaching, you also need to know *where* you lack confidence. The next exercise (which focuses on *fairness*) and other exercises throughout this book will help you identify specific problems that can decrease your effectiveness as a teacher.

EXERCISE Measuring Your Teaching Self-Confidence About Treating All Students Fairly

Please respond to the following question with V = *Very Confident,* S = *Somewhat Confident,* or N = *Not Confident at All.*

1. How confident are you about your ability to treat all students fairly? _____

2. Now examine your answer to the previous question and explain what you can learn from it.

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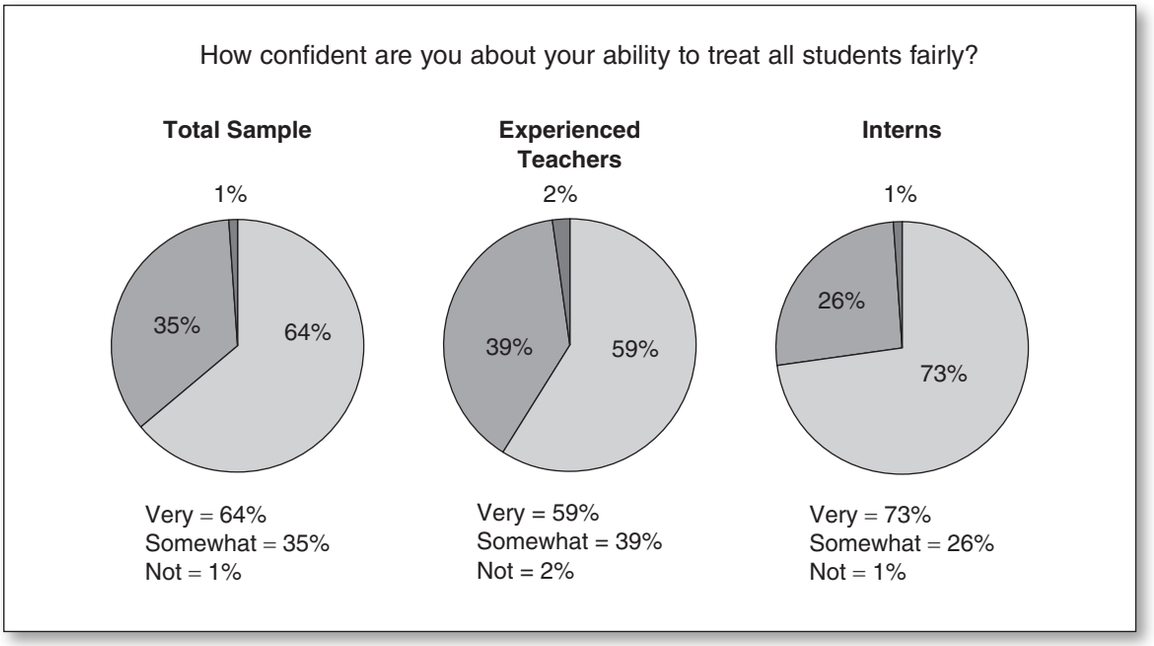
THE TEACHER CONFIDENCE STUDY

If your answer to the previous question revealed that you are *not confident* or only *somewhat confident* about your ability to treat all students fairly, you can sigh with relief. You are human, and lots of other teachers—even many who have a lot more teaching experience than you do—feel the same way. In an effort to learn more about teachers' self-confidence in their ability to be fair and other topics, I (Gail) created the Teacher Confidence (TC) Study. The study was based on a questionnaire that I distributed to 293 *preservice* (interns who were finishing their course work in a teacher education program) and *more experienced* teachers who attended professional development workshops that I conducted in California. Like most K–12 teachers nationwide, the majority of the respondents were White females. The TC Study participants answered numerous questions and then were asked to examine their responses and explain what they learned from them. (You can learn more about the questionnaire and the respondents in the Appendix section.)

Throughout this book, you'll be reading a lot about the TC Study, and you'll also have numerous opportunities to assess your teaching self-confidence—especially about working with African American students and other students of color, struggling students, and parents—and to compare and contrast your answers with those of the TC Study respondents. In fact, in the previous exercise, you already answered one of the questions, so now it's time to compare and contrast your responses with theirs.

