by yourself, just doing your own thing. Everybody would kind of group t
together, people that weren't Black or whatever, and you would just kind
be sitting there on your own."

One of the doctoral candidates told the story of attending an education
conference, sitting in a restaurant talking to two White female participan
While she sat with them, a White male later joined their table, spoke an
looked directly at the other women, yet never acknowledged her presence,
though she were invisible. The other women shifted their attention to hi
and never again spoke to her. Similar stories were cited by all seven focus pa
ticipants, describing this isolation in classrooms, in cafeterias, at social event
at professional meetings, etc. However, their stories of determination to forg
ahead and, indeed, achieve, might startle those who see these students only
victims, or incapable of academic achievement, or too sensitive about racism
or worse, somehow guilty for the nation's institutionalized racism.

II. Struggles to Name It

Yet, in the opening of each dialogue, an unexpected response emerged in th
group. The respondents seemed initially somewhat unconscious of racist att
tudes or behaviors at the university. It took the telling of many stories amon
them to unravel the obvious. As one student explained, "Because it hasn't bee
so overt, it is hard for me to think of an incident." When stories began t
unfold in the conversation about specific encounters they had experience
when relating to White professors and students or White Hispanic/Latino
either at the university or at their employment, all respondents initially use
expressions like "I don't think this was racist; it may have just been ignorance."

One of the students' reflections of an experience during her undergraduat
program explained her struggle to understand the motivation of the advic
of her Anglo professor/advisor:

> For the dietitian program you put in bids for an internship . . . So you pick your three and you pray that you get into one of those three. Okay. And so to the professor, I was like well this place gives a voucher so you get a certain amount of money every month. She kept saying, "No, no, don't pick that one. . . .You're definitely not going to get into that one." Okay. Well, what about this one? "No, no, no don't do that one." And you know you're thinking that the professor knows best but then kind of in the back of your head you're like is she being racist? You're not really sure because this is a person that's above you . . . your professor that you've been with for the last year. So you're like well, I guess I'm just going to pick these three that she thinks are the only ones I can do—not really knowing if, maybe, I could have done one of my first three choices. . . . Maybe it was racism. Maybe it's not. I still really don't know. I kind of feel like maybe it was though.

Another student told a story about White students from her high school whom she knew well, but who once on the same PWI campus with her, went their separate ways and never befriended her again. She commented that she didn't "know if this would be called racism, but I never had any White friends approach me in college." Later she told a story of being one of three Black students in a majority "White Hispanics" graduate course, where students were encouraged to complete research projects with others who were interested in the same research topic. She said that the three Black students remained alone in their group with no one else gravitating toward their research. Again, she said she assumed the Cuban Americans still were uncomfortable working alongside Black students, but insisted it might have been for other reasons. She seemed unwilling to suggest that the reason could be an unconscious undercurrent of racist "othering" by those students.

Her ambiguity about how to describe a reality that society denies exists, echoed previous comments from other Black students in my classrooms after they finish reading, *Other People's Children* (Delpit 1995). In the 16 years I've been using that book in courses, most of my Black students react similarly to it. Each, using different words or phrases, confirms what one Ph.D. student succinctly remarked, with tears rolling down her cheeks, "I thought I was crazy until I read her book. She says what I have been feeling all of my life, but I thought I was crazy." The waltz forced on Black students to dance around covert racist attitudes and behaviors sometimes makes them feel schizophrenic. They want to achieve in college. Indeed, their families expect them to. Yet these barriers to experiencing a "typical college life" often makes Black students question their judgment of reality; sometimes making them feel "crazy."

One respondent explained, "You don't know what that is so you question yourself. . . .you've come from a school where everyone is Black and all of the teachers around you are Black, and the administration is Black. So you don't know what racism is. You've seen it on TV. You've heard about it before but to actually experience it in a White college. . ."

A graduate student suggested, "There's an undercurrent working behind the scenes all of the time that we have kind of figured out it's there. We don't see it exactly but we also know that you have to do certain things when you navigate that current. So even if you don't see the current happening . . . you know you've got to perform better. You have to be sure everything is on the up and up."

In one group session, respondents discussed how they often ignore or mentally question assumptions that other cultures make about them, whenever Black students are in a room with predominantly White people. One Ph.D. student/respondent suggested:

> And it's more micro aggressive, I guess. . . . Not only am I here for some of my degree, but I'm working here. And a lot of times I walk into a room, and I just feel this automatic assumption arises that "you don't know as much as we do." And I look around as to who else is in the same position as I am, and I think I can count on one hand how many Black descended individuals who are ITs [Instructional Technicians]. So I just wonder a lot of times with them, are you presuming that I don't know this because I'm Black? Or are you just presuming I don't know this because I don't know it . . . I look at my resume and I'm like, well, I think I pretty much accounted for what I know. And, I think, you guys have tested me enough by now. You still shouldn't be looking at me and wondering those types of things as to what it is I'm capable of. So I experienced more that than anything else on this campus.

Another respondent, who also works at the university, explained a further dimension of work experiences for Blacks in a White environment:

> . . . . I probably wouldn't call some of the things that I've experienced racism per se. . . . What I think in terms of experience here, what I've noticed for myself, my assistant is Hispanic, White Hispanic. And I know whenever we go out together if we have an appointment to go someplace to a meeting they assume she is Dr. ______. Or if we're both in my office and we're expecting someone to come in, they assume that she is Dr. _____, although I'm behind the desk, and she's sitting in front of me. So I find it very interesting.

Her comment suggests the convolutions that students mentally juggle as they try to navigate a system where institutional racism pervades, yet is always masked as the victim's problem, not an institutional structural trap.

Nevertheless, in both focus groups, as the conversations evolved, tales of overt racism unfolded, but most were instances that had happened at PWI's that they had previously attended in another part of the state. One respondent mentioned, "And so the newspaper there, the cartoonist did this little cartoon with Condoleezza Rice and Kanye West and basically painted them monkeys." Another student reported the unabashed and pervasive flying of Confederate flags on homes and cars in another city in the state. Many, however, cited instances of racist pictures or discussions on *Facebook* pages of White students with whom they now attend classes. Several mentioned their surprise when their White peers "befriended" them on Facebook yet sooner or later posted unmistakable, racist comments: "Sally is always nice to me and stuff. But then I look on her Facebook page and she's got some racist monkey picture of Obama and I'm like, 'Man, I never would have thought Sally was thinking like that.'" Another respondent commented, "I don't know. It seems like social media to me is helping to refuel racism."

