PART 5

The problem is cultural

I still believe the problem is cultural, but it is larger than the children or their teachers . . . the cultural framework of our country has, almost since its inception, dictated that "black" is bad and less than and in all arenas "white" is good and superior. This perspective is so ingrained and so normalized that we all stumble through our days with eyes closed to avoid seeing it. We miss the pain in our children's eyes when they have internalized the societal belief that they are dumb, unmotivated, and dispensable.

—Lisa Delpit, Multiplication is for white people: Raising the expectations for other people's children

Dealing with whiteness to empower students to fight for common good

by Mary Alison Burger

> The collective struggle presupposes collective responsibility . . . Yes, everybody will have to be compromised in the fight for common good . . . there are no innocents and no onlookers. We all have dirty hands; we are all soiling them in the swamps of our country and in the terrifying emptiness of our brains. Every onlooker is either a coward or a traitor (Fanon, 1968, p. 199).

I am an upper-middle-class, college-educated white woman. I say that first because it is a vitally important signifier when discussing issues regarding race, class, and gender. It is important because it frames my entire reality. It is important because it requires a constant, tireless vigilance, to check, and recheck my privilege, my perspective, and my input on issues that do not affect me directly. It is vital to make sure that I am not engaging in the very oppression I am trying to oppose. I am an upper-middle-class, college-educated white woman, and I am doing the best that I can to combat, as an educator, what critical educational scholar, Joan Wynne (2012), identifies as the "isms," of sexism, racism, and classism, through a tireless advocacy for an "anti-oppressive" education (Shim, 2012).

If I ever encounter a person of my ethnicity claiming to be completely void of racism, I am immediately suspicious of them because I believe it is not possible. It is not possible because the entire premise of our U.S. history is constructed around the ideas of white male privilege, imperialism, and a "pernicious" white hegemonic dominance that is pervasive in every corner of our existence, particularly in that of education (Castagno 2013). It is not possible, because as a white person, I am bombarded with both active and passive racist messages, suggestions, and acculturation from the moment I am born. I am surrounded by encryptions of racism in day-to-day life that encourage me to keep in place institutional structures that, every day, limit people of color's upward mobility and civic participation in a social environment. Jenna Shim. in her article

"Pierre Bourdieu and intercultural education: It is not just about lack of knowledge about others," (2012) notes "We are not the sole authors of our perceptions, thoughts, and (re)actions because we are all inescapably constituted within a variety of historically constituted social and political discourses (p. 213)." As extensions of a past full of slavery, oppression, Jim Crow and segregation, we are *all* agents in the *habitus* (p. 213) of racism. It is hardwired into our history, so, it seems to me that probably no white person can *truly* be "above" racism. There is no such thing. So what now?

Coming to terms with my role in the African-American liberation movement has garnered some honest and challenging questions: What can I do? Where does a young white woman fit in this struggle for equity? What can I *truly* do to join my black brothers and sisters in this fight to free America from racism, without getting in their way? Wynne perfectly captures and identifies the "schizophrenic conundrum," of being a white antiracist, trying to, as she aptly puts, "finding-while-fighting my place in the national scheme of white supremacy—snarled in the web of veiled utterances that protect it" (p. xiii). She asks a question I have asked myself over and over. "How do I disentangle my tongue twisted for decades in making sounds sustained for hundreds of years in the dismissive dominant discourse?" (p. xiii). I believe the answer to her question is an intensely complicated one beyond the scope of this essay, but there are two simple things that I *do* know that have led me to some form of action—first and foremost, racism is a white issue, and what I mean by this is, it is an issue of white people, either blatantly ignoring, or lacking knowledge and sensitivity to the historical mistreatment, discrimination, oppression, liberation, rebellions, and triumphs of African-Americans that are still pervasive today.

Secondly, as a white woman I have white privilege, a tool that I can use to my advantage, as it grants me the accessibility to talk to other white people about these issues. Knowing these things, I've developed a boundless sense of personal responsibility, to use my accumulated knowledge as tools to attempt to break down these hegemonic structures, and an understanding that it is my duty to use my privilege as a platform for advocacy rather than one of oppression. I feel that the most sinister acts of racism are not those enacted out of ignorance, but out of knowing better, and opting instead to stay silent and allow injustices to continue. As Frantz Fanon's quote in the heading states "*Every onlooker is either a coward or a traitor.*"

I feel my role in this struggle is to do what my brothers and sisters of color might not do, for fear of being type-cast as the social trope of "the angry black individual" (vis-à-vis the symbolism of Richard Wright's (2005) character of Bigger Thomas in *Native Son*). It is my position to be as belligerent and

vocal about these issues as possible, to speak out, and speak up, and to interrupt the cultural pervasiveness of racism at every opportunity that I can.

Naturally learning to be an antiracist is not an overnight metamorphosis, but a constant and ongoing learning process that requires a large degree of patience, listening, and humility. There is an important and necessary amount of research and background knowledge that must be in place, in order to be an effective agent for change. Avoiding neo-liberalism, paternalism, projection, and being prepared to own up to an error is a studious and ongoing practice.

I was fortunate enough to have been raised by a mother who encouraged me from the moment I had a blood-beating heart that every human life is of equal value irrespective of any kind of "difference" they may have. Although this ideological and egalitarian belief was certainly over simplistic and lacking critical finesse, as my mother was not an academic, she was the catalyst that ultimately ignited, in me, an overwhelming and powerful indignation for bigotry of any kind that followed me into adulthood.

Still though, I have stumbled along throughout my own journey, misspoken, misunderstood, and made embarrassing mistakes. As an undergraduate, I entered into the University of Florida, staunchly vocal about my opposition to any form of discrimination, and quickly began to recognize that my passion and outspokenness for social justice issues sacrificed my likability among my white peers. Because of this, I began to gravitate to the black community, sharing a situation similar to the one Dr. Joan Wynne (2012) explains in her Introduction to *Confessions of a White Educator: Stories in search of justice and diversity*:

> Because my parents philosophically stood against racism and segregation, as a family we lived in contradiction to the society we were born into. No one . . . seemed to share the same world view. Although my white skin advantaged and protected me, I became accustomed to feeling intellectually and politically alienated . . . only in the black community could I have possibly found a large number of like-minded people (p. xi).

As a voracious reader and writer, whose very soul resides in literature, I eventually found myself in a performance poetry organization, to which I was the only white member. Sharing an equal love for language, the members became not just my close friends but my family. We performed not only on campus, but within the Gainesville community, almost always at all African-American events. I entered these situations with a common, misguided belief that many young white people harbor, that being an anti-racist means being "color blind," an ignorant and naïve concept that if we ignore race altogether, ergo racism will vanish with it. Oftentimes, this subject would

come up at length, and I was frequently confronted with discussions, exchanges, questions, and sometimes outright confrontations about race. I was blessed to receive tutelage from several African-American mentors willing to explain to me, at length, the things that, as a white woman, I just could never understand. It became obvious to me quickly that race was not something that one could just "ignore" and that my concept of colorblind sameness was just as damaging, if not more so, than the acts of blatant racism to which I was so opposed.

So I listened. I listened and I learned. I didn't know it at the time, but these conversations would become the cornerstone of a platform for equity that I would carry with me for life. One that recognized that colorblind sameness was not preventing racism, but promoting it, by pretending it does not happen; something I could opt to do as a white person, but someone of color cannot. One that recognized a glaring characteristic of privilege, a blindness to itself; and one that recognized that a truly equitable world is not one of homogeneousness and uniformity, or colorblind sameness, but one that embraces all cultural identities, while granting them equity and opportunity in every conceivable way. These were all powerful lessons, ones that I owe my deepest gratitude to my friends for having the patience to share with me. It illustrates that the knowledge that I hold so dear is not information that I have come upon by accident and demonstrates the necessity of listening and learning in order to truly operate as an agent for change. But even now I am still learning. This essay itself is a careful reflection and amassment of all I have learned so far, and I am not nearly done, I will never be done.

