Unbundling Race: Design Thinking and Education Entrepreneurs in Post-Katrina New Orleans

Christien Tompkins
Assistant Professor, Anthropology
Rutgers University New Brunswick

Email: christien.tompkins@rutgers.edu
Twitter: @profcptompkins

Changes in Teacher Demographics

Source: Education Research Alliance For New Orleans

Figure 1: Racial Make-Up of New Orleans Public School Teachers

Percent of Teachers in New Orleans Public Schools from 2003–2014 by Race

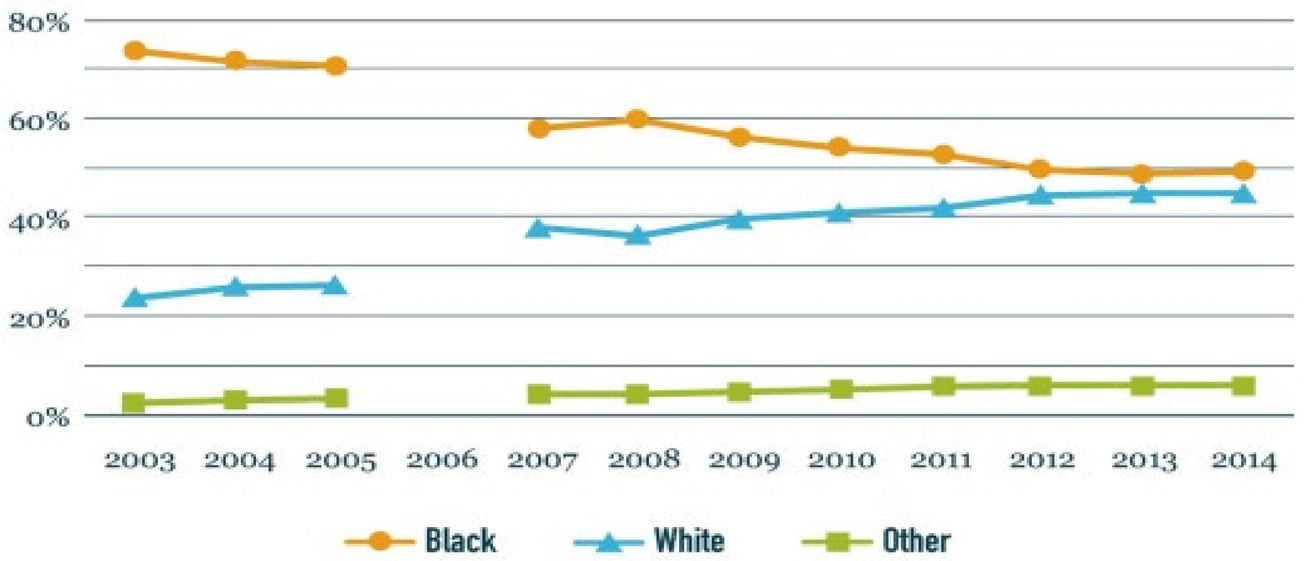
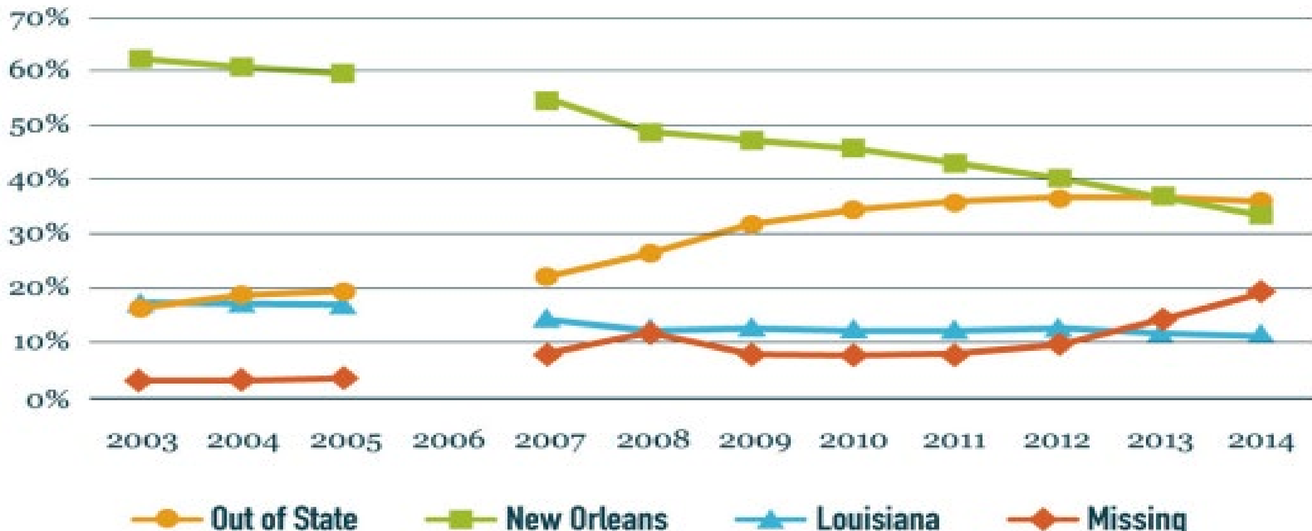