Figure 1.1 What the TC Study Respondents Said About Treating All Students Fairly



Like you, the TC Study respondents were asked to measure their level of confidence about fairness (see Figure 1.1). Surprisingly, a higher percentage of interns than more experienced teachers said that they were very confident about their ability to treat all students fairly. One likely reason is that because they had more teaching experience, the experienced teachers were more aware of how difficult it is to do this.

Comments that the interns wrote illustrate that this might have indeed been the case. For example, a Hispanic female with no teaching experience wrote, "I'm very confident I can and will be a great teacher regardless of the students' race, socio-economic background, or if their parents are supportive or not." An African American female who had no teaching experience wrote:

> I am a very confident individual in dealing with human beings of every race or creed. I love diversity and I embrace every culture. I am compassionate and know how to deal with human behavior. I work in retail, so

> you figure out what to say, and how, in giving people what they need. I come from a very diverse background and growing up poverty-stricken, I assimilated to the mainstream environment.

Other interns wrote more realistic comments. For instance, a Latina with no teaching experience said, "I have no real teaching experience and don't really know what to expect." An African American female with one year of teaching experience said, "I've learned that I need to build my confidence in connecting with all students." An Asian American male who had no teaching experience wrote:

> For the most part, having no teaching experience, I can really only speculate about my future performance. I'm very confident that I can instill equality and help any student regardless of background, but having never done it, I can't be fully confident.

At the end of this chapter, we will share some advice about how you can treat all students fairly, and in Part II, we'll return to this topic and examine carefully why it's so important for you to do your best to treat all students, especially African American students and other students of color, fairly. But for now, please reflect on what you learned from the TC Study respondents.

EXERCISE What You Learned From the TC Study Respondents

1. What are the most important points that you learned from the TC Study respondents' answers?

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2. Which comments differ from your views and why?

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(Continued)

(Continued)

3. Which comments are most similar to your views and why?

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FAIRNESS AND INCOME

The ability to treat all students fairly is linked to many issues, including the way students look, their race, stereotypes, teachers' beliefs, teachers' upbringing, and students' backgrounds.[2] For example, researchers have found that teachers tend to have lower expectations of low-income students and higher expectations for middle-class and upper-class students. In terms of discipline, teachers are also more likely to penalize students of color and low-income students than other students,[3] and upper-class African American students experience many of the same negative schooling experiences as low-income African Americans.[4] Consequently, the ability to work effectively with all students, but especially with students of color, requires you to examine your beliefs and measure your teaching self-confidence about *many* issues, including seemingly unrelated ones such as income and gender. Therefore, in the following sections, we'd like for you to examine your teaching self-confidence related to students' income and gender, learn what the TC Study respondents said, and compare and contrast your answers to theirs.

Effectively Teaching Low-Income Students

Because of the recent worldwide economic downturn, the number of children in poverty has increased. In the United States in 2009, for example, more than 15 million children under age 18 lived in poverty.[5] Each year, over one million children in the United States "experience homelessness," and approximately 200,000 are homeless each day.[6] These statistics suggest that at some point in your teaching career, it's very likely that you'll work with low-income students, especially since teacher turnover rates tend to be greater in low-income schools. This means that low-income schools are more apt to have teaching vacancies than other schools. If you're hired to work in an impoverished community, working with low-income students will become a daily reality for you. Furthermore, African American, Latino, and Native American students tend to be overrepresented among the students who live in poverty. Because one of our primary objectives is to equip you with information that will

help you work successfully with all students, especially with African American students and other students of color, measuring your teaching confidence about your ability to work effectively with low-income students is important.

EXERCISE Effectively Teaching Low-Income Students

1. How confident are you about your ability to effectively teach low-income students and why?

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2. What can you learn from your answer to the previous question?