To me, it is a devastating injustice that amongst white communities, our environment is so saturated in discriminatory practice that consciousness is more elusive than ignorance. It is a loathsome truth that I did not have to directly address race or its social consequences until I chose to do so. I feel that this is a gross reflection of negligence that permeates how we are educating our young people. So I have decided that a second component and responsibility to my role as a white antiracist, is to work towards, as Shim (2012) puts, an "anti-oppressive" education, or one geared towards deconstructing these damaging narratives.

While I acknowledged above that racism is a "white" issue, and that it is important as a white anti-racist to continually reach out to white people, I also feel that another area where I need to explore is why we are consistently failing our black and brown youth in our schools. So I want to teach, and I want to teach the disenfranchised. I want to teach NOT because I want to "save people." I am not a moral imperialist; I am not "the white savior," and

this is not a *Freedom Writers'* essay. Those notions, I believe, are paternalistic. I want to teach because I want young people to have the education they deserve. I want to teach because I have an understanding that education will inspire young people to demand change where it needs to happen and because this kind of educational foundation should be mandatory for all students. I want to teach because as Shim (2012) states "The field of education functions in such a way as to reproduce and legitimize class/racial inequalities and maintain status quo since the educational credentials are held mostly by those already in dominant positions (p. 214)."

It is my belief that for students to be successful, they need an educator sensitive to the obstacles they face. Students need more teachers that understand fully the societal barriers that are preventing youth from reaching their potential. There is a desperate need for educators who have a detailed comprehension of these barriers and an understanding of strategies to overcome them. I believe in exploring research and practice that provide me with the skillset to guarantee the success of my students, not only scholastically, but intellectually, and professionally. I am convinced that remaining on a personal and intellectual learning curve, I will be able to enhance students' ability to self-actualize and overcome systemic limitations through consciousness. I hope that, through my own modeling of life-long learning, I can inspire a passion for learning in other students of life and academics that will arm them for success for the rest of their lives. As my hero, and favorite author, Fanon (1968) stated in his famous canonical work, *Wretched of the Earth*:

> To educate the masses politically does not mean, cannot mean, making a political speech. What it means is to try, relentlessly and passionately, to teach the masses that everything depends on them; that if we stagnate it is their responsibility, and that if we go forward, it is due to them too . . . that there is no famous man who will take the responsibility for everything . . . the magic hands are finally only the hands of the people (p. 197).

Holding a similar philosophy as Fanon, Civil Rights icon and President of the Algebra Project, Bob Moses, encourages grassroots people, students, parents, and teachers to make a demand on schools and society to deliver quality education to every mother's child (2001). Again, like Fanon, Moses (2001) insists "that in the long run they themselves are the only protection they have against violence or injustice . . . they cannot look for salvation anywhere but to themselves" (p. 33). I will be using my summer to study, research, and work with local youth in the Algebra Project because I want to learn how to empower myself and others to raise our voices and actions, to work our "magic hands," and to demand justice in a society that still sees "constitutional people as constitutional property!" (Moses 2010).

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Listening to students: Stories from the Education Effect

by Maria Lovett

As the Preface of this book requests, let me begin by being *specific*—I have so much to learn. Each day I unpack my own white obliviousness, question my privileges and also attempt to, as Bob Moses, Civil Rights icon and founder of the Algebra Project says, "keep on pushin" in the struggle against hegemony. I am part of the Education Effect, a university community school partnership in Promise City[1] Unpacking my privilege is wrapped tightly to the story of being schooled by the brilliant young minds I have been so fortunate to work with, come to know and learn from.

October 2013. It was a few days before the ribbon cutting of our new Aquaponics Lab and Organic Garden—what we now refer to as the "Living Classroom"; and the students were busy planting trees, bushes and vegetables, feeding the fish and testing the alkaline levels of the water. One of the high school students explained to me how the system works, as I, a professor in education, had no clue. He explained:

> Aquaponics is the combination of aquaculture, growing fish, and hydroponics, the soilless growing of plants. We are raising 250 tilapia in each tank, and the waste from the fish is filtered through the system and fertilizes the large crop of herbs and vegetables growing above. We test the water quality checking Ph and carbon dioxide levels and monitor the nitrogen cycle to insure the fish live and the plants grow.

We then walked through the garden of over 100 plants representing 13 different species native to Florida. "This is cluisa—also called the autograph tree because you can write your name on the leaves, this is moringa, a highly nutritious plant native to Florida, that we call a super food," another student explained. Two butterflies zipped by and a bee landed on my sleeve. "You

[1] All names of locations and individuals have been changed except for Bob Moses.

know that bee wouldn't have been here a few weeks ago—the butterflies either. There were no bees or butterflies around here. They are here now because we planted that milkweed over there. And the lemon grass. . ."

"Things are changing?" I asked.
"Yep. Promise City won't be a food desert for long," a student chimed in.

The back yard of the school—what once was an empty lot, occupied by dilapidated portable classrooms and cars lined up for sports practice—was transforming—and so were we all.

I am not an agroecologist or environmentalist and until this program and these students I had never heard of "aquaponics." Three and a half years ago, I became the director of the Education Effect—my university's university community school partnership with a local high school in a neighborhood, forced to live in poverty, in an urban city of America. Collaborating with the community, schools, students, and parents, the partnership aligns university resources and opportunities to address the pressing educational and social needs of students at the high school and its feeder schools. The Education Effect resonates with the mutual understanding that our university's future and the future of school district's disenfranchised communities and schools are connected.

The goal of the partnership is to support 100 percent student graduation from high school and see every student ready to be successful in college and pursue careers of their choice. While it is understood that not every student may wish to pursue college or university, this should be a result of individual choice—not institutional barriers. To achieve our goals—we believe, as the story above shares, the work often involves us adults stepping aside, and becoming students to such brilliant young people.

Inequity in our public education system is evident and pervasive. Access to resources, high quality instruction, a safe and inspiring learning environment is not equally accessible for all our children (Wynne & Giles, 2010). Low-income students are more likely than middle and high-income students to fall behind in academics, score low on standardized tests and drop out of school. In addition, poor students are more likely to attend schools that have significantly less academic support and per pupil funding (Southern Education Foundation, 2013). According to a 40-year study by the Southern Education Foundation, in 1970, 40 percent of students from the highest income quartile graduated from college. In 2012, it was roughly 80 percent. For students in the bottom income quartile in 1970, 7 percent graduated with a B.A. In 2012, it was only 9 percent. In other words, as Bob Moses (2014) stated, for poor students, it hasn't budged.

In our state, 56 percent of public school children qualify for free or reduced lunch, 74 percent in our county, in the community where our partnership began it is 90 percent, and at our high school it is even higher (SEF 2013,

district data). When we began the Education Effect in 2011, the graduation rate at the school was 64 percent; it now hovers at 80 percent. An accomplishment yes, but our students still struggle to graduate "college ready" (prepared to meet standard admission requirements for college acceptance without remediation). While 75 percent of students are now "college ready" in reading (up from 52 percent in 2012), only 35 percent of students graduate "college ready" in math. Both reading and math scores are requisites for college admission.

The Education Effect partnership had been in place for five months when I began. Working with disenfranchised students struggling in a broken system on a daily basis made it impossible to deny that indeed Jim Crow was alive and flourishing. In less than one week on the job, I was acutely aware that this work would transform *me*, and that I had much to learn; but what could be achieved for the students was so uncertain when the institutional barriers were so high and the smog of hegemony so thick. Early on, issues of concern included the metaphors we were using and the language we were speaking such as "addressing the achievement gap" and "transforming the community." There wasn't an achievement gap; there was an opportunity gap. Or more accurately, let's stop talking about gaps, and as Moses (2001) has indicated, change the metaphor all together, and talk about "raising the floor" for all children to succeed.