Nevertheless, in an e-mail, sent after her participation in the focus group, a respondent unknowingly corroborated my observation of the respondents' struggles to clearly identify racism. She remarked that "Throughout the conversation we reflected on multiple incidents and wrestled with being able to say it was covert, overt or simply racism at all. As college students we experienced both types of racism, weathered all of the side effects and still could not name or simply call it out. If we can't name it, how can we change it?"

III. Exhaustion from Playing the Role of Hostess

In one focus group, the metaphor of hostess, one also introduced in bell hooks' text,[14] emerged as a thread to explain the mainstream culture's implicit expectation of the chief role of Black students, and Black people in general, whenever they are in the room with White Americans.

Respondent A: But that every time you go to a new group there is that constant need to prove yourself. . . . Yeah, it does a toll emotionally as far as being tiring because then once you realize ain't nobody else hosting. Nobody else cares about what they say to people around here why should I care about what I say?

Respondent B: Right. And it's tiring, right . . . the fact that sometimes you're put in the position to make people comfortable. Yeah, it is like being the hostess. I have to make you comfortable so you can be comfortable with me. That's tiring. So it's like you're at a party and you have to host everybody. That would be tiring. I mean you want to be a guest. You want to be a guest. So that sometimes you do and sometimes you don't, I'm not tired today. Other times I'm tired, but I'm not doing it today, so I'm not hosting, I'm a guest.

Respondent A: And that's when problems usually start.

Respondent B: Right. Who does she think she is? She thinks she belongs. I mean no one is saying this, but the look is like, 'Oh she looks comfortable here. Why is she so comfortable here?' Because you know what, I'm a guest today. I'm not hosting.

(Group Laughter)

Respondent C: I'm telling you we can't have a day off.

Respondent B: No. And then people wonder why people are so comfortable, and they let their hair down with people from their own cultures—because [when you're with your own culture] you don't have to host. We all are guests. But we need to be able to intermingle with other cultures as guests, not a host and a guest, a host and a guest, a host and a guest.

Respondent A: How can we all get invited to the party? . . . And leave somebody else to host? Or why have a host at all? Let's just all show up.

The act of hosting, (a flip of the use of the metaphor by hooks) of having to make everyone else feel comfortable in a room, seemed to speak to the mainstream notion that Blacks should not show competence nor aloofness, irritation, and certainly, not anger. To the contrary, the unspoken and maybe unconscious notion is that Blacks should continue to take care of people, as they for centuries in the south were demanded to do. This unconscious yet structural racist belief system continues to wear many Black students down; to make them "tired."

IV. Schisms between Black Cultures

During the focus groups, subtle tensions surfaced between those who identified more with African-American culture versus those who identified primarily with a Caribbean Island culture. In each group, students acknowledged those tensions existed at the university and in the city. Exploring some of the assumptions that created the divisions shaped a great deal of the conversation. At Morehouse College, I had noticed the same division between African-American students and students and professors from various countries in Africa. In her book, *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope*, hooks explains: "Dominator culture has tried to keep us all afraid, to make us choose safety instead of risk, sameness instead of diversity" (2003, p. 33). That fear and practice bubbled up in each focus group around attitudes of Caribbean and African-Americans toward each other.

An African-American student explained: "That's kind of what we were talking about earlier about Caribbean's not associating themselves with African-Americans. Like oh, no I'm not African-American, I'm Haitian. I'm not African-American, I'm Jamaican. So it's like still separating ourselves while we should be cohesive."

One respondent explained her epiphany as a Jamaican-born student who attended K-16 schools in Florida:

> My family is Jamaican and I was taught you are not African-American and neither do you want to be African-American. You want to make sure that folks know that you're Caribbean; you're Jamaican; you're other. And, of course, I think going to ___ U definitely snapped it out of me because when people looked at me and they left two seats empty they weren't saying, 'Oh there's the Jamaican girl.' No, they're thinking, 'Oh she's Black. She's got a big afro; we don't want to sit next to her'. . . . . that's a conversation on a whole that we need to have more as a people and what does it mean to actually be Black in America period. Like I said, after seeing myself for 12 years

of schooling here as a Jamaican, and socializing only with Jamaicans, I experienced a rude awakening when I attended ___ U. That's when I began to identify myself differently, as a Black woman . . . devoted to the struggle.

In the other focus group, a Caribbean student explained, "You hear all of the bad things about African-Americans, they're lazy. They don't want to work. They use public assistance, blah, blah, blah. I'm going to be honest with you, we come with those thoughts. We come with those thoughts . . . What we didn't understand is the structure of racism, because we didn't have a structure of racism where we came from that impeded our development. So we didn't get it. And I didn't get it either . . . I don't think my parents even got it yet.

Later, the same respondent commented, "Yes, sometimes between African-American and immigrant Blacks there's some kind of division . . . . Like we're potentially better or we think we're better than other Blacks, especially African-Americans, right. But I think it's not about being better. I think it's just the fact that we're coming from an environment that's all about you ethnically. You've seen everyone who is powerful, doctors, lawyers, nurses, everybody is Black, and I really don't see that in this country. So [unlike African-Americans] I'm not yearning to see it because I've seen it before."

Several respondents suggested that student clubs that designated themselves as a specific ethnic culture such as Jamaican or African-American or Bahamian, etc. further complicated this issue of separation among Black students.

Yet, during these portions of the conversations, everyone seemed baffled by the oppressive behavior of White Hispanics/Latinos when interacting with Black students. All respondents insisted that whether they were from the islands or from America, if they were Black, the Hispanic culture did not accept nor befriend them. Whenever sharing scenarios about the deliberate choice of "White" Hispanic/Latino peers or professors to avoid them, the Black students all seemed to wonder what one respondent voiced, "How could you be participating in the very thing that other people are imposing on you?" Many insisted that they had heard Hispanic/Latino peers mention the shock of oppressive attitudes and behaviors they experienced when travelling outside the city into other parts of the state. The respondents suggested that the city seemed to provide a protective cocoon for its Hispanic/Latino population, and unless White Hispanics travelled beyond the city's boundaries, they were unable to see themselves as caught in the vice of hegemony. One of the focus participants insisted, "If they could just understand that if we all stood together, stood united, we could seriously change this system that oppresses all of us."