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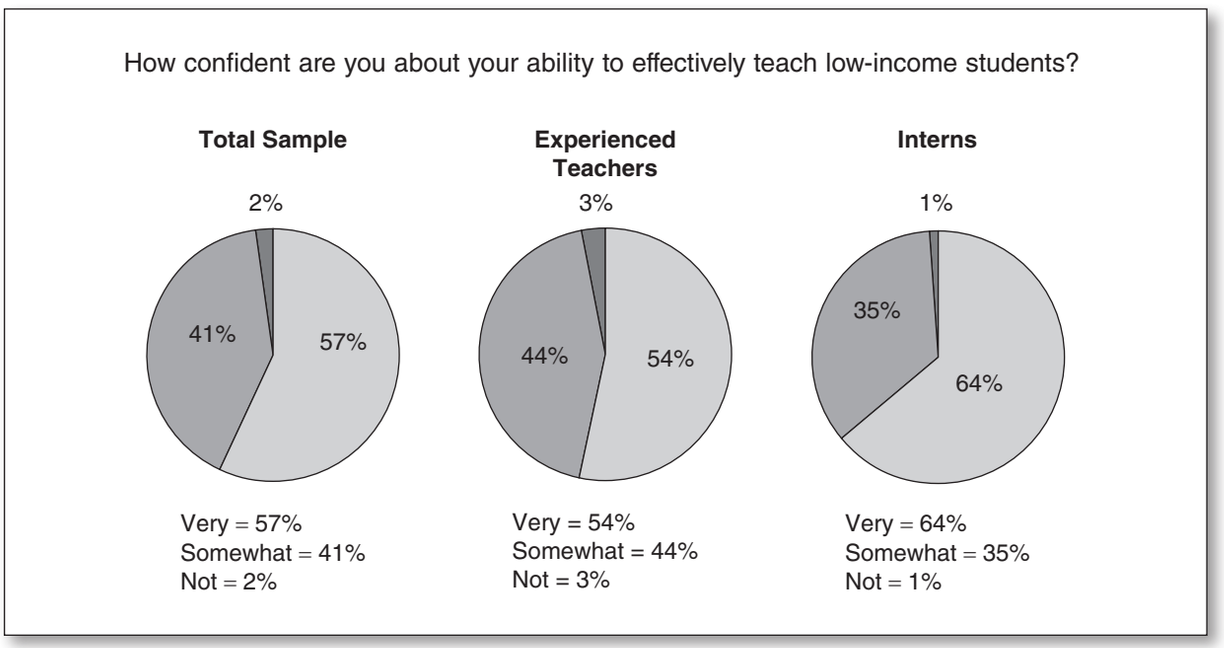
Figure 1.2 What the TC Study Respondents Said About Working With Low-Income Students



In explaining his views about working with low-income students, an Asian American male high school math teacher with 4–5 years of teaching experience admitted, "I have biases toward low-income students." An African American female intern with no teaching experience wrote, "I am skeptical about what I will experience at a low-income school." A Latina intern with one year of teaching experience said, "I don't feel completely confident working in low-income schools."

Whereas many of the respondents expressed concern about their ability to work with low-income students, others felt differently. For example, a White female who had taught high school for 2–3 years said, "I have always thrived on working with lower-income students who really need my help and guidance." An African American high school social studies teacher who had taught for 27 years wrote,

> As a result of my race, I had the choice to teach in a high-income school, because the school needed racial balance. But my priority has always been low-income students because the need was always there. This is how I would like to end my teaching career: helping and providing assistance to low-income African American and Latino students.

Now, please take some time to reflect on what you learned from Figure 1.2 and the TC Study respondents' comments.

EXERCISE What You Learned From the TC Study Respondents

1. What are the most important points that you learned from the TC Study respondents' answers?

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2. Which comments differ from your views and why?

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3. Which comments are most similar to your views and why?

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Working Effectively With Middle-Class Students

In addition to understanding your confidence level about teaching low-income students, you also need to examine your views about other income groups. Although African American and Latino students are overrepresented among the students who live in poverty, substantial numbers of them also come from middle-class and even upper-class backgrounds. In fact, since the 1960s, the African American middle-class has grown tremendously. Although most teachers come from middle-class backgrounds, many teachers lump all students of color together and fail to realize that there is a lot of income diversity within each racial or ethnic group. This failure causes teachers to assume that all African American and Latino students come from low-income backgrounds, and often, middle-class students and their parents are treated accordingly. For example, in *Black Students. Middle Class Teachers,* Dr. Jawanza Kunjufu wrote that because of stereotypes and teaching inadequacies, teachers from middle-class backgrounds often fail dismally with African American students.[7] The next exercise encourages you to examine your confidence level about teaching middle-class students.

EXERCISE Effectively Teaching Middle-Class Students

1. How confident are you about your ability to effectively teach middle-class students and why?

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(Continued)

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2. What can you learn from your answer to the previous question?