Typical thinking around university engagement too often reflects the propensity to lead community engagement. Instead, the emphasis should be on allowing the community, the students in these schools to lead, asking them to pose the questions and seek the solutions. I understood we could transform ourselves, but is it our role to transform or suggest that we are the agents in transforming others? Paolo Freire (1970) speaks to transforming *our* world, not *theirs*. In the Education Effect, we needed a serious shift in our thinking if we thought our goal was to change the school, the community. Learning from the Southern Freedom Movement's grassroots organizing tradition (Moses, 2001), I began to understand that not only is this view self-righteous, but it objectifies the work already happening. So I started looking deeper, opening myself up to learning from the students on the ground, in the school.

In January 2012, my first week, a colleague and I were asked to cover a dual enrollment class (where high school students take college courses in high school for college credit) in public speaking. The disconnect between the university academic calendar and the district's schedule left these students in limbo for three weeks. So my colleague and I volunteered to substitute for the remaining weeks, and framed the content of our mini unit around Bob Moses' call for a campaign to guarantee quality education as a constitutional right for all children. After I explained an activity and the students moved into their groups, Matthew, a senior in the class came up to me and said, with

courtesy, "With all due respect, this is a public speaking class, and I just want to point out that you say 'um' a lot. Not sure if you noticed that so I thought I would let you know."

"I didn't realize that actually, thanks," I answered, and I am sure, blushed. As I left that class I thought, "Wow, I am about to be the student to these high school kids and I have so much to learn! I've been working on my "ums" in my public speaking ever since. Lesson #1.

It was not long before I realized what was missing in the partnership's discourse, in its praxis. We were ignoring the "elephant in the classroom," or in this case, "the elephant" in our university community school partnership (Wynne, 2005). Frankly, the demon in the room that wasn't being named was institutionalized racism. As a white educator, I echo the sentiments of Joan Wynne in *Confessions of a white educator* (2012), that we have an obligation and responsibility as white reformers and researchers to name the demon of race and racism, and not expect black people to do this. We need to name the hegemonic structures that form institutionalized racism, which cripples these communities and our kids (Wynne, 2012). If you don't name it, don't face it, you can't change it, including the changes that need to happen within ourselves.

In an interview with *The Real News* program *Reality Asserts Itself*, Bob Moses explained: "The Civil Rights movement of the 60's got Jim Crow out of three areas: public accommodation, the right to vote and the national democratic party structure . . . but we didn't get it out of education" (2014). If, indeed, the new Jim Crow is alive and flourishing, and we were to implement a partnership called the "education *effect*," we needed a very different approach than just making connections between the university resources and the community/school needs and vice versa. To be successful, we needed to reflect the urgency of educational inequality and inequity in this historic community. We needed to adopt processes that would strategically address the needs of all children, particularly those most often pushed to the bottom. "I think the strongest political idea embedded in this work is the idea that if you can really bring about any kind of change at the bottom, it is going to change everything" (Moses, 2001, p. 188). We learned from Moses that the fight for quality education for all our children is the constitutional and civil rights issue of our time. Thus, as we began to implement the Education Effect we adapted our model to reflect the grassroots approach offered by Ella Baker, Moses, and the organizing tradition of the Southern Freedom Movement.

Although not funded by the seed investment to the Education Effect, we leveraged the partnership; and in 2012, the district and the high school Principal committed to build upon the eight-year partnership of the local College of Education with the Algebra Project (AP) by creating a new AP site at the

high school with a cohort of 34 in-coming ninth graders, all of whom were low performers. In fall, 2013, the high school added three more ninth-grade AP cohorts and in 2014, an additional three cohorts. Because, AP in cities as diverse as Los Angeles to Ypsilanti, Michigan, has a 30-year success rate with students caught at the bottom of academic achievement (NSF report), our coalition agreed that expanding the university/AP collaborative would be a win-win for Promise City. AP's insistence on "serving up accelerated mathematics and experiential pedagogy to struggling students, instruction typically reserved for 'gifted" programs' (Wynne, 2010), caught the imagination of the Principal for the students. That insistence is congruent with the Education Effect's mission to co-create and give the best to those who previously have been denied academic quality.

Furthermore, AP's commitment to engage parents and the community in the education of their children is totally consistent with our partnership's vision of engagement. And, of course, the Algebra Project's insistence that they are getting youth ready, not just to graduate from high school, but also to be ready to do college math for college credit (PBS, 2006) echoes our desire to propel our community's students toward academic excellence. But collaborating with and learning from the Algebra Project, pedagogy and Bob Moses gave the Education Effect much more than just the AP program. Moses' ideas gave us a philosophical framework and tangible concepts to inform all aspects of the Education Effect. Thus, the implementation of our work was guided in particular by the following principles: (1) High quality, equitable, and equal access to education is the constitutional and civil rights issue of our time. (2) Students are at the center, making "the demand" for their own quality, equitable education. (3) The work is a process, not an event (Moses, 2001). (4) Students are positioned as "knowledge workers" and adopting the "Each One Teach One" (2001) pedagogy, instruction that is essential throughout all our initiatives.

Quality Education as a Constitutional Right

I was driving with a student to a community meeting about a proposal for a Wi-Fi program in the largest public housing development in the state, located across the street from the high school. James is a high school senior and lives in the neighborhood. He is very vocal about the need for access to the Internet and technology and the impact the so-called digital divide or more accurately the "digital desert" has on his education. He was attending the community meeting to speak on behalf of students. As we waited at the traffic light, we were stopped by a convoy of trucks, the SWAT team, and over a dozen officers in full riot gear.

"Geeze, this is just like a page out of *The New Jim Crow by Michelle Alexander*," I muttered to John.

"I'm not sure what you mean by that, but they are about to go bust down some doors," John said.

"This happen often?" I asked.

"Yep . . . (He laughed, I assumed, at my naiveté).

"The use of the police as a military force in communities like Promise City was created due to the War on Drugs. See that book I am reading? It is highlighted right there," I said, pointing to the book.

John read the passage. "Dr. Lovett, this isn't new to me, I could have told you that myself."

"Yep," I thought, "You live it. I read it in books."

High quality, equitable, and equal access to education is the constitutional and civil rights issue of our time. Education is a right, not a privilege and a sense of urgency and attention to this macro-narrative drives our work. This framework and understanding speaks deeply to the contemporary crisis of what is so often referred to as "the school to prison pipeline." Moses refers to today's education as sharecropper education (2001). Poor youth and youth of color are given an education that is equivalent to an eighth grade education. This prevents access to college and to economic stability. He sees a parallel with registering sharecroppers to vote in the 1960s with young people today. In an interview with NPR Moses asks:

> . . . Who are the constitutional people in the country? Over the course of 2 and ¼ centuries, we have managed in spite or ourselves, to extend the reach of that concept to larger and larger classes of adults. What we haven't figured out is how to extend that to the youth of our country. These kids spend most of their time in school. So this is how they relate to the country. So the country needs to figure out how it relates to them . . . The sharecroppers we worked with were the serfs of the industrial age. So, if we are turning kids out of high schools that have the equivalent of an 8th grade education, then in effect we are setting them up for the serfdom of the information age. Those people in the plantations, they were hidden, out of sight, and they suffered quietly. These kids will not suffer quietly (O'Connor, 2014).

If the Education Effect intended to focus its mission on a commitment to seeing youth as constitutional people, with the right to a quality education, we had to ask ourselves what does that look like? This led us to interrogate the next principle: Young people making the demand.

The Demand

According to Moses, young people have to work the demand. Students are at the center. Our goal is to raise the voices of the heretofore silenced and to amplify students' own language (Wynne, 2012). "Young people finding their voice instead of being spoken for is a crucial part of the process. . . We believe the kind of systemic change necessary to prepare our young people for the demands of the twenty-first century requires young people to take the lead in changing it" (Moses, 2001, p. 19). To support "the demand," the Education Effect shifted from being advocates *for* the students. Rather, we sought to facilitate spaces and opportunities where the youth could be positioned to make this demand themselves. Students began to see themselves as a part of something bigger, demanding the ability to obtain a high quality education not just for themselves, but to serve their community.