Figure 3: Location of Teacher Undergraduate Institution

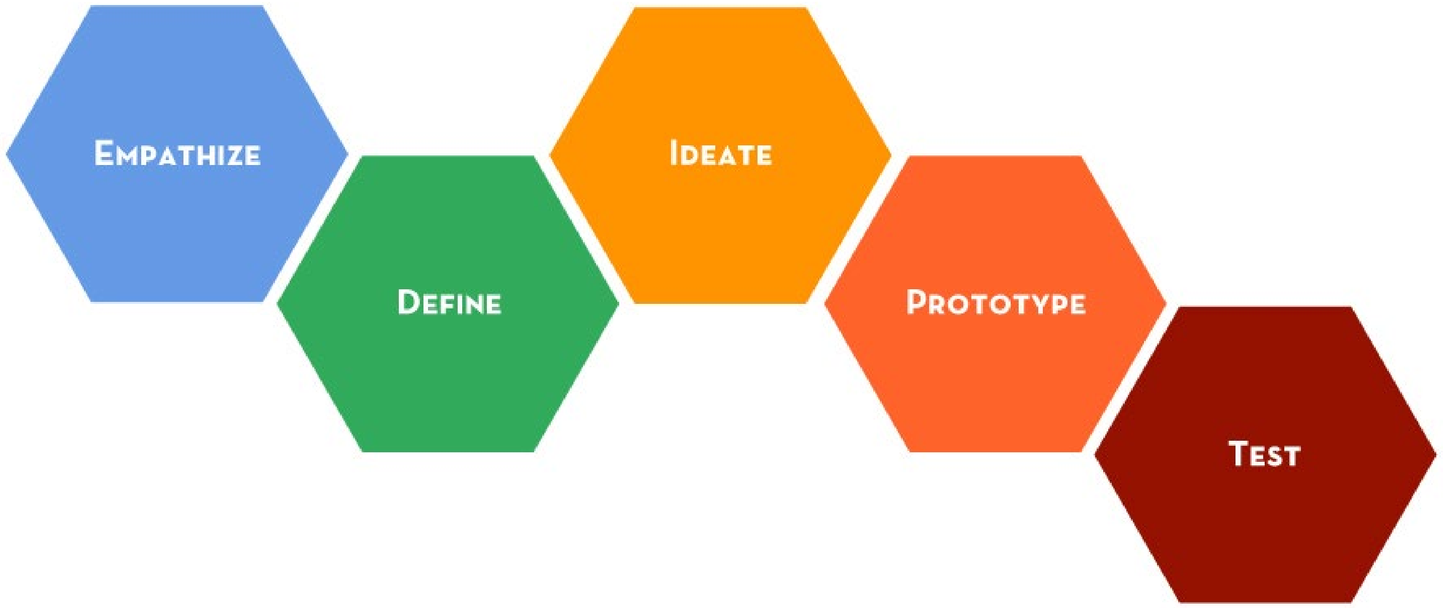
Percent of Teachers in New Orleans Schools from 2003–2014 by the Location of their Undergraduate Institution



“I’ve spent a lot of time in New Orleans and this is a tough thing to say but I’m going to be really honest. **The best thing that happened to the education system in New Orleans was Hurricane Katrina. That education system was a disaster.** And it took Hurricane Katrina to wake up the community to say that we have to do better. And the progress that it made in four years since the hurricane, is unbelievable.”
– Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan