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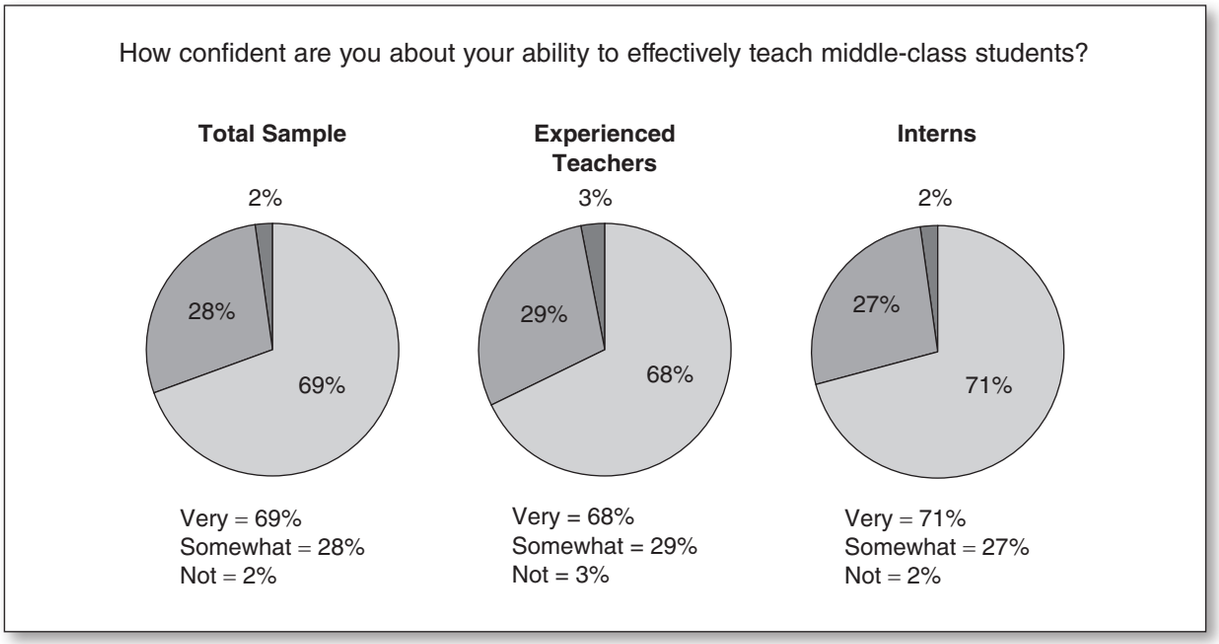
Figure 1.3 What the TC Study Respondents Said About Working With Middle-Class Students



A White female high school teacher with more than five years of teaching experience wrote, "I question my efficacy as a teacher for students other than the middle- to upper-class student." Conversely, a White male high school teacher who had taught for more than 20 years stated, "I have grown in confidence as a teacher, teaching in an urban setting. My experience is in low-income Latino/African American school settings. I am more comfortable in this setting than I would be in a middle-class [W]hite classroom." Now, please take some time to reflect on what you learned from Figure 1.3 and the comments in this section.

EXERCISE What You Learned From the TC Study Respondents

1. What are the most important points that you learned from the TC Study respondents' answers?

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2. Which comments differ from your views and why?

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3. Which comments are most similar to your views and why?

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Working Effectively With Upper-Class Students

Most U.S. cities and most public school districts have three categories of schools: low-income, middle-class, and upper-class. Schools in wealthier areas tend to be associated with higher standardized test scores, more overt parental involvement, stronger political influence, and better resources. They also tend to have fewer students of color.[8]

In spite of this, if you end up teaching at a school that only has a small number of students of color in it, it's important for you to be aware of your attitudes, beliefs, and treatment of these students. Otherwise, you could end up viewing and treating these students in harmful ways. Similarly, if you have unexamined fears, stereotypes, and prejudices associated with upper-class individuals, you may unknowingly engage in biased behaviors toward White and nonwhite students who come from upper-class backgrounds. Understanding your underlying beliefs and confidence level about teaching these students can prevent you from falling into this trap. The next exercise allows you to explore your confidence level in this regard.

EXERCISE Effectively Teaching Upper-Class Students

1. How confident are you about your ability to effectively teach upper-class students and why?

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2. What can you learn from your answer to the previous question?