> Shanika: I am the first person in my family to attend college. Because of The Education Effect, you see kids talking about college, talking about being ready to go and start a new life. It's really touching because a lot of people are like: 'Oh you're not going to be anything, look at where you are from.' And to change that misconception is really, really good. Now, walking the streets of [the community] and my neighborhood where I grew up, I realize that I am the future of [the city] (personal interview, The Education Effect video).

Clearly for her, it is not about getting out. It is about being a part of the change that young people want to see in their community.

Working the demand is probably the most essential aspect of the work, and it is also the most challenging. Here, the pollution of hegemony and power dynamics in the schools, in society; are obstacles for students. For example, there was recent chatter about gang activity in the community that was impacting the ninth graders. The kids knew about it. Many wanted help. Some kids were even getting into fights because their names were being attached to a group they were not a part of. But, when a teacher asked why they didn't tell the administration at the school, the students said, "Ah no, then *we* might get suspended." Whether that is true or not, that is the perception of the students. The school system is not a safe space. The popular rhetoric is that the students are afraid of "snitching." However, maybe, it isn't about snitching. Possibly, once again, it is we adults who are letting the students down. Not providing the safe space, not listening deeply, so that students can advocate and make the demand for safety, for an education, for the pursuit of happiness.

> Everyone said sharecroppers were apathetic until we got them demanding to vote. That finally got attention. Here, where kids are failing wholesale through the cracks or chasms; dropping out of sight; becoming fodder for jails; people say they do not want to learn. The only ones who can dispel that notion are

> the kids themselves. They, like Mrs. Hamer, Mrs. Devine, E. W. Steptoe, and others who changed the political face of Mississippi in the 1960s, have to demand what everyone says they don't want (Moses, 2001, p. 17).

I was reminded of Moses sharecropper analogy one morning at the high school when the ninth-grade Algebra Project teacher asked if I was available for lunch. Travis, a student in her third block had requested a meeting. "Sure," I said, "What's it about?"

The teacher answered, "He has some concerns with the class and wants to talk about it."

I went to McDonald's (per his request) to pick up lunch, and we met in my office. Travis, a small skinny 14-year-old didn't say much at first. Nor did he touch his lunch. Anxious about his silence, I asked, "So we are here to discuss some things happening in the class? What is upsetting you?"

Finally he said, it's Ms. K. (Ms. K. is a part of a service corps organization that places young adults in urban schools as mentors and teacher assistants.) The Algebra Project teacher indicated that Ms. K and Travis had some confrontations in the class.

"She's always 'agging on me. . . and gets too close, and asks me a question and won't even give me time to answer. I need a minute okay?'" he blurted out.

It was important to Travis to explain to his teacher why he "was acting up" in class. But, he demanded that his side be heard too. He reflected on what might make the relationship work better. "Maybe if she knew more about me," he offered. "But she has to be more patient too. It's not like I always have to share my story, you know?"

The teacher and Travis came up with a plan to address his needs. Travis took his lunch and headed back to the courtyard for the end of the lunch period. "How come he didn't eat his lunch?" I asked the teacher. She replied, "Because he wanted to find his sister and split it with her." I am the learner, again,

The Work is Process Based, Not Event Based

"Ella Baker spent her entire life trying to 'change the system.' Somewhere along the way she recognized that her goal was not a single 'end' but rather an ongoing 'means,' that is a process. Radical change for Ella Baker was about a persistent and protracted process of discourse, debate, consensus, reflection, and struggle" (Ransby, 2003, p. 1). In a national, local, school and university world that emphasizes metrics and outcomes, it is hard not to be distracted by focusing on "the event." But heeding the works of Baker and Moses, our project emphasized that this is a collaborative partnership that fluctuates to meet the

ever-changing needs of our students and the community. It is simultaneously addressing both personal experiences and systemic change. The processes are illustrated not in rhetoric, but in action. And, despite pacing guides and measurable outcomes, as Moses says, sometimes you have to "slow the bus down" (Wynne, 2009, p. 92) so everyone can get on board.

One of the best examples of understanding the concept of the work as a process, not an event, includes involving parents. I'm pretty certain that every education program has something written about "increasing parental engagement." But, what does that look like? As an educator working with both preservice and current teachers, I am frequently frustrated by the repeated banter of "blaming the parents." As we strive to recognize the brilliance and experience of our students, are we doing the same to recognize the gifts our parents bring to the process? Do we honor their lived experience, so often struggling against social and economic barriers that prevent what hegemonic institutions typically define as "involvement?" Do we pause, make space, and provide opportunities to learn from our parents? Do we visit them in their communities or do we demand that they come to the school?

Schools host parent "events" throughout the year, but they are hardly engaging. Outside of "Back to School Night" where parents meet with their child's teachers, parent nights typically consist of mandatory meetings held in an auditorium where parents sign in and watch a prescriptive PowerPoint on what it takes for their students to graduate, be successful, and so on. In true hegemonic fashion, parents and their children are talked to, not with, and little space for dialogue is included. Do we ever ask parents "what they thought or wanted to do about their children's education?" (Wynne p. 230). Typically, no, and after the last slide, everyone scurries out the door; another parent night, check.

At our high school, we tried some alternative methods such as a family night in the garden, where the school jazz band played; the culinary program cooked a meal based on ingredients from the garden; and students, demonstrating their knowledge, led the guests through the Aquaponics labs. We were gathering enthusiasm; the attendance was growing. They were nice events. But that was the problem, they were just events. And only nice. We weren't really making progress on equity in education, on collaboration, on engagement, on talking about the tough stuff that impacted their children. We weren't creating opportunities to learn from the parents.

We managed to experience small successes with the Algebra Project. We were preparing for our third cohort of students. It was the spring of 2014, and we collaborated with the principal of the Middle School to host an Algebra Project information night for parents and students. Under Moses's direction, we soon realized that we were not going to host an information session; rather, students would demonstrate the information. About 10 current

Algebra Project students set up workstations around the school's media center. Immediately, before there was a "welcome" or "introductions" or anything else typically found on an agenda, the guests, parents, and students, were greeted by an AP student at the door and were given an explanation of what was happening around the room. The parents and the students were led to individual stations where they engaged in the math lesson (height charters, polynomials, road coloring, graphing calculators, etc.) taught by one of the current 9th or 10th grade AP students. It was miraculous. Parents asked probing questions to the students and made comments such as: "Wish I had learned math this way." Or "You really know and understand what you are talking about don't you?" The event was a success. Over 40 parents, students, community members, and teachers attended.

But, we missed the mark again. We didn't embrace the principle that this is a process not an event. We had hoped to use this "event" as an opportunity to recruit a new in-coming ninth grade cohort to participate in our summer induction program. We made phone calls, sent flyers, and visited homes asking students to participate in our Algebra Project summer induction program. That included facilitation from Moses, the new AP math teacher, six visiting teachers from Ireland who were interested in learning more about the Algebra Project and FIU graduate students who would facilitate lessons on science and civics. Despite all, our efforts and what we thought sounded like a great program, despite many enthusiastic responses to our invitation, on the first day participation was minimal. We were missing the parent advocate.