The Optimistic Stories

A week after the dialogue, a couple of respondents, when seeing me in t elevator, mentioned that they had continued to talk about the conversatio from the focus group. They asked if we might reconvene, maybe meet wi other students, and continue the conversation. They also mentioned th they had experienced a few epiphanies as a result of the dialogue about ra ism. We agreed to meet during the fall semester and talk again about how v might fit future dialogues into their busy university schedules. I also asked they might e-mail a sentence or two describing those epiphanies. The follov ing are their e-mailed responses:

Epiphanies

E-mail Respondent 1: A dialogue about racism can be difficult to have, conside ing in America we live in it constantly. It is often such a complex issue that cannot be separated from everyday life. It can be blatant and obvious, but mo of the time it is subtle and unclear. From the discussions I began to understan more about how I navigate the world—I recognize covert racist actions may b happening around me, but I do not give it much thought. If I do, it is often i the form of counter narrative stories that I run down as a list of why this actio may have occurred. Often after reviewing the counter narratives list, it doe come back down to "probably because I am Black." The dialogue discussio also provided me, a Black American, with some of the perspectives of Carib bean Blacks living in the U.S. The notion of cultural capital that Caribbea people gain from growing up in a society that is predominantly Black helpe me understand what is often perceived by Black Americans as a "better tha you" persona; it is simply a greater amount of cultural capital they are ingraine with from living in a society where they are not told they are "less than."

E-mail Respondent 2: Basically, the dialogue reminded me how "targeted" m social identities (race, gender, etc.) are here . . . and how psychologicall exhausting it is to be a Black-female-professional or simply a human being i the U.S. This exhaustion, I think results in racial/ethnic minorities becomin hypersensitive to their environment, as a defense mechanism, to combat thi racial-psychological warfare that exists in the U.S.

E-mail Respondent 3: . . . because of the dialogue I did remind myself that have a voice; that I do not have to be bound by the contingencies or the con structs that others create for me. Nor do I need to subject myself to the one created for myself. So, for that . . . I sincerely thank you!

These comments as well as the dialogue in both focus groups seemed to ech the concerns of many of my African-American and Black students durin

the 12 years of teaching at the present university. Re-reading the transcripts from this dialogue has helped me rethink my pedagogy and assumptions about tensions between students here. Reading the respondent's e-mails reminded me that, as Baldwin suggests, having space and time to tell the "tales" of struggle and triumphs around the issues of racism might be a necessary journey for many of our Black students at the university. And because such a space and time happens so rarely in classrooms, I've committed to co-create with interested students a professional learning community, where Black students can come together once or twice a month and address these issues by telling their stories.

Yet, having worked with Black students at a number of universities, the conversations during the focus groups offered no surprises about the racist culture in PWIs. Except when teaching at Morehouse, I have witnessed institutionalized racism on every plantation where I have taught. The surprise for me at PWIs has always been, not the abuse of students of color, but mainstream professors' unconsciousness of that abuse and of the hegemonic structures that undergird their own university life. My students have consistently validated this observation when they, during and at the end of my courses, challenge the nature of their college education with comments such as, "Why am I a graduating senior, and I have never engaged in conversations about racism and classism in any other courses?" or "I'm at the end of my Master's Program, and no other class has ever addressed issues of justice."

Thus, the dialogue with the focus groups seemed an affirmation of the practices and curriculum used in my classrooms. Both investigate the impact of institutionalized racism, classism, sexism, homophobia, etc. on education. Like Paulo Freire (2001), I believe that education is never politically neutral; it either supports the status quo or encourages transformation of our worlds. Included in that belief is the notion that anything we want to change must be addressed intentionally and directly within the classroom. If we don't name it, it sits there in defiance. Moreover, confronting justice issues can lead toward eliminating the structures that diminish our marginalized students and that also trap mainstream students into destructive notions of White Supremacy, mocking the nation's dreams of democracy.

Due largely to my experiences at Morehouse College and to my African-American mentors, who have over 30 years modeled for me a different way of being and of teaching in a compromised world, I have over the last 30 years developed course content and practices that many students have evaluated as successful. They claim the curriculum and the pedagogy have raised their consciousness about hegemony and have paved a road for them to become better teachers in their public school classrooms. Like bell hooks, I believe that "Moving through fear, finding out what connects us, revelling

in our differences; this is the process that brings us closer, that gives us a world of shared values, of meaningful community" (2003, p. 197).

One of the college's Cuban-American graduate students, who was graduating from her Master's program at the university that semester, when responding to an assigned reading in one of my courses, posted the following on the on-line discussion site:

> . . . the process of unlearning racism is a mind blowing experience. From the readings I've begun to realize the hidden truths about the way I treat some of my students. I had never considered myself racist in the past and yet like the teachers from this article, I would have never known the harm I was causing without taking a course like this and realizing I had to take a deeper look at my actions and thoughts. I know I still have a lot to learn but I have begun to see a change in my attitude towards my students and parents. I think that all teachers' especially new teachers coming into the classroom should be required to take a course like this. . . teachers are never truly prepared of how to deal with our underlying attitudes about students and parents. . . . I have lived it as a teacher in an urban school. In a city like _______ where almost all the schools have such diverse populations of students, why is it that undergraduate students are not required to take an Urban education course? The article also states, "The teacher loses sight of her own power to teach all children, and she, unconsciously, sends messages to her students that they are unteachable". . . as an experienced teacher, I have been there as well and these types of courses are the ones that readjust our thinking and remind us that we are not "just" teachers . . .

Her comment is typical of other student responses about awakenings in these courses versus their disappointments in the curriculum of other college courses. However, I take little credit for these transformations because my content and practices come not from my own wisdom but the wisdom of my African-American mentors. They have deeply influenced my research and teaching.