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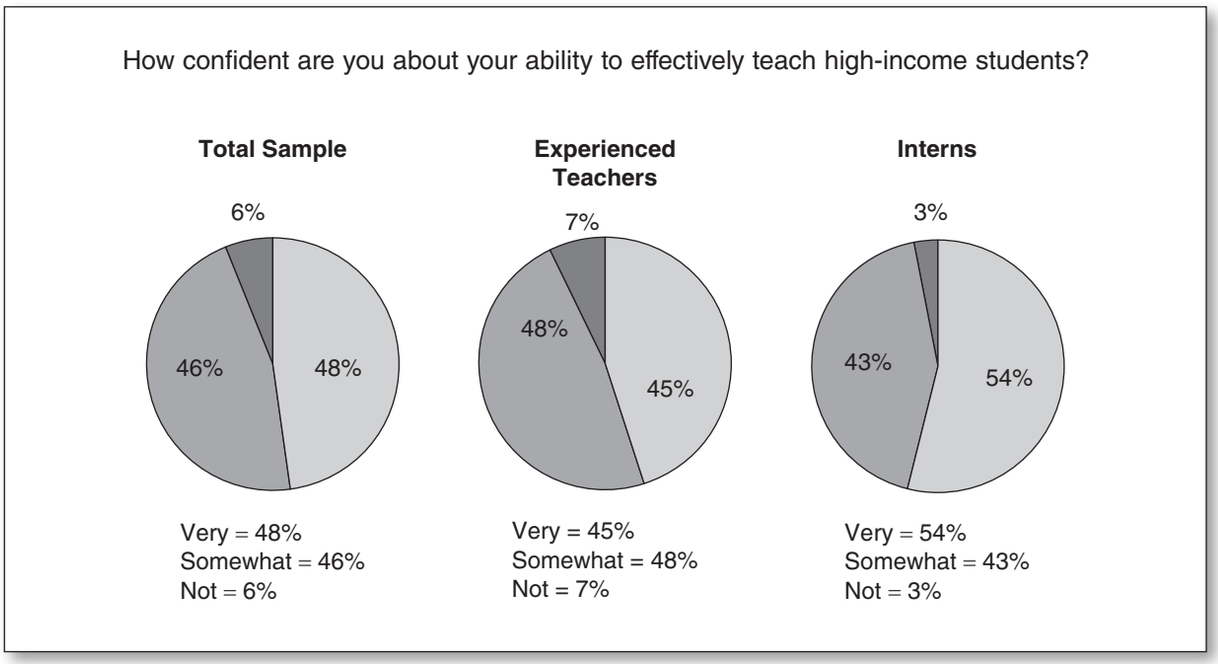
Figure 1.4 What the TC Study Respondents Said About Working With High-Income Students



In explaining her feelings about working with high-income students, an African American high school music teacher with more than five years of teaching experience wrote, "Higher income people, kids, and families intimidate me." A White female middle school teacher who had taught for more than five years wrote, "I am confident working at a public school with suburban low-income kids. In the high-income areas, I can do the same good job of teaching, but the parents in those high-income areas will be a pain." Now, we'd like for you to reflect on what you learned from Figure 1.4 and the TC Study respondents' comments in this section.

EXERCISE What You Learned From the TC Study Respondents

1. What are the most important points that you learned from the TC Study respondents' answers?

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2. Which comments differ from your views and why?

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3. Which comments are most similar to your views and why?

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GENDER AND CONFIDENCE

In spite of the progress that has been made in the United States so that both males and females can have equal rights, gender biases and sexism are still prevalent in the workplace and even in schools. Many people still harbor stereotypes about males and also about females. Some believe, for example, that males can do better in certain subjects, such as mathematics and science, than females.

Research has shown that males and females tend to have different K–12 schooling experiences. Negative labels are more likely to be placed on males; males are more likely to be labeled as *hyperactive*; males are more likely to be placed in special education classes; males are more likely to be labeled as *behavior problems*; and males are more likely to be suspended and expelled from school.

Although White males, especially those from low-income backgrounds, often have negative schooling experiences, African American and Latino males are extremely more likely to do so.[9] One of the main reasons is that female teachers in particular—who dominate the K–12 teaching force—have not examined or addressed their fears and mental baggage about male students, especially about African American and Latino males.[10]

Therefore, knowing how you feel about your ability to work effectively with males and females is important so that you don't subconsciously give students the impression that you believe that they are incapable of excelling in your class simply because of their gender. This is why the TC Study questionnaire contained questions about gender. In Chapter 2, we elaborate on the schooling experiences of males of color, especially Latino and African American males. Now, however, we'd like for you to complete the following exercise.

EXERCISE Teaching Boys and Girls

1. How confident are you about your ability to effectively teach girls and why?

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2. How confident are you about your ability to effectively teach boys and why?