Enter Angela Mays. While we have been blessed to know and work with Ms. Mays for the last few years, it was in the summer of 2014, when she met Bob Moses that our relationship with her became a game changer. When we began the 2014 summer induction program for our third cohort of Algebra Project students, only five kids showed up. Moses and Mays hit the streets, making home visits, and spending time in the community with students and families. By the end of the week, we had 25 in-coming ninth graders (20 boys and 5 girls) showing up every day, on time, even early and engaged. Angela Mays is our city's Fannie Lou Hammer. Mays is a resident of the historical Black community we serve and grew up in both that community as well as the oldest Black community in the city. She is a mother, grandmother, and auntie to almost every child in the community. Mays is the founder of a community wide parental engagement organization, and she graciously taught us that, "It's on us to get to know parents." By the end of the week, we had parents volunteering in the class and asking the football coach to require their football-playing son to come to the summer institute before attending practice. So, yes, it is a process not an event that will make the change we want to see in the world.

Students as knowledge workers + "Each One Teach One"

Positioning students as knowledge workers, employed as often as possible, for using their knowledge guided the project's work. Students engaged in the "each one teach one" model, originally designed by AP and the Young People's Project, where youth teach their peers, younger students, even parents and other adults. It became the signature of the Education Effects philosophy. Applying this principle contributed to the exponential growth and reach of our Aquaponics Lab and Organic Garden. Supporting students' interest and mastery in sciences and bringing the classroom "to life," we established the most comprehensive Aquaponics Lab in the county; positioning students as action researchers addressing urgent issues around health, food justice, and sustainability.

Camilla, a recent graduate of the school, who is now studying bioengineering at another university reported:

> We would come across plant problems such as nematodes, which destroyed our tomatoes. So, we planted a counter plant [so the tomatoes could grow]. I went to New Mexico to attend the Rooted in Community Conference, where I learned skills and concepts about food justice and protesting, along with the intergenerational richness in education [Referring here to The Rooted Conference's involvement in conversations and collaborations with Native American elders in the community]. We want to see changes in our community, and we desire to have the necessary skills to do so (personal correspondence).

The lab and garden have become a centerpiece for experiential learning across a variety of disciplines including science, art, and design, culinary arts and civic engagement. A science teacher wrote:

> Students have taken ownership of their projects . . . Parents come up to me and say, 'I know exactly what my son learned today because he came home and told me all about it and now we are growing our own herbs.' They are not just leaving their knowledge at the school; they have been bringing it home with them to their community and have spread the knowledge they have obtained (personal correspondence).

Jermaine, a recent graduate from our high school who now is employed as the coordinator for the lab and garden explained:

> The opportunity to work at the garden has expanded my knowledge and passion. It has given me a chance to reflect on my community and life. How can I make a difference in this garden? My co-workers have been an

> incredible team who have worked hard and with love. And that is reflected in the outstanding growth of every plant and tree in our beautiful garden.

As knowledge workers, our students are leading the way in challenging the crippling representations and misrepresentations of their community (Lovett and Squier, 2010). "The activities gave our school a name for itself. Proving for a fact that we are more than the stereotype of violence and lack of education," said Anthony (personal correspondence).

Students like Anthony made me aware that confronting those misrepresentations do not only take place in the realm of media or the greater community, they also take place in the classroom. As, I was preparing for our presentation at a national conference with two ninth-grade Algebra Project students, Alvin, a quiet thoughtful young man with a grin that covers his whole face, when you are fortunate enough to catch it, was very hesitant to speak. His best friend, Terrell, was trying to encourage him to get over his shyness. "Listen, when I was in elementary, I wouldn't speak up either. Even if I knew the answer, and usually I did, I just didn't want to say anything. Then, I don't know, in middle school, I just realized I had to show 'em'." While the purpose of his words was to encourage his friend, once again, it was I who learned. Terrell, who is 16 and in ninth grade had been held back twice. As I heard his story, I thought: that is why he was held back, not because he didn't know, but because we, educators in his path, didn't listen. We did not deeply listen to his silence; open ourselves to learning from him.

When it came time for the students to speak in the conference, I was nervous. Actually, I was nervous the whole time, I always am when I present. Did I say "um" a lot? I think of Matthew. Terrell knew this about me and from his place in the front row, kept giving me the "thumbs up" sign of encouragement. So, when it was time for the students to speak, I wondered if they were nervous too. I didn't want our kids to feel put on the spot. Most of the other students participating in the conference were seniors in high school or in college or a university. Our kids were in ninth grade. Yet without hesitation, when I paused, Terrell stood up. Terrell, at over 6 feet tall and 200 pounds and a star on the football team, which is what he is "known for" in the school, said:

> This work has given me the opportunity to show what I know. To be in the Algebra Project class and talk about the math; to learn and show what I am learning and what I know. And help my classmates. It's given me confidence to speak up. That's made a big difference in my life.

When we were heading home from the conference, I asked Terrell what he liked most from the weekend. The weekend was filled with workshops on hip hop, athletics, dinners out, time spent with his mentor, and his first time on an airplane. "My favorite part was our speech in the presentation," he said.

It's not what I expected him to say. And that's the point about my being *specific*; I keep on pushin' but mostly, I keep on learning.

I end with one last story. One afternoon, in their closing circle, the Algebra Project teacher was leading the "shout outs." One student next to me asked, "Where is Mr. Bob? Where did Mr. Bob go?" The AP teacher explained that he was preparing for a talk to be given in a few hours, and he would be back tomorrow. Students proclaimed: "Shout out for Mr. Bob! For being here and teaching with us." Later that evening, I shared the story with Moses: "They missed me, huh? That's nice." He smiled big. A big quiet, smile like Alvin shares.

Like Moses, I too, feel that "It is the voices of the young people I hear every day, more than anything, that give me hope" (Moses in Wynne p. 236, 2012). Those voices, along with our teachers' voices, now, give the Education Effect hope too. If that hope becomes a reality, then, we will be effective after all.

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Living with the tensions of hope and despair

by Joan T. Wynne

The United States is a racist country and because of that, I, as a White person, am the beneficiary of power and privileges that have an adverse effect on citizens of color" (2014, p. 10). I have begun opening presentations I make to any audience, at national conferences or in university classes, with that sentence, one that a young writer for *The Nation*, Mychal Denzel Smith, has persuaded me is a necessary starting place for any White person who wants to unravel racism in our society.

Because of my life-long journey of "un-learning" racism, I find his sentence to be essential and pertinent also to my writing for this book. The sentence reminds me that a southern White woman, creating a chapter on the impact of racism on the college experience of Black students seems arrogant and a bit preposterous. So before I can address the topic, I must admit that anything I say comes tempered by the reality that I can never fully understand the impact of racism on these students. I can read and cite the research about it. I can do my own research about it. I can observe it in my classrooms; but, because of my unearned power and privilege, I can never really know it as my African-American and Black students do. In this chapter, though, I will describe what I do know in hopes it might be valuable to practitioners, especially to people who look like me and who care about eliminating racism—not only to better teach Black students, but also to rid ourselves of the pathology that we, not African-Americans, have carried within our national DNA for centuries.

The late singer and stalwart activist, Pete Seeger, once said in an interview that "The key to the future of the world is finding the optimistic stories and letting them be known" (2014, p. A20). I intend to do just that. Yet, before telling those stories, I'm driven to depict another facet of our dilemma as activists. That dilemma seems to demand a recognition of the tension between the hopeful and the discouraging. For, to fully understand the

optimistic stories, we, first, must wrestle with the difficult and sometimes sinister things that confront us all in a hegemonic world. Thus, the beginning of this chapter addresses my observations of the negative consequences of the dominant culture's institutions on Black students. Later, the optimistic stories emerge illustrating the philosophy and pedagogy that can be effective in creating environments that support the intellectual achievements of Black students, stories that also include the wisdom of students (Focus, 2014) who have informed my exploration of the dilemma.

The Ominous

Because I now live in Florida where within an 18 month span, two unarmed Black teenage boys were murdered—one, Trayvon Martin (Robles 2012 p. A2), for walking while Black in a mostly all-White neighborhood, and another, Jordan Davis (Hsieh, 2014), for playing loud music in a car—I am more dedicated than ever to understanding how racism plays a part not only in the mis-education of our African-American children, but in the mis-education of our Anglo children who are schooled to become adults who can "stand their ground" to murder Black boys or who can serve as masters of judicial systems that legitimize these murders.