Because of Asa G. Hilliard, III's work (Hilliard, 1995, 1998, 2014, pp. 25–38) and mentoring, I began to consider that no matter what I taught, I must address the hegemonic structures, policies, and practices of schooling; that it was not enough for me to discuss with my pre-service and in-service students the "how" of teaching, but I must also consider the "what" of teaching. Consequently, I integrate into all of my courses an historical perspective of how race was and is still being lived in America in order to invite my students into the struggle to liberate themselves and their students from the destruction of hegemonic systems.

From Lisa Delpit (1995, 2012; 2002), I learned the language to address issues of power and privilege that manifest themselves in schools and that cripple the achievement of our Black, Brown, and poor students in K-16 public and

private schools. From observing her leadership style, I learned the value of deep listening to the "other"; of believing in the brilliance of every mother's child; of exposing White students to the reality that White Supremacy diminishes us all; of how to turn my anger toward racism into more creative, exploratory conversations; of understanding the value of humor and laughter while resisting hegemony; of taking no one too seriously, especially myself.

From Bob Moses (Moses, 2001; Wynne, 2012), I discovered the value of investigating the nation's historical records and the organizing tools of the Southern Freedom Movement (Harding, 1990; Wynne 2002, pp. 215–216) to teach the power and intellectual capacity of the people pushed to the bottom of society's academic and economic ladder. Through him, I learned the wisdom of Ella Baker and Fannie Lou Hamer, who believed that the people at the bottom often offered the most ingenious ideas (Ransby 2003). And through Moses, I realized that my responsibility included teaching teachers how to allow space and time for students at the bottom-quartile to wrestle with abstractions and to use their language, not their oppressor's, to demystify mathematical and interdisciplinary concepts, process, and design. From Moses, I also learned the "demand" side of education—that the children at the bottom, through disciplined study, must earn their right to become insurgents, to demand what the country says they don't want, a quality education; that advocacy is useful, but ultimately, significant change will only come when those at the bottom demand their constitutional rights as "constitutional people" (Moses 2014).

From Theresa Perry, I learned the imperative of teaching the "counter-narrative" to the nation's story of the history and education of African-Americans (Perry, 2004). Because of her retelling the history of African-Americans' passion for education, I began to flip the image of African-Americans from victims to liberators, engaged in a 400 year old struggle to educate themselves and to free the nation from oppressive policies and practices. Teaching that historical context in classrooms seems to create possibilities for a liberation journey for the teachers I teach and for the students they teach.

Pedagogy

For decades, I have designed practices that can mirror anti-hegemonic content. Instead of a "sage-on-stage" methodology, my courses offer student-centered, participatory engagement with each other, with me, and with the content. These practices are validated in most research about sound pedagogy for the teaching and learning of new ideas and skills (Weimer, 2002; Moffett, 1988; Becvar, 1997; Palmer, 2007). Nevertheless, these strategies primarily interest me as an intentional challenge to that which buoys

authoritarian power in the classroom. Yet, at the same time, I insist that no one is force-fed any belief system or ideology, most especially my own. Refuting hegemony demands a delicate and disciplined dance of avoiding proselytizing and of honoring the organic nature of individual intellectual discovery. It demands a tolerance for ambiguity, for nuance, for living the question instead of the answer.

Circles as the Primary Instructional Structures

Typically at the university, most classrooms are set up with rows of desks facing the front of the room. On the first day of every class, before I introduce myself, I ask if anyone has ever heard the word "hegemony." Most often the collective answer is "No." After I explain what the word means, we explore the alignment of their desks as a hegemonic structure. Then, we, move the desks into a circle, while discussing the issues of power that the two distinct physical structures symbolize.

Afterwards, we introduce ourselves as peers in the teaching/learning process. Though, I admit during this portion that the power of the letter grade demanded by the university, students, and parents, hands the professor an unequal tool of power (Later in the course, we explore how to banish or transform this evaluative, subjective "sorting" tool.) We continue by discussing mutual course expectations; what we each hope to learn; what must happen in the class for them and me to feel that the class time has been well spent.

Collaborative learning and teaching

To counteract institutionalized isolation, self-aggrandizement, unhealthy competition, I introduce the value of collaboration in intellectual explorations. Time is spent inviting students to complete a Group Process form that addresses their past experience with groups; their frustrations; the expectations for each members' participation; the strengths each brings to the group; and what must happen for the group experience to be valuable for them? After completing the form, students create groups of 5, charged to include people from unfamiliar cultures. Groups then are asked to go anywhere inside or outside the classroom for 20 minutes and discuss their questionnaires and create a group name. Afterwards, groups report their experiences to the class, discussing roles that can lead to high performing teams.

Because in most cultures, "breaking bread" together is a sacred ritual that helps create community, an out-of-class assignment is to dine together with their small group, while discussing the theme of their collaborative research

projects, data collection and analysis, and responsibilities of each researcher. Also because I believe this ritual is significant for creating community, I bring food to share each session. Our last class is spent sharing dinner at my home.

Written Responses to Selected Readings

The content of the course is partially grounded in the readings that require written responses posted on an on-line site, where participants can offer feedback. Their guidelines for the responses are to consider: Which ideas seem compelling and why; which ideas made them uncomfortable and why; what questions arose as a result of the reading? This practice of writing and response seems to foster the growth of their critical thinking skills; deepens their knowledge of issues; and supports the philosophy that their classmates' responses to their ideas are as significant as the professor's. They are also asked to recommend articles that they feel are pertinent for us to read concerning the issues being studied.

Music

From teaching in high school, at Morehouse College, and studying the Southern Freedom Movement, I learned that music is an integral part of the African culture (Wynne 2002). A number of studies also indicate that the use of music effectively facilitates the discussion of difficult concepts and skills (Moffett, 1991; Gardner, 2008). To create a welcoming space for all cultures as well as to use effective tools to study abstractions, I share music, whose themes I believe relate to concepts we are exploring. Later, students bring their music to explain concepts being investigated. Students repeatedly insist that music helped them better explore and remember theories like "Critical Race Theory" or "Culturally Responsive Pedagogy."

Videos

To keep ideas current, and because we live in a digital age, I include videos that are relevant to many issues being studied, from educational sites, Youtube.org, and TED.com. Videos like Howard Zinn's, *the People Speak* (Zinn, 2010) have become a staple in my curriculum. Within such videos, students can learn the variety of freedom struggles in this country and can begin forming their own sense of social agency. The videos are always followed by open-ended questions that students consider with their small groups. They continuously evaluate the videos, suggesting the "good, bad, and ugly" of each.