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3. Now, examine your answers and explain what you can learn from them.

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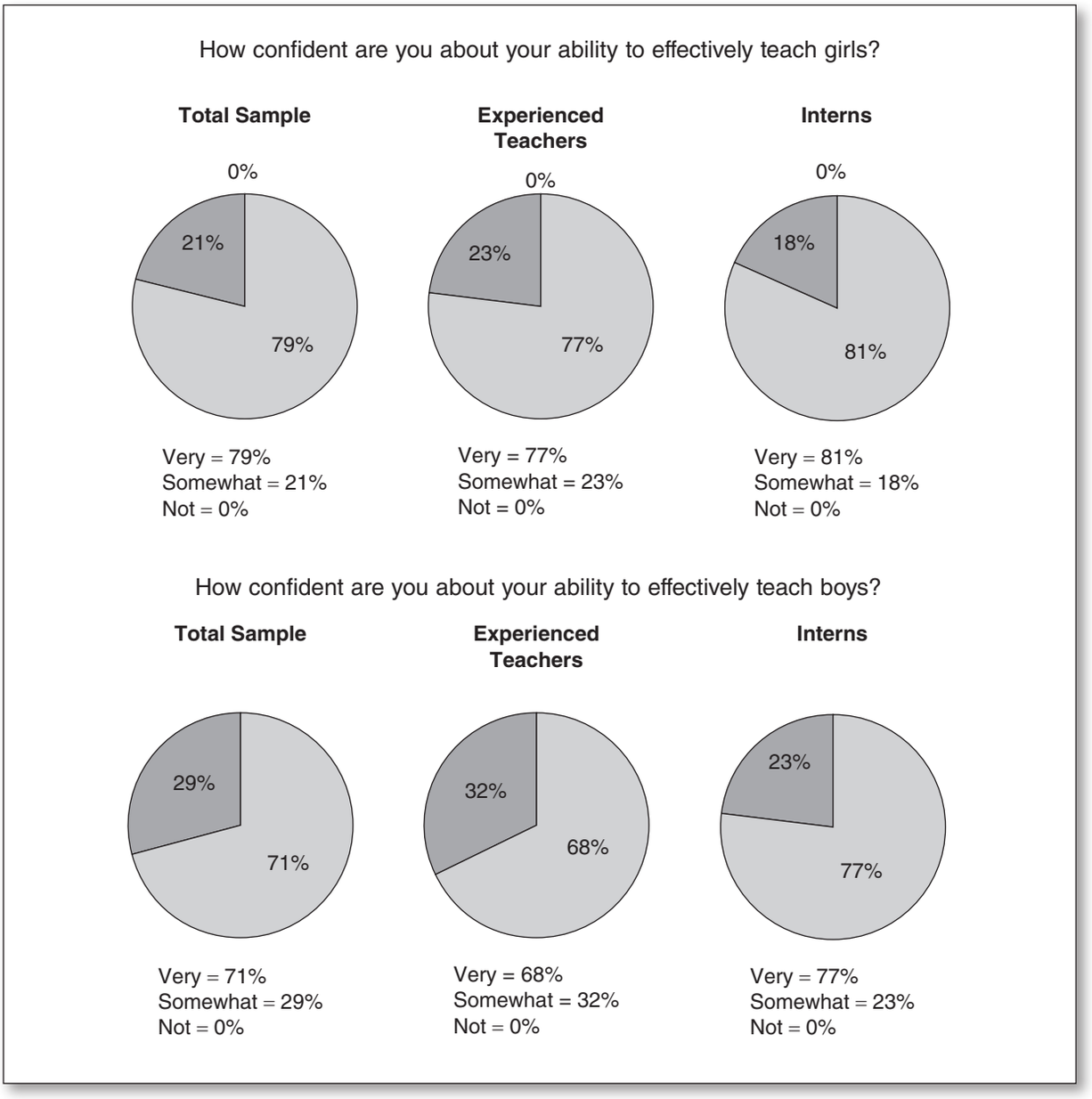
Figure 1.5 What the TC Study Respondents Said About Teaching Boys and Girls



Effectively Teaching Females

A female elementary school teacher who had taught for more than five years clearly didn't understand why teachers need to examine their beliefs about males and females, for she wrote, "Gender is not an achievement issue." However, a female high school teacher who had taught for 4–5 years indicated that even students themselves can be sexist in how they view teachers. She stated, "I feel students listen more to a male better than a female. Therefore, my skills can always be improved." A male high school mathematics teacher who had only taught for a year admitted, "I am somewhat insecure with girls

because I have too much respect for females." A female intern with no teaching experience shared a similar concern: "I am fearful of problems in class because of my gender." In Chapter 2, we return to the topic of females when we explain what the respondents said about African American female students.