Agenda

1. The Design Turn
2. Unbundling The Teacher
3. Substituting Race
4. Concluding Thoughts



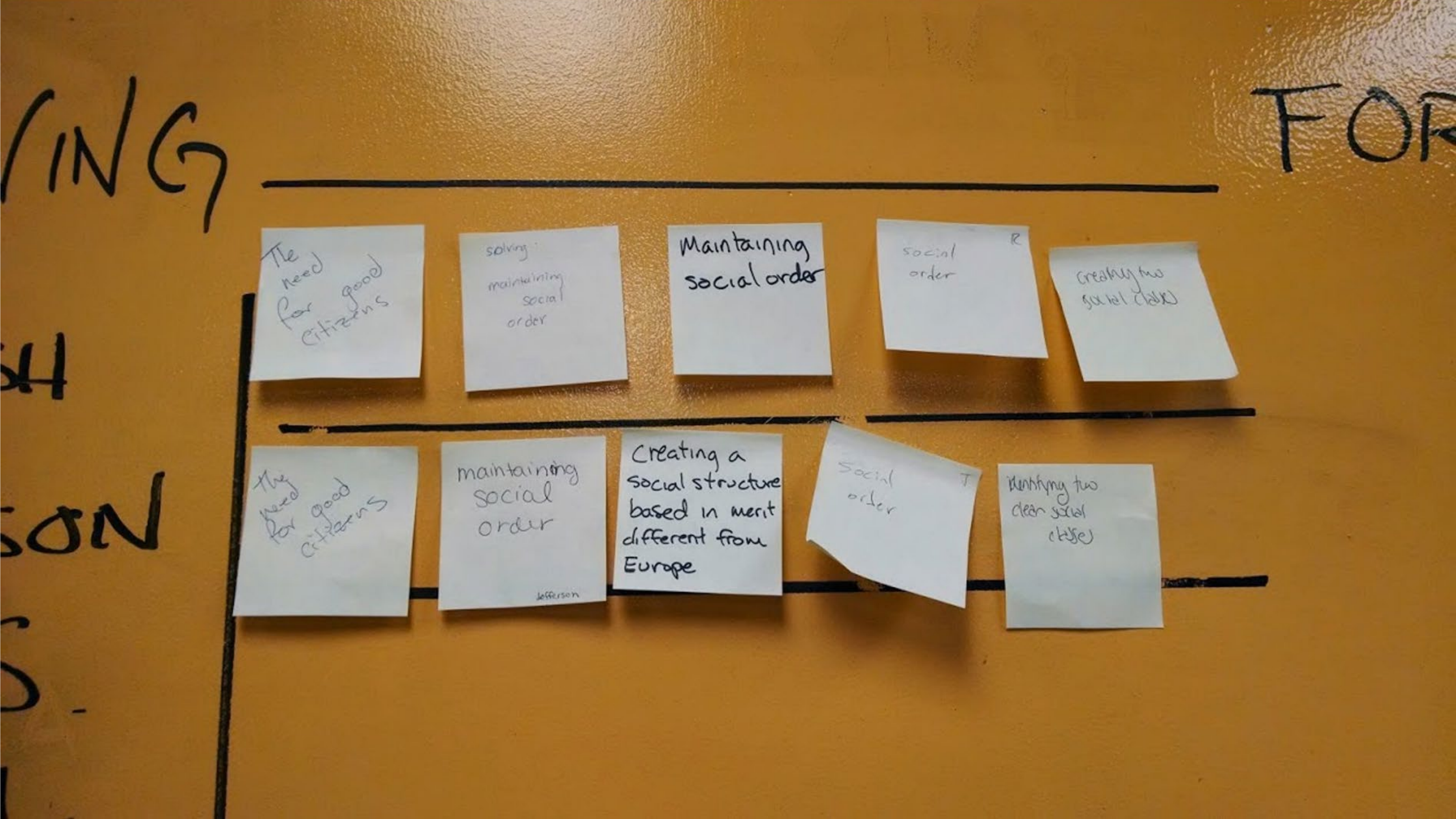
Incubator…

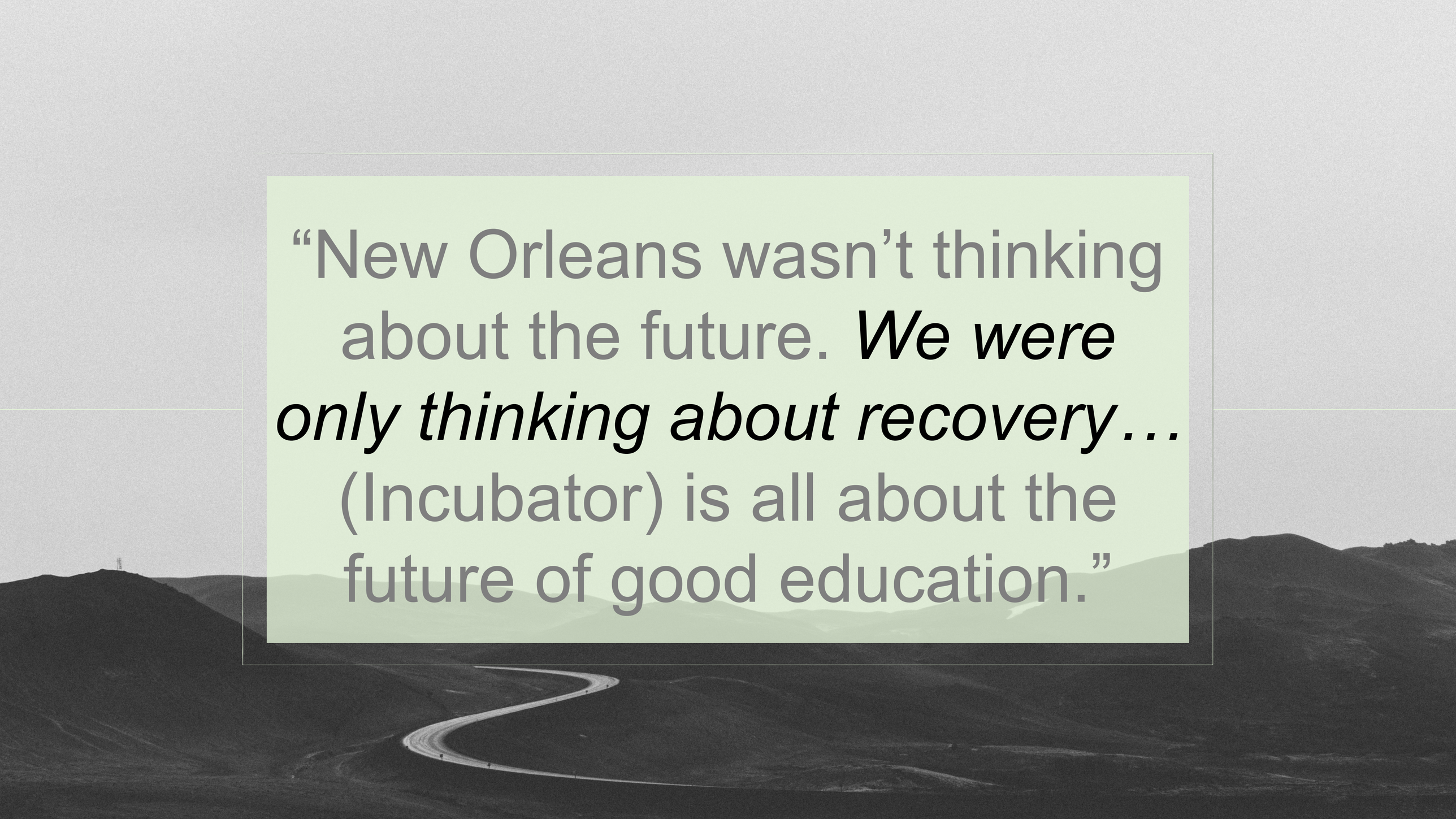
"finds, trains, and invests in passionate people solving the most important challenges in education. We build communities around entrepreneurs and their ventures to help them grow their ideas into successful, sustainable organizations."