What Worked? What Did Not Work?

The last five minutes of each session is devoted to the students anonymously writing what activities or discussions worked for them; and what did not work. This evaluation helps us understand that teaching/learning is a continuous cycle of success and failure. And that my growth as a professional is tied to their honest reflection on how the class either facilitated or hindered their learning. This mechanism, I believe, reminds me and my students to see ourselves more clearly as peers in the struggle for truth.

Mantra at the End

From studying African-centered curriculum and practices, I became a believer in the power of affirmations. Because that and studying the Southern Freedom Movement convinced me of the value of community building in educational spaces, I end all sessions, with us standing in a circle, repeating the mantra, "None of us is as strong as all of us." On the first day, I explain the history of choosing to end my classes with the mantra; what standing in solidarity might mean for us as educators and for dismantling hegemony. Thereafter, I invite students to volunteer to lead the mantra at the end of sessions. I've also experimented by asking students to create mantras. One student's creation that I particularly liked was "None of us is free until all of us are free." But students, most often, later choose to end the class with the same mantra we used on the first day. Many students have reported that they later have used this mantra in their K-12 classrooms.

In Conclusion

This may be the last time a spiritual sung during the Southern Freedom Movement (1961; Freedom Song), still compels me to understand the sacred nature of each moment of instruction. The power of that song and that moment in time it was sung in the building of this nation remind me of how fragile the experience of building community is. It reminds me that each semester probably is the last time that my students and I are together, exploring the depth of oppression and the breadth of possibilities for transformation. So each classroom moment must be grounded in the integrity of discovery, a willingness to explore the unknown. Philosopher Martha Nussbaum indicates that this kind of exploration "says something very important about the human condition of the ethical life: that it is based on a trust in the uncertain and on a willingness to be exposed; it's based on being more like a plant than like a jewel, something rather fragile, but whose very particular beauty is

The dark & the dazzling: Children leading us back from the edge[1]

by Joan T. Wynne

One of my favorite activists, Bryan Stevenson, Director of Equal Justice Initiative, in a TED talk, said to an audience interested in innovation, that "It's the mind-heart connection that compels us to not just be attentive to all the bright and dazzling things but also to the dark and difficult things" (2012).

For educators, part of the "dark and difficult" is the huge growth of the school to prison pipeline and its impact on our black, brown and poor children—and on our society's dream of becoming a real democracy. Another difficult part is exploring strategies and taking action that will change public policies which continuously create the inferior schools where these children are forced to attend. Schools where guards stand at the doors and roam the halls; where bathrooms hold no toilet paper; where rain water leaks down stairwells; where exhausted teachers have lost faith in our children's hunger to learn. As teachers we must collectively grapple with the reality that we live in a racist country, where too many of us reap benefits from our unearned power and privilege that negatively impact children of color. Because approximately 76 percent of public school teachers are white and mostly female (Characteristics 2013), our responsibility is to use that power and privilege to confront and eliminate injustices and inequities in schools.

Writing to teachers years ago, my late friend and mentor, Asa G. Hilliard, III, educator, psychologist, and historian, insisted that: "*Revolution, not reform, is required to release the power of teaching. . . . Virtually, all teachers possess tremendous*

[1] Keynote Address, The 14th Annual South Florida Education Research Conference, June 6, 2015. A version of this speech was earlier published as Wynne, J. (2014). Foreword. In *Transforming the School to Prison Pipeline: Lessons from the classroom*. Debra Payne & Tonette Rocco. Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Sense Publishers.

power which can be released, given the proper exposure. We can't get to that point by tinkering with a broken system. We must change our intellectual structures, definitions and assumptions; then we can release teacher power" (Hilliard 1997).

Hilliard's clarion call seems vital if we ever hope to create schools worthy of our children and our teachers. As did Hilliard, we must question current belief systems that:

- establish racism in schools;
- deliver authoritarian pedagogy;
- foster an obsession with student behavior in lieu of the pursuit of academic excellence; and
- institutionalize the blaming of students and parents for the consequences of demoralizing instruction.

We must openly challenge the arcane and dangerous "structures and assumptions" that prevail in schools, pushing our Black and Brown children into the sinister, corporate "school to prison pipe-line" and, by doing so, bankrupt our nation of the benefit of these young, untapped brilliant minds.

This is a huge issue in Florida, since its school to prison pipeline as of 2013 was the largest in the nation (Hing 2013). Another disturbing reality in the state is that Black students are just 21 percent of Florida youth, but make up 46 percent of all school related referrals to law enforcement (Hing). So, addressing racism is crucial to any legitimate study of the pipeline or the demand for quality education for every mother's child.

Many of the urban schools, where I observe and where my graduate students teach, carry the same stench of offensive and obsolete curriculum and pedagogy. Too many of these schools, in fact, operate like prisons, where students of color—especially those forced to live in poverty by an economic system that demands there be "losers"—are daily maligned and rigidly controlled as though they already wore orange jumpsuits. Because of this badgering of certain youth, I often think that the school to prison pipeline is in reality a prison to prison pipeline.

Affirming my experiences in public schools, Henry Giroux in his latest book, *Youth in Revolt*, asserts that we are criminalizing the behavior of young people in schools" (Giroux 2013, p. 10). Giroux declares that "young children are being arrested and subjected to court appearances for behaviors that can only be called trivial" (p. 10). In Florida, even a 5 year old child was handcuffed and arrested for a temper tantrum (CBS 2009). Given the state's racist history and policies (King 2012), no surprise that this 5 year old was black.

But we should explore as well another facet of this assault on children in schools. The privatized prison system is one of the fastest growing industries

the nation (Rappleye 2012). The industry needs a continuous flow of prisoners into these jails to capture the public dollars; thus, here, enters the demand for criminalizing youth for the least infraction while also increasing the detention of the immigrant poor in these prisons. The GEO Group and the Corrections Corporation of America (CCA) are the two largest privatized prison companies, with profits per year of 3 billion dollars (Rappleye 2012). Not only do these companies demean society by receiving such abundant profits for incarcerating people, they also drive local and national policy about immigration and criminal justice. Riding the waves of this corporate tsunami catching our poor children in its undertow are banks like Wells Fargo who hold significant equity shares in CCA (Rappleye 2012). These shares further the national economic interest in pushing students out of school and into prison. It's another case of "follow the money" and you find out who is driving the policy.