What kind of schooling is needed for White Americans to stand up for protecting the lives of all children? Racism is a blight on this nation, and a blight on any intellectual who sits silently as her Black students' very lives are daily threatened. That threat never seems more clearly stated than in the words of Ella Baker, who said: "We who believe in freedom cannot rest, until the killing of Black men, Black mothers' sons is as important as the killing of White men, White mothers' sons" (Ransby 2003, p. 335). Those words constantly challenge me to dig deeper, to explore abusive schooling more urgently, whenever I write about the education of Black students, and, indeed, about the education of any mother's child. For, all of our children are at stake at different levels—those who are being victimized by demoralizing education and violence, and the integrity of those whose education is so severely distorted that many later become either the perpetrators or the protectors of violence against Black children. If not addressed in the classroom, the tentacles of White Supremacy, that strangle the K-16 system of public and private education, leave no one undiminished by the destructive powers of the dominant culture. And the dearth of disciplined discussion about it allows and encourages a divisive nation.

Civil Rights icon and President of The Algebra Project, Bob Moses, in a keynote address at a public forum explained the dire consequences of bad

education for our Black, Brown, and White, poor children. During his address, Moses reported,

> The Southern Educational Fund looked at a 40-year period from 1970 to 2010 and asked the question who gets a B.A.? Not who goes to college, but who gets a B.A.? They answered it in terms of the quartiles, the top economic quartile and the bottom economic quartile. In 1970, 40% of the top economic quartile got their B.A.s. Forty years later 80% received it. It doubled over this 40-year period. In 1970, 7% of the bottom quartile got B.A.s. *Forty years later in 2010, only 9% of the bottom quartile graduated from college* (Moses, 2014).

With that grim 40 year record of sorry education delivered to our students at the bottom, can we continue to pretend that we are a democratic nation who offers quality education to all its people? Or will we continue to blame the victims for this travesty of unequal opportunity?

In other chapters of this book, K-12 racist realities are addressed, especially the horrific criminalizing of our young children, paving the way for a corporate school-to-prison pipeline. So my chapter is not intended to address K-12 schooling. Yet, I must share here one of the more shocking statistics, that I only recently discovered. A Department of Education report in March, 2014 declared that "Black children represent 18 percent of preschool enrollment, but 42 percent of the preschool children suspended once, and 48 percent of the preschool children suspended more than once" (Civil Rights Data 2014). Really? Suspending virtual toddlers? What is wrong with a nation that cannot deal with three to five year olds? And what kind of nation keeps the doors open to pre-schools that don't know how to nurture or discipline children who not too long ago have just learned to talk and walk? But still a stunning silence exists in mainstream corridors of this country about the exploitation of our children of color.

With these kinds of child abuse, institutionalized racism is crucial to any legitimate study of quality education for all children. Moreover, these debacles in K-12 severely impact the opportunities for African-American students to attend and succeed in college, long before they are of age to enroll. Recently, California published a snapshot of their state's manifestations of systemic racism on Black students in their universities (Rivera 2013):

- Blacks have the lowest completion rates for freshman and transfer students at all three higher education segments: community colleges, California State University and the University of California.
- Black students are more likely than any other group to attend college without ever earning a degree.
- The achievement gap between Blacks and Whites earning a bachelor's degree or higher has narrowed by only a percentage point over the last decade. In 2011, about 24% of Black adults had obtained a bachelor's compared with 41% of Whites. [Opportunity gap, not achievement gap, probably more aptly describes this dilemma.]

- Black students appear to have been disproportionately affected by policy decisions such as the state ban on affirmative action in education and budget cuts in recent years that resulted in significant declines in enrollment at community colleges and Cal State campuses.
- Reluctance on the part of policy makers and educators to tackle racial disparities head-on is one factor in the persistent gaps, said Michele Siqueiros, executive director of the Campaign for College Opportunity.
- "I've come to be more convinced of an inability to really address these issues more openly in a way that forces state policy makers to come up with ideas and colleges to find solutions," Siqueiros said. "Especially after the ban on affirmative action, we don't feel comfortable talking about race and nothing really happens."

So where do we go from here? How do we more effectively consider the difficult issues in order to integrate our sense of humanity into the optimistic and the hopeful?

Focus Groups

Thinking about that challenge propelled me to first elicit the wisdom of my Black students, to include their voices in the publication. Sixty-seven percent of the students in the university where I now teach are Hispanic/Latino students. But many of my Black students come from the Caribbean Islands—Cuba, Trinidad, Jamaica, Haiti. Some are African-American. However, because of scheduling conflicts, (two months to finalize respondents' available dates) and because of a fear by some students that this confidential conversation might somehow, by some participant, be revealed, only seven students joined the focus groups. Their fear of disclosure reminded me of the treacherous terrain that many of our students travel. Finally, though, four of the seven students who were able to participate in focus groups were Black students from the Caribbean and three identified themselves as African-American. Some were still attending my present university; some had attended Primarily White Universities (PWI) in other parts of the state.

James Baldwin once insisted that ". . . while the tale of how we suffer and how we are delighted and how we triumph is never new, it must be heard. There isn't any other tale to tell, it's the only light we've got in all this darkness" (1995). Guided by his perspective, I invited the focus students to share their stories of navigating the university system. I wanted to hear their insights about the challenges of dealing with covert and/or overt racist behavior and attitudes while attempting academic success in a PWI. Though this university is considered a minority institution, the majority of its Hispanic/Latino population describe themselves as White Hispanic and in the

particular city where most of them live, they hold power and privilege that doesn't exist for them elsewhere in the state. Therefore, many of the Hispanics in classroom discussions originally report that they never think about themselves as victims of racism.

Though, like Beverly Tatum (1997), President of Spelman College, I believe the darkness of racism and its consequences in schools is all around us. It's the elephant in the classroom that no one wants to talk about out loud. And, like Baldwin, I think the stories of those who suffer racism in our schools must be heard. They must be heard over and over until the nation commits to reckoning with its 400 unrelenting years of bloody, racist history. As a developing democracy, to move forward from the darkness of that history into the light of liberation may lie in our willingness to listen deeply and well and to learn from the collective stories of "suffering, delight, and triumph."

Therefore, my goals for initiating these focus groups were:

1. To explore the dynamic of and discoveries from intentional conversations among those who have experienced overt and/or covert racism in schools and universities.
2. To listen for any mention of schisms that often occur between African-Americans and Caribbean Blacks in my classroom and in many U.S. urban universities.
3. To learn from students' stories of specific challenges they have faced that I may not have recognized as a professor from the dominant culture.

Conversations involving the two focus groups began with the same guiding question: Can you describe any specific challenges that you faced because of overt or covert racism in your university experience?

Emergent Themes

Four themes seemed to evolve throughout the dialogue among respondents in both groups: Isolation; Struggles to name racism; Exhaustion from playing expected roles; and Schisms between Black cultures.