1

The Design Turn

The Genesis of Incubator


ING
SH
SON
S.
FOR
The need for good citizens
solving maintaining social order
Maintaining social order
social order
Creating two social classes
The need for good citizens
maintaining social order
Jefferson
Creating a social structure based in merit different from Europe
Social order
Identifying two clear social classes

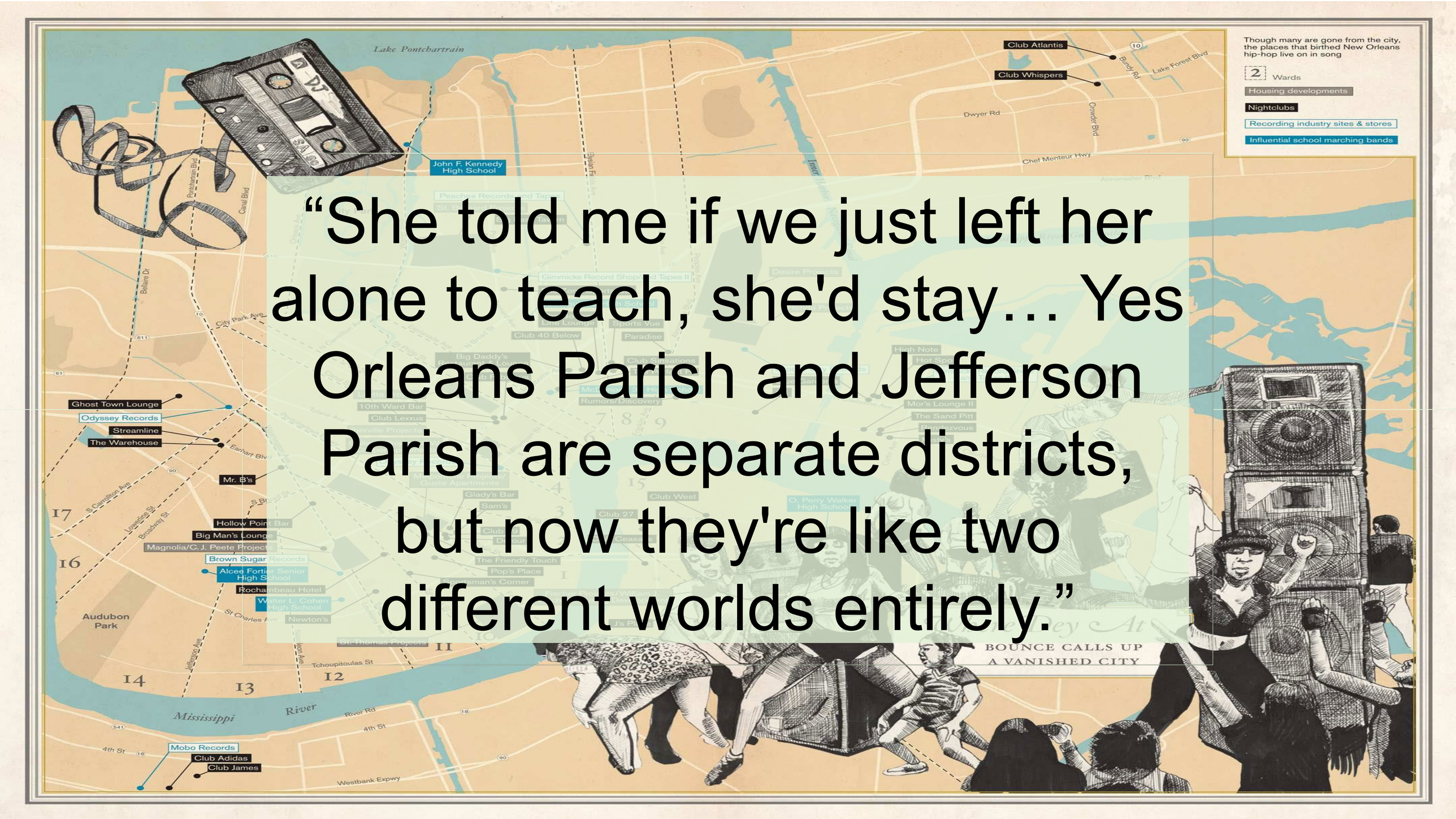


“New Orleans wasn’t thinking about the future. *We were only thinking about recovery…* (Incubator) is all about the future of good education.”