Consciously or not, the structure and practice of "inner-city" schools aids the corporations in dictating these policies. In these schools situated deep in the belly of most cities, obedience, not academic excellence, is the prime attribute desired for their students at the bottom. Obedience prepares them not just for prisons, but also for the military and for low paying jobs. In the schools where most poor children attend, scripted curricula and stupidly designed testing, all delivering multi-billion dollar profits to corporations, stifle the creative curiosity of our young children kicked to the curb by a society who doesn't believe in them, nor care about them.

Hundreds of years ago, Great Britain created a colonial educational system to sustain its empire. And it worked extremely well to keep everyone in the proper place in a well-structured, hegemonic hierarchy. Teachers at the front doling out information, students sitting in rows powerless and obedient, sucking up filtered information that the elite chose for them. That system is still alive and well in many countries across the globe. And, yes, the U.S.A. continues to use it. Yet it most often colonizes only black, brown, and poor white students. And what better colony than a school-to-prison pipeline. All of these "dark and difficult things" that Bryan Stevenson challenges us to examine, I hope we can explore during this conference.

But as promised, I will also talk today about the things that dazzle: like student-centered, creative, non-punitive teaching. I want to talk about models of education that are right now in schools interrupting the cycle of tyranny, mediocrity, and warehousing of young, imaginative students who daily suffer the slings and arrows of society's outrageous failure to provide quality education for all of its children. I have been lucky to experience first-hand two of those models. Since 1997, I have visited and/or worked with the

children that Bob Moses leads. I have met with them in Mississippi, in Boston, in New York City, in Los Angeles and in Miami. Many are the students whom this nation has ignored or punished.

Yet Moses' youngsters personify hope for education. They are part of the Algebra Project (AP), a program dreamed up, founded, and delivered by Moses (Civil Rights icon and MacArthur Genius Fellow) and his regional teams. His project takes the alienated and underperforming kids—and serves up accelerated learning in mathematics, not remedial pabulum. Its primary interest is in the students' intellect, not their "good behavior." Contrary to traditional math content, AP's curriculum changes as the need of the students change. AP teachers must learn how to quickly modify their plans for teaching tomorrow according to what was learned today. This kind of creative curriculum flies in the face of test-driven, standardized, static, regurgitated models in use most often today in failing schools. Yet because of AP's demand for creativity, not only students, but also their teachers begin to think more critically and imaginatively about their work.

For thirty years, in the Algebra Project classrooms, the progeny of slaves and sharecroppers, children of new immigrants, and youth from Appalachia enjoy the instruction typically reserved for what society deems "the gifted." Steeped in an experiential, student centered pedagogy, AP listens deeply to the voices of the youngsters they educate. And it raises those voices into the public sphere. In cities and towns around the country AP students talk about mathematics at national and state conferences, local school boards, college classrooms, and community events.

Explaining the need for AP's work, Moses insists that "The absence of math literacy in urban and rural communities is as urgent an issue today as the lack of registered voters was 40 years ago . . . solving the problem requires the same kind of community organizing that changed the South then. For, if we can succeed in bringing all children to a level of math literacy so they can participate in today's economy, that would be a revolution (Cass 2002)." AP isn't waiting for a "superman" or for society to clean up its act; rather, AP continually finds what Moses calls the "crawl space" within and outside schools to reach the students that society has chosen to leave behind or send to jail. AP is grounded in a history of grass roots organizing that understands clearly that those at the bottom must demand the education they deserve. Consequently, AP develops students as a cohort, fostering a community with their teachers and their parents.

Another beacon for hope is AP's offspring, the Young People's Project (YPP), designed, run by and for young people. Directed by Maisha Moses, it develops students into math literacy workers who go into their communities during after-school hours to teach younger children that math is interesting, fun,

and doable. YPP uses the youth culture, its rhythms and rhymes, drums, hip-hop, videography, youth participatory action research, math games, all as vehicles to teach—and to extricate youngsters from the colonial vise that holds them tightly to the bad education that gets them ready for prison.

In its sixteen year journey, YPP continually evolves as its prestige and local power grows. Because of its openness to the organic nature of change—and as a result of grants awarded by the National Science Foundation, it has begun to develop young leaders to challenge and influence public policy. These youth are engaging our alienated students.

YPP's capacity for authentic encounters that can shift quickly into the urgency of any current event is illustrated best with their "Finding our Folks" campaign. Within weeks after the debacle of Katrina, these disenfranchised youth began organizing students and young adults from across the south to "Find our Folks." Along with the New Orleans Hot 8 Brass Band, YPP went to Atlanta, Baton Rouge, Jackson, Mobile, New Orleans, and Houston to find the hurricane's dispossessed. They networked with community agencies, churches, schools, colleges, friends in each city who might support the tour and its work with dispersed populations (Wynne 2012). Their vision for this tour spoke to our demands for educational transformation. They said:

> *We seek to raise the voices of Katrina's survivors and connect them with the voices of America's survivors, the brothers and sisters in all corners of the country who remain on the margins of citizenship. We seek to use the tools of education, documentation, healing, and organizing to explore and discuss the conditions that led to the devastating impact of Katrina; to join the voices of resistance, the veterans of past and continuing movements, with the voices of Hip-Hop, Blues and Jazz; to celebrate African and indigenous cultures as they have been expressed in New Orleans and throughout the world; to find our folk, to reconnect the individuals, families and communities that are scattered across the country, living in exile. In finding our folk, we hope to find ourselves* (YPP 2007).

What better antidote to oppressive models of education might we find than the YPP's visionary alternative to the school to prison pipeline—young people leading youth, using their imagination and skills, their art and music, inviting the wisdom of their elders, reaching back to all of the nation's cultural roots, in order to lead America into a more just, equitable, and creative twenty-first century education. This is a paradigm shift that I could easily wrap my brain around.