I. Isolation

Often, the sense of isolation was addressed, an isolation that Black students felt as a consequence of being in a PWI, where no one, professors nor students, assumed a responsibility to reach out to them. As one respondent explained about the classroom, "And so it seemed like you were just kind of

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

One of the doctoral candidates told the story of attending an educational conference, sitting in a restaurant talking to two White female participants. While she sat with them, a White male later joined their table, spoke and looked directly at the other women, yet never acknowledged her presence, as though she were invisible. The other women shifted their attention to him and never again spoke to her. Similar stories were cited by all seven focus participants, describing this isolation in classrooms, in cafeterias, at social events, at professional meetings, etc. However, their stories of determination to forge ahead and, indeed, achieve, might startle those who see these students only as 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 the group. The respondents seemed initially somewhat unconscious of racist attitudes or behaviors at the university. It took the telling of many stories among them to unravel the obvious. As one student explained, "Because it hasn't been so overt, it is hard for me to think of an incident." When stories began to unfold in the conversation about specific encounters they had experienced when relating to White professors and students or White Hispanic/Latinos either at the university or at their employment, all respondents initially used 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 undergraduate program explained her struggle to understand the motivation of the advice 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 the elevator, mentioned that they had continued to talk about the conversations from the focus group. They asked if we might reconvene, maybe meet with other students, and continue the conversation. They also mentioned that they had experienced a few epiphanies as a result of the dialogue about racism. We agreed to meet during the fall semester and talk again about how we might fit future dialogues into their busy university schedules. I also asked if they might e-mail a sentence or two describing those epiphanies. The following are their e-mailed responses:

Epiphanies

E-mail Respondent 1: A dialogue about racism can be difficult to have, considering in America we live in it constantly. It is often such a complex issue that it cannot be separated from everyday life. It can be blatant and obvious, but most of the time it is subtle and unclear. From the discussions I began to understand more about how I navigate the world—I recognize covert racist actions may be happening around me, but I do not give it much thought. If I do, it is often in the form of counter narrative stories that I run down as a list of why this action may have occurred. Often after reviewing the counter narratives list, it does come back down to "probably because I am Black." The dialogue discussion also provided me, a Black American, with some of the perspectives of Caribbean Blacks living in the U.S. The notion of cultural capital that Caribbean people gain from growing up in a society that is predominantly Black helped me understand what is often perceived by Black Americans as a "better than you" persona; it is simply a greater amount of cultural capital they are ingrained 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" my social identities (race, gender, etc.) are here . . . and how psychologically exhausting it is to be a Black-female-professional or simply a human being in the U.S. This exhaustion, I think results in racial/ethnic minorities becoming hypersensitive to their environment, as a defense mechanism, to combat this racial-psychological warfare that exists in the U.S.

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

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

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

inseparable from its fragility (Nussbaum, 1989, p. 448). Because of this ethical conundrum of beauty and fragility, maybe no classroom moment should be corrupted by the tyranny of grades, of sorting students, of rigid adherence to syllabi or bell curves or boring lectures. And possibly, the space and time for story, for expressing feelings of isolation and cultural separation, time for tales of victimization and liberation, along with candid confessions of denial, ultimately, can help us effectively juggle the ominous and the optimistic.

Who knows—if we have the courage to face our collective stories, they, like the wild geese in Mary Oliver's poem, may lead us toward "our place in the family of things" (Oliver, 1996).

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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

in 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

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

I learned that she was there because the more money a person steals, the longer they are expected to be banished from society. Fortunately she did her time and was released. Soon after release, she contacted me to tell me she was on this side of freedom, and within two weeks, she had a job and purchased a car. As we chatted online, I was so excited to read that she had been given an opportunity. Heather was motivated and she had a great support system. She also provided a glimmer of hope for the work I do by stating "You had an impact on me at the very beginning. I always told my family how much I enjoyed working for you because it felt like a normal working relationship. I enjoyed our lunchtime discussions. Having just come to prison is was nice to be able to have intelligent conversations." Incidents like this continually persuade me that most people want to be acknowledged and heard, regardless of their circumstances. Why should a criminal conviction render 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 one day before I planned to leave that I did not want them to plot a surprise party, or have time to get too sad. But that plan failed. On my last day, at the end of class, I had one student who stood there looking at me, crying and asking 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 violated 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 dialogue 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." Society would have us believe the people who have made mistakes do not deserve happiness, joy, accomplishment, or any of the other positive emotions representing the human condition. Some people do have hard days, great sadness, remorse, and regret, but we will never know the dimensions of their humanness 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.

Redefining the narrative of voices from prison requires redefining the script of fairness and integrity in our criminal justice system, which continues to crumble before the eyes of Americans and the world. While the evidence exists that justice for some happens, many in our country still hold on to the notion that there is a fair and equitable punitive system for all. If only those who still believe in the fairness of the criminal justice system had a chance to hear the voices I hear regularly, they might reconsider the script that has duped them into distortions of prison realities, of erroneous notions of fairness and legal equity. To really understand the horrors that our democracy has created inside its jails and prisons, everyone should read, *The New Jim Crow* by Michelle Alexander (2010).

In the Marvin Gaye tune "Can I get a Witness," he inquires "Is it right to be treated so bad, When you've given everything you had?" Returning citizens can echo this same refrain post release as they are continuously subjected to exclusion from voting, housing, employment, and opportunities (2010). How long must punishment continue after punishment has been completed? Once again, there is a script expressing that those who have been convicted of committing a crime are not worthy of reintegration, that their penitence must last their natural life. Sharing the stories of those who are denied voice, silenced, unheard has been a validating experience for both me and my imprisoned students. The sharing has allowed the silenced to know, "I am listening, I hear you" and it lets the silencers understand that, "I know you are trying to silence them, but their stories will be told."

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Let the human spirit in the room[1]

by Joan T. Wynne

"An important component of African indigenous pedagogy is the vision of the teacher as a selfless healer intent on inspiring, transforming, and propelling students to a higher spiritual level." When I first read this passage by Asa G. Hilliard, III (*SBA*, 1997, pp. 69–70), I felt as I did when the Berlin Wall fell or when Nelson Mandela walked out prison doors. I never thought either would happen in my lifetime. Neither did I think that anyone with a respectable reputation, indeed, a renowned scholar like Hilliard, in a white university would ever have the courage to publicly frame education within a context of spiritual transformation. Seeing that in print, I felt as though somewhere in my psyche, walls had fallen down and a liberator had been set free.

My years in white universities as a student and as a professor had indicated to me that matters of the intellect and matters of the spirit are as separate as church and state. That the purpose of my education might become the "transformation toward a new spiritual level" was certainly never remotely discussed or assumed. Typically, scholars who entertain such ideas are relegated to fringe groups in their disciplines. Because of the distortions of fundamentalists and most religions on such issues, many of us academics may feel justifiably uncomfortable. Nevertheless, for fear of being thought anti-intellectual, or worse, unworthy of academia, I kept the idea of a connection between spirituality and intellectual pursuits suppressed in my conversations with other mainstream professors. My experience in colleges and universities

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around this issue taught me that Paulo Freire (1987) was probably right when he suggested that "The intellectual activity of those without power is always characterized as non-intellectual" (p. 122). I found that scholars who openly spoke of the spiritual within a context of intellectual discourse typically were outside the academic circles of power. I remember back in the 1980s attending a conference in Denver, Colorado, called Exploring the Spiritual in the Teaching of English. It highlighted the work of Language Arts scholar and researcher, James Moffitt, who was a giant in the Language Arts field at the time and an active member of National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE). Only 80 teachers and professors showed up from the association that, in that era, boasted 10–15,000 active members or 43,934 paying members (Hogan, NCTE). So, many noted scholars are often ignored if they speak of the spirit!

Yet, as I thought about the writing of this chapter, I kept coming back to Hilliard's wisdom as one of the distinguishing characteristics of effective pedagogy with African-American students. I learned it when teaching African-American students at an inner-city high school. I learned it when teaching at a premier, all male, historically black college (HBCU); and I learned it again when working with African-American teachers in an urban teacher leadership master's degree program. In all three experiences, there seemed to be an innate sense of the "spiritual" aspirations of an entire people being integral to educational journeys. Jacob Carruthers (1999), a professor of Inner City Studies, concurs in *Intellectual Warfare*, saying that the "Restoration of African civilization is not possible without a return to African spirituality" (p. xv).