Effectively Teaching Males

A female who had taught high school English for more than five years wrote, "I am more confident with girls than boys." However, several of the respondents who said that they were very confident about all aspects of their teaching ability wrote comments questioning their abilities. "I am probably more confident than I am able. Maybe, too confident," a male high school science teacher with more than five years of teaching experience stated. Another male high school teacher who had taught for more than 20 years said, "I never found the kid I couldn't teach."

As we previously stated, in Chapter 2, we spend more time focusing on gender because many respondents wrote comments that were specifically about African American males or African American females. Now, please reflect on what you learned from Figure 1.5 and the TC Study respondents' comments in this section.

EXERCISE What You Learned From the TC Study Respondents

1. What are the most important points that you learned from the TC Study respondents' replies?

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2. Which comments differ from your views and why?

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3. Which comments are most similar to your views and why?

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CONCLUSION

What We Can Learn From the TC Study

At the beginning of this chapter, we introduced you to Michaela, a second-year teacher who was fearful about teaching a new grade level. We explained that fear and a lack of confidence are linked and that a lack of confidence about many issues can prevent you from becoming an effective teacher, especially with students of color. Throughout the chapter, we asked you to examine your confidence levels about your ability to treat all students fairly and to teach low-income, middle-class, and upper-class students (both male and female), because sometimes, teachers aren't aware that they harbor income and gender biases against students.

- The TC Study respondents were less likely to be very confident about their ability to effectively teach upper-class students than middle-class or low-income students.
- The TC Study respondents were more likely to be very confident about their ability to effectively teach middle-class students than low-income students.
- The TC Study respondents were more likely to be very confident about their ability to effectively teach girls than boys.
- More than one-third of the TC Study respondents admitted that they were not very confident about their ability to treat all students fairly.
- The interns were more likely than the experienced teachers to rate themselves as very confident in all areas.
- Many White teachers and many teachers of color expressed a lack of confidence about the topics.

We conclude this chapter with advice, strategies, professional growth exercises, and recommended readings that can help you increase your confidence levels about working with all students, regardless of their income level or gender.

ADVICE AND STRATEGIES

1. Don't fool yourself.

One of the main reasons why some teachers fail dismally with African American students and other students of color is that they are in denial and claim to be colorblind to racial differences, income differences, gender differences, cultural differences, and so on. Therefore, it pays to be honest with yourself about your beliefs and biases and to seek to remedy them.

2. Look beneath the surface.

Explore all of your responses to the exercises in this chapter in detail and look for the hidden messages. For example, if, like the TC Study respondents,

you learned that you feel less confident about your ability to effectively teach upper-class students than middle-class or low-income students, identify the real reason. It is likely that one of the reasons why many respondents felt this way is that they are fearful about working in an environment that is more likely to be associated with high expectations and rigor. Additionally, if you found that you felt more confident about your ability to work with middle-class students than low-income students, try to determine whether the underlying reason is that you associated low-income with African American and Latino students and middle-class with White students. Consequently, a hidden fear of working with African American and Latino students might be the true culprit that you need to face and address.

3. Be confident, but not overly confident.

Obviously, one of our main goals for writing this book is to help you become more confident about your ability to work effectively with all students, especially students of color. Confidence is needed, but so is realism. When people become cocky and overconfident, they are likely to fall flat on their face and fail. That's why it's so important for you to be honest as you examine your fears and assess your level of confidence about each topic. The fact that the interns were more likely than the experienced teachers to say that they were very confident about working with low-income, middle-class, and upper-class students and about working with boys and girls makes us suspect that they were in for a rude awakening during their first year of teaching.

4. Remember that treating students fairly is not the same as treating all students equally.

There's no way that you'll be able to treat all students equally and have positive results. Students arrive at school with different experiences and needs, which can impact how they interact with you. One way to ensure that you are treating students fairly is to keep a paraphrased version of a famous biblical commandment in mind: "Treat others in the manner in which you would like to be treated." In other words, when you deal with students, try to put yourself in their shoes whenever possible.