Might this shift also be needed to shake the foundations of Colleges of Education (COE)? Shouldn't every Teacher Ed program in Florida, indeed, in the nation deliberately and emphatically address these difficult issues of hegemony within their courses? I implore all COE's to investigate AP's and YPP's work; to invite the young into their "classroom management" courses to

teach teachers how to liberate students from the archaic systems that enslave both teachers and children. And isn't the very notion of "management" an antiquated concept? Dan Pink insists it is, when talking to business owners who desire innovation. Drawing upon his behavioral science research on what motivates people to think new, Pink suggests that "management" is a tool for compliance and, thus, is contrary to autonomous, creative thinking and innovation (Pink 2009). If Pink is correct and if we want to engage youngsters in critical thinking, shouldn't we stop managing them and start delivering instruction that inspires them to create the new; that engages their intellects; that amplifies their voices?

Or better still, maybe we simply get out of their way and allow them to learn how to act like citizens of a democracy, willing to grapple with the hard questions as well as attend to "all of the bright and dazzling things." In such a scenario, might teachers, then, become inspirational guides, "living the question," not giving the answers—and certainly not relegated as police, meting out punishment in dreary urban "inner-city" schools?

But if we are honest, maybe the real questions we must ask ourselves are:

- Do we really want to *inspire* the progeny of slaves and sharecroppers, the children of recent Black and Brown immigrants, the children in Appalachia?
- Or is our real desire to keep them in a system that will guarantee someone else will pick up our garbage, flip our burgers, dig in the bowels of our mines, pluck the feathers off our chickens, pick our tomatoes sprayed with poisons, and otherwise work for slave wages? Is that the hidden agenda of what we require for "other people's" children?
- Or might we just get out of the way so that our children can lead us back from the edge of the dark?

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Voices of those we cage—and a different kind of witness

by Chaundra L. Whitehead

If there is anywhere in the world where there is a predominance of not only control and subjugation, but also the caging of humans, it exists in prisons in the United States of America. It might shock some of our citizens of the USA that our "leader of the free world" is also the leader of incarceration. The United States has the highest incarceration rate in the world (Tsai & Scommegna, 2012). At the end of 2011, there were about 7 million offenders under the supervision of the adult correctional systems in the United States. This equates to about one in every 34 adult residents in the U.S. being under some form of correctional supervision, which includes incarceration, probation, and parole (Glaze & Parks, 2012). Many of the imprisoned have very little hope to be seen or heard from again, with about 50,000 serving life sentences without the possibility of parole. About 3,000 people are sentenced to death. Given the rates of mass incarceration in the United States, the voices of many, who have suffered unjustly in a court system that is stacked against them (Alexander, 2010; Stevenson, 2012), are missing each day from our workplaces, schools, and communities. These voices are to be found behind bars, unseen and unheard by society because of either frivolous or minor infractions against the laws of a legal system that far more often prosecutes the poor than it does the rich for the same or worse crimes. Too few can or do speak for the imprisoned poor.

For almost 10 years, I have been telling the stories of imprisoned people, as just that, people who are confined to prisons, not inmates, degenerates or criminals, but people. I tell their stories with a distinct inability to do it justice. Witnessing is an act of caring for your fellow human being. Being a true witness requires courage in the face of those who wish to continue to silence the stories of caged individuals.

My first teaching position at a correctional facility arose from a series of fortunate occurrences. I was in a telephone customer service position I greatly

disliked, when we were informed that we were going to be laid off in a couple months. I was excited and saw this as my chance to look for full-time work in adult education. I had been a volunteer tutor at the public library and worked part time at an adult reading center, but now I wanted to find a full-time job that could use the same skills. I saw an advertisement in the local newspaper for an Adult Basic Education Instructor at a nearby prison in the next county. I applied and was offered the position soon after.

I was a novice teacher to say the least. I had only taught in one-on-one settings, now I was going to be responsible for reading, math, and language arts for two classes a day, each three hours long with about 25 incarcerated women on a 4th- to 6th-grade performance level. This was my Adult Basic Education II (ABE II) class. Now what was I going to do with them? No one really told me what to do. There was a two-week training on correctional facility policies and procedures, such as safety, suicide prevention, and key control. That is the typical employee-training program at most correctional facilities. Then I was given a week to do lesson plans and prepare my classroom. Luckily another teacher was hired for ABE II at the same time, so we had each other to bounce ideas around and come up with a plan. We also had to share materials. There was only one class set of most of the books that we both needed, so we coordinated a schedule for the dictionaries and other important books. No matter how much planning a new teacher does, however, we are hardly ever ready. Being ready for my incarcerated students seemed like a different type of ready. Was I truly ready to be a nonjudgmental promoter of learning?

For the first few months I was overwhelmed with lesson plans, grading, attendance form submissions, classes interrupted or cancelled by institutional incidents, standardized test scores, and the general management of 25 personalities at once. Eventually I found my way, and I relied heavily on hands-on-activities with limited supplies, watching videos and having discussions or worksheets to accompany them, division of the class into small groups for activities, plays, and reading aloud. Essentially I tried to do everything, but lecture. If I did need to do whole group direct instruction, it was limited to 20 minutes. With such diverse learning needs and levels in one class, lecture was not the most productive means of instruction. If lecture was the least effective, quiet independent work was a close second. This was the method of choice for many other teachers at the institution, but with low literacy levels, short attention spans, and adult women who may take various medications that cause drowsiness, quiet-time work was limited. But I did find that classical or new age music could lessen the pain of "quiet-time" work.

In my class, there were also lessons on topics that were not in the books on the shelf such as a lesson on propaganda during election time. When each holiday came around, we learned its history and meaning. I offered information that

I believed might broaden their understanding of what was happening in the world around them. I also served as the Literacy Coordinator, providing trainings for those incarcerated women who wanted to become tutors. I created and managed the Lunchtime Tutoring program, which was successful and well received. My position as an ABEII instructor was instrumental in developing my understanding of correctional facilities, criminal justice, and crime.

I enjoyed my work so much that I had the crazy notion of becoming a director or principal of a school in a prison. I was told by my supervising principal, who was retiring, though, that I would need a master's degree to take on the position. Off I went to get a master's degree. Then all of this "prison stuff" I did, took off. For the past five years, I have been a volunteer with Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP), a conflict resolution training program offered to incarcerated people. Whether conduction research or being a volunteer, AVP is an organization for which I would choose to work precisely because whatever the role, the AVP program promotes dialogue, empathy, and community building. They engage the prisoner as a fellow human being.