2

Unbundling the Teacher

“I didn’t feel like myself”



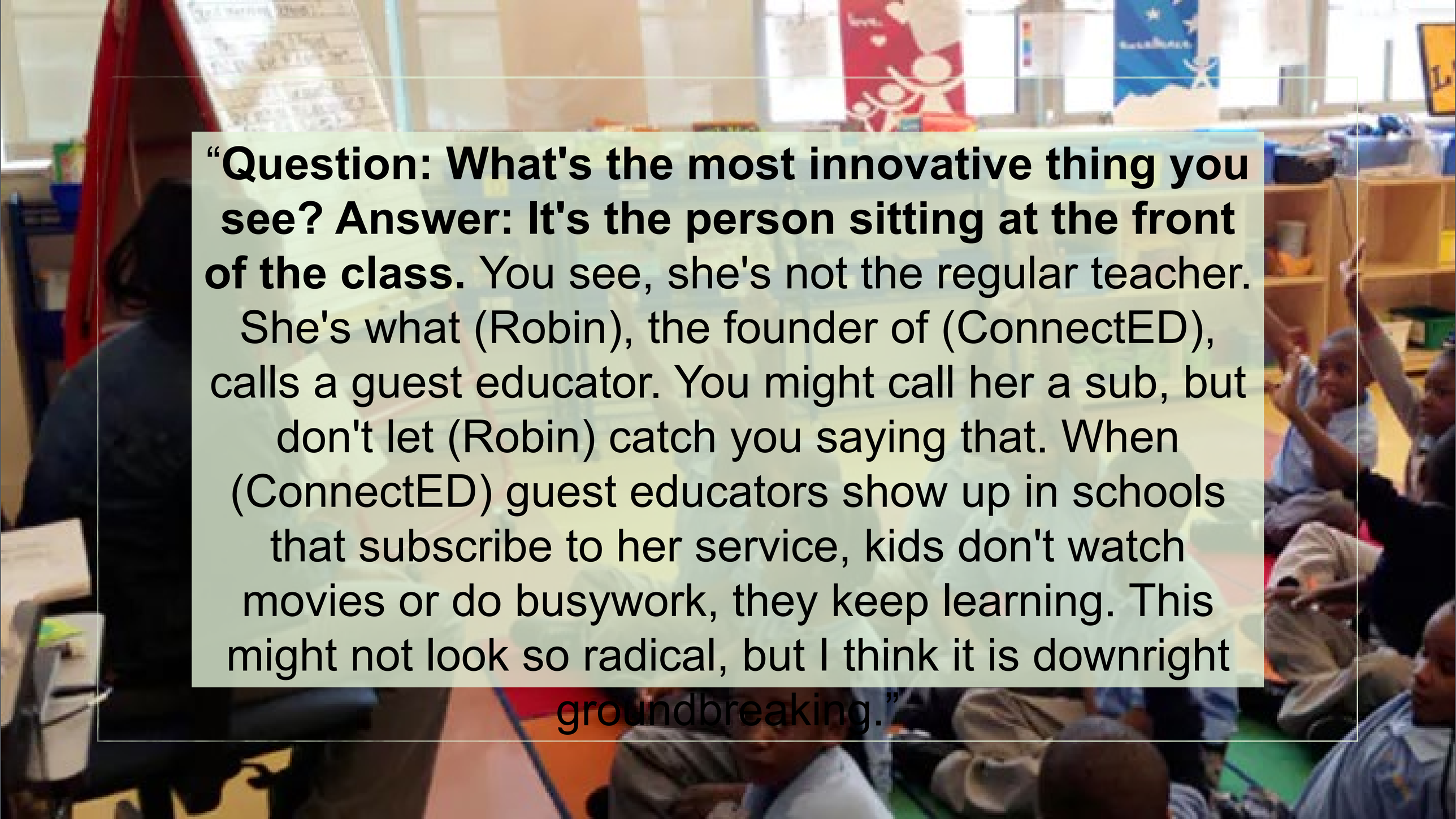
"She told me if we just left her alone to teach, she'd stay… Yes Orleans Parish and Jefferson Parish are separate districts, but now they're like two different worlds entirely."

3

Substituting Race

“What’s the most innovative thing you see in the classroom?”

JOB BOARD
JOB BOARD
JOB BOARD
JOB BOARD



“**Question: What's the most innovative thing you see? Answer: It's the person sitting at the front of the class.** You see, she's not the regular teacher. She's what (Robin), the founder of (ConnectED), calls a guest educator. You might call her a sub, but don't let (Robin) catch you saying that. When (ConnectED) guest educators show up in schools that subscribe to her service, kids don't watch movies or do busywork, they keep learning. This might not look so radical, but I think it is downright groundbreaking.”

4

Conclusions

Consider the following statement:

There’s nothing wrong with blackness