Also, always keep in mind that you are the person in authority. That puts you in a very powerful position. If you are having a bad day or you have been asked the same question several times and are fed up, don't take it out on the next student who asks the question or the next student with whom you have to deal. Take a step back and try to put yourself in the student's place.

Additionally, we advise you to keep assessing your behavior. For instance, simply asking yourself, "Do I say nice things to certain students and not to others?" can help you become aware of negative differential treatment. This strategy was one that helped us personally during our K–12 teaching years. For example, when I (Rufus) was a new social studies middle school teacher, I made the mistake of not complimenting my African American students enough. The underlying motive was that as an African American teacher, I didn't want the nonblack students to accuse me of giving the Black students preferential

treatment. My unfair treatment toward the African American students became clear to me one day during a cooperative learning activity.

All of the African American students in a particular class were sitting together. I informed them that their choice to work together as a group wasn't acceptable, and I wanted them to mix in with the rest of the class. In essence, I told the African American students that they couldn't sit with each other. In a respectful manner, the students questioned my decision. When I explained my rationale, they looked at each other and then at me and replied almost in unison, "The White students are sitting together!" They were absolutely correct. Not only did they teach me an important lesson, but I backed down and allowed them to continue to work together as a group. This experience taught me the hard way that as educators, we often expect students to accept our decisions that are rooted in insecurity and fear.

During that same school year, the African American students worked together on some amazing projects. They were top-notch, and perhaps the outcome would have been different if I had destroyed their group. Surprisingly, the White students never complained to me about the "Black group." In fact, all of the groups worked well together. In retrospect, I believe that I was able to avoid a potential huge racial conflict because of the respect and the relationship that I had developed with students by treating them fairly in other situations.

5. Keep working on each problem or issue that surfaces.

As you are reading this book, and long after you finish it, we want you to keep growing. Engaging in ongoing self-reflection, learning from mistakes, and identifying and working on concerns will help you to continue to grow personally and professionally.

6. If you are assigned to teach a new course at the last minute, try the following strategies:

- Affirm yourself. You must believe in yourself; if you don't, you will not succeed. Once that has taken place, get busy with preparation. Be prepared to work late into the night until you are ready to meet your students on the first day.
- As soon as you can get a list of the students' names, ask a school secretary where you can locate their cumulative files. Read the files in order to learn what you can about your students, but don't prejudge them. Just because a student may have had problems with a previous teacher does not necessarily mean that the student will have problems with you.
- Develop lessons that are short and interactive. Don't spend too much time lecturing. There are many lesson plans available online and from your county and state agencies and also organizations that use grade-level standards as a foundation. Find them and use them.
- Ask veteran teachers for help and sample lesson plans, especially those who have taught the subject and grade level that you have been assigned to teach.

- Finally, if you are assigned to teach a new course at the last minute, don't take it personally. During my (Rufus's) first seven years of teaching, I had no idea what I was going to be teaching until the week before school started. In my case, however, I actually requested the difficult students. I also asked for the larger classes. Since I was a physical education teacher and former athlete, I was used to teaching classes with 55 students in them. In physical education classes, the students had to move around, and they were from diverse backgrounds. Many were from rival gangs, and some were physically disabled. Therefore, whenever an administrator informed me that I was going to have to teach a class of 35 students in a traditional classroom setting, I thought, "Are you kidding me?" In comparison to teaching the large physical education classes, this setup sounded great to me. The bottom line is that over time, your teaching confidence will grow, and you will be less likely to panic if you are assigned to teach a new course at the last minute.

Professional Growth Strategy: Create a Personalized *Yes, I Can!* Journal

As soon as possible, create a journal in which to record your thoughts; lessons learned; confidence-building tips; teaching strategies; classroom management strategies; strategies to improve your relations with parents, colleagues, and administrators; and additional information that you will learn from this book. Refer to and update your *Yes, I Can!* journal on an ongoing basis. The following questions can help you apply what you learned from this chapter to your journal.

APPLYING WHAT YOU LEARNED TO YOUR *YES, I CAN!* JOURNAL

1. What was your income level growing up?
2. How did your income level influence your beliefs about individuals from other income groups?
3. How did your income level influence your beliefs about African Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, Asian Americans, and Whites?
4. After reading this chapter, what issues related to treating students fairly; working with low-income, middle-class, and upper-class students; and working with boys and girls do you still need to address?
5. What remaining questions do you have about the topics that were covered in this chapter?