Many people do not feel comfortable working in or visiting prison facilities. Some AVP volunteers have come once and not returned. When teaching at a prison full time, I remember the high teacher turnover rate. I always felt that some of these people who chose not to return, did so not out of fear, but because they recognized the hypocrisy and inequality which existed inside the prisons. Nothing like the society script they had been told about prison turned out to be true. The prison was simply not the humane rehabilitation facility they had expected.

Why do we believe that we should be fearful in a correctional setting? Because that is the script that has been told to us. Certainly, timidity is not a useful quality for working in a correctional setting, but when has timidity been useful anywhere? People respond to bold authenticity. Some qualities that are valued in correctional facilities, much like anywhere else in society, seemed most often to be honesty, sincerity, and humor. As an educator moving and working in that space, I became aware of the contradictions and flaws ever present. Yet I began to understand that I was accountable to the people who live in those cells, to tell their stories as a counter narrative to the dominant script. I have visited several prisons in different parts of the country, and they can be quiet or loud. In either scenario, though, no one's real voice is heard.

Way too often I see the phrase "Lock them up and throw away the key," in news story comments online. I wonder if the people who use this phrase have ever really stopped to think of the implications of removing someone from society for life, especially for nonviolent offenses or even worse, conspiracy charges, which often equates to no real charge, just a suspicion of involvement in something the power structure finds offensive.

How has America become number one in harsh, often inhumane, punitive treatment of fellow human beings, without the public registering outrage or demonstrating shame by this statistical abomination? Of course, after the pictures of our nation's torture of international prisoners suspected as terrorists, why would I ask that question?

Nevertheless, as a nation we seem to choose to believe the scripts we have been told over the years about crime. We choose to believe that we are safer locking everybody up; that crime is out of control; that harsher punishments are needed. And, of course, the best story ever told is that we needed a war on drugs. But the media seems to be rampant with deception, misinformation, covering up of injustices, pandering to privilege and oppression.

Experience in a correctional facility and dialogue with an incarcerated person or someone returning home after incarceration often reveals the truth that many of them are not much different from us. The dominant language we are accustomed to hearing and speaking has been used to diminish the stories of incarcerated people and reframe them as less than human, revolting, unintelligent. For, often we hear the adage that if the imprisoned were intelligent, they would get away with "it" as many other Americans do each day—like the gang on Wall Street. I would argue that the defining factor is not intelligence but power and money. As Bryan Stevenson, lawyer, Founder and Executive Director of the Equal Justice Initiative, said in a Ted Talk (2012), "We have a system of justice in [the US] that treats you much better if you're rich and guilty than if you're poor and innocent. Wealth, not culpability, shapes outcomes."

Those outcomes limit the ability of millions of people to think and create. In our nation's prisons, individual needs, thoughts, and ideas are not valued, encouraged, or rewarded. How is this rehabilitation? When thinking skills are continually reduced, how is an incarcerated person to develop the skills they need to have a successful return to society? Contrary to society's distortions about the humanity of people it chooses to cage like animals in a zoo, worth and value are actually abundant in the prisons where I've worked. Surprisingly, in the most oppressive and repressive human conditions, creativity still manages to flourish. I hear the voices of incarcerated people who find a way to write and speak from behind the walls. I see them read and reflect. I witness acts of kindness between them.

Squandering talent through the use of serving long sentences seems unproductive and a waste of human potential. I experienced this waste once when I was assigned a teacher's aide, Heather, who was a professional woman, excellent with accounting and convicted of some fraudulent activities which gained her a 10-year sentence. At the end of the 10 years, she was expected to find a job, hope her skill set was still relevant, and earn enough money to pay restitution. She was an excellent teacher's aide, managed my gradebook, helped students one-on-one, and kept the class tidy. Yet I always thought it was such a waste of

that she was there grading the student papers instead of contributing to rger society outside the prison walls. I was thankful, though, that she was to maintain some of her professional skills. At the time, I truly felt that she d teach the class, so why was she incarcerated for 10 years, rather than a er sentence, and more community-based restorative justice strategies?

rned that she was there because the more money a person steals, the lon- they are expected to be banished from society. Fortunately she did her e and was released. Soon after release, she contacted me to tell me she on this side of freedom, and within two weeks, she had a job and pur- sed a car. As we chatted online, I was so excited to read that she had been en an opportunity. Heather was motivated and she had a great support tem. She also provided a glimmer of hope for the work I do by stating ou had an impact on me at the very beginning. I always told my family w much I enjoyed working for you because it felt like a normal working lationship. I enjoyed our lunchtime discussions. Having just come to prison was nice to be able to have intelligent conversations." Incidents like this ntinually persuade me that most people want to be acknowledged and eard, regardless of their circumstances. Why should a criminal conviction nder a person unworthy of the most basic conversational exchange?

When I left working at the prison, I tried to make a quiet exit. I told my class ne day before I planned to leave that I did not want them to plot a surprise arty, or have time to get too sad. But that plan failed. On my last day, at the nd of class, I had one student who stood there looking at me, crying and sking why I had to go. Who, she asked, was she going to talk to? And who would fill the void. As she stood there, with the heavy weight of sadness, I iolated my employee protocols and gave her a hug.

The AVP program had the opportunity to hold a full day workshop inside the prison, where dozens of outside AVP people came to have training and dia- logue with the inside people. I overheard one person questioning "Are they always this happy?" Soon she got up the nerve to comment to one of the inside facilitators about how happy everyone seemed and the response was "Just because this is prison doesn't mean we go around sad every day." Soci- ety would have us believe the people who have made mistakes do not deserve happiness, joy, accomplishment, or any of the other positive emotions repre- senting the human condition. Some people do have hard days, great sadness, remorse, and regret, but we will never know the dimensions of their human- ness unless incarcerated people are allowed to have a voice. Stevenson insists that he believes that a murderer is not just a murderer; a thief is not just a thief. Most humans, he suggests, are multifaceted, complex beings. Certainly those were the ambiguous dimensions that I observed in the prisons. Granted there are recalcitrant, who probably might cause us to challenge this belief, but those were not the people with whom I came in contact.