As a white woman, I feel presumptuous writing about effective pedagogy for African-American students. So, I can only offer my story from the perspective of one who first learned about "good teaching" from African-American teachers and scholars. Master teachers like Mattie Williams, Dorothy McGirt, Baby Ruth Brantley and Oliver McClendon took me under their wings my first year out of college, teaching at an African-American high school. They taught me how to expect and demand the best academic performance from all students, especially those living in poverty. Later on, scholars, teachers, and leaders like Lisa Delpit and Asa Hilliard, III taught me the theory that explained the practice that had been modeled at Howard High School. Alonzo Crim, Robert Dixon, and Bob Moses taught me how to hone my practice when teaching disenfranchised students. Thus, any wisdom I share came from those educators and those places where, no matter the physical structure, the educational process became a "sacred space" (Hilliard SBA, 1997).

The research literature and my experiences in the classroom indicate that there are specific strategies that create optimum learning conditions for African-American students. Yet, some of those studies and experiences have also persuaded me that regardless of the strategies, something far more profound

than methodology connects students of African descent with the pursuit of academic excellence. For, along the way as I worked with African-American students, I did observe, and probably engaged in as well, some "bad" instruction that seemed antithetical to what is considered pedagogically sound. Nevertheless, many African American students survived such instruction.

It is only recently, however, that I've begun to understand the reasons that students of African descent can endure ineffective teaching strategies in HBCU's when they often cannot in mainstream colleges. That is not to say that there are not thousands of African-American students who, nonetheless, achieve in mainstream colleges without these conditions being present. Rather, they excel in spite of those colleges, not because of them.

Some of the conditions, beyond pedagogy, yet, bound within the culture, that I believe facilitate academic success for African-American students are:

- the assumption of the spiritual connection to educational pursuits;
- the infusion of music into the educational experience;
- the explicit discussions of challenging an oppressive society;
- the expectation and demand for excellence in the midst of a nurturing environment;
- the developing of personal relationships with faculty;
- the belief in the collaborative nature of the educational journey.

All of these were integral parts of the total Morehouse College experience, an HBCU where I taught for 10 years. Much of what I now consider a quality educational experience for any student, but especially for African-American students, was crystallized for me at that college.

Spiritual Connection to Educational Pursuits

When explaining the ancient, education traditions of Africa, Hilliard (SBA, 1997), who often spoke at the college, said, "Our educational and socialization process was always situated in a sacred space. This space served to clarify purpose and emphasize the divine nature of the process." At Morehouse, part of that "educational and socialization process" was obligatory attendance at chapel twice a week. In that space, students heard renowned persons of African descent—ministers, scholars, politicians, or heads of state—speak of the ancestral spirits who gave their all so that these young men could be at that college. At the end of such meetings at chapel, students resoundingly sang together the "Alma Mater." When the song's reference to the "Holy Spirit" emerged, all reverently lowered their voices and bowed their heads as they whispered the two words. I had never before

experienced, first, a student body who all knew and sang their "Alma Mater," nor, secondly, a secular college that made reference to the "Holy Spirit." This attention to the divine, outside a specific religious context or denomination, poured out beyond the chapel walls. The legacies of spiritualists/educators like Howard Thurman, Martin Luther King, Jr., Benjamin E. Mays reverberated not only in the chapel but also in the halls of the academy. The memorializing of those legacies is a ritual considered part of the "Mystique" of the college.

Many of my students, whether they were in the writing, literature, speech, or education seminars, unabashedly found appropriate ways to connect their personal spiritual experiences to their writing, their speeches, or classroom discussions, no matter the assigned topic. I learned early in my career at Morehouse that "touching the spirit" was a collective assumption throughout the campus. No hesitation there to connect the intellectual with the spiritual. Caruthers insists that, "The road to African liberation begins at the door of that 'Good Old African Spirit'" (p. xv). And if education is not "liberating," then it becomes, more often than not, propaganda for maintaining the societal status quo.

For mainstream professors in colleges or universities where the spiritual is ignored or shunned, creating opportunities for students to connect their spiritual heritage to discussions of content in a specific discipline is a culturally responsive strategy that can be quite effective in fostering stronger engagement of African-American students in college classrooms. In such discussions, the professor is not obligated to validate or dismiss any particular belief system—only to establish a safe space for the students to bring those spiritual analogies into classroom conversations. I once observed a mainstream professor, who was a professed atheist, sit respectfully quiet as student after student began to connect her spiritual beliefs to the topic at hand. The energy in the room, due to his acquiescence to their desires to connect their own spiritual stories to the abstraction being grappled with, grew into a vigorous, synchronized exploration of the self and the discipline.

Infusion of Music

Part of the spiritual experience at Morehouse was music. The college's award-winning Glee Club, usually opened and closed every chapel session. Their sometimes thundering renditions of old spirituals often left me so charged that I, too, felt the call of their ancestors to produce the best teaching performance possible for those who had inherited these heroes' struggle. Moreover, I became convinced, after a number of years attending chapel, that the messages and music, the total education experienced within that

"sacred space," seemed to increase student determination to "hang in" with those difficult courses or the ones that might bore them into distraction. And, because of those chapel experiences, some students, who might have just barely slipped through the admissions door, seemed to get the extra boost they needed to study more diligently. It's what Delpit (1997) seems to intimate when she suggests that African-American students learn best when they "connect to something greater than themselves."

Using music as ritual and as a collective everyday experience is deeply rooted in the African cultural experience. I was reminded of that when working in Alexandria, South Africa one summer. I listened often as black South African workers, building homes in a Habitat for Humanities project, spontaneously burst into song when passing bricks to one another or when carrying food from one home to another; at the beginning and end of informal social gatherings; or in the middle of any mundane task such as washing dishes together. In that same tradition, during the Southern Freedom Movement, freedom fighters burst into song together in buses, churches, marches, and jails whenever fear became intense, struggle became burdensome, or short-term victory was won (King, 1986; Reagon, 1998). Regardless of the song, it seemed to invite the "spirit" into the human space. Music in the collective seems an integral part of African lives and struggle. How sterile our white institutions of learning must seem to such a musically sophisticated people.

Using Music in the Classroom

Though I have no training or talent in music, because of the powerful use of it in the King chapel and my success in using music in high school classrooms, I began to play taped musical selections in my college literature and composition classes when students were writing. For many, their writing became more fluent while the music was playing. In literature classes, I brought songs whose lyrics and/or rhythms related to themes, metaphors, or forms being studied in specific genres. I often asked students to bring to class their choices of music to relate to what we were studying. On tests, I found that the students could demonstrate more effectively their conceptual understanding of those lessons that had been connected to their music. Many educational researchers have documented the use of music as a means of teaching a diverse range of skills from mathematics to poetry (Moffett & Wagner, 1983). The Algebra Project, initiated by Robert Moses, a mathematics educator and prominent Civil Rights Activist, sometimes uses African drumming to teach algebraic concepts. Howard Gardner's research (Gardner, 2000) defines music as one of the distinct Multiple Human Intelligences. To leave it outside the classroom door once students complete the third or fourth grade seems negligent on our part.

Nature Vs. Nurture

Hilliard (1999) has argued that in America, there is a continuing "nature vs. nurture" educational debate about African-American learners. Many Eurocentric scholars, represented by the likes of Murray and Hernstein (1994) of the infamous *Bell Curve*, purport that the nature of the student defines his potential to learn and achieve. Because of these and similar educational theorists, the nature or capacity of African-American learners to academically excel is more often than not questioned throughout our society, not just in our schools. Using his own educational experiences and research as well as the work of Shinichi Suzuki, "a teacher of world-class musicians who asserted that talent was not inborn but must be trained," Hilliard (1988) affirms that the nature of every human is to learn and that all students optimally learn when they are nurtured. It's rather, Hilliard explains, the "nature of the nurture" that promotes academic achievement, not the nature of the student. Delpit (1997), too, suggests that when teachers create "a sense of family and caring," students of color are more apt to excel.

That kind of nurturing exists at many of the HBCU's where I have taught or visited. The support system for excellence and the belief in the students' capacity to excel is so strong throughout these colleges that most of their students can survive "bad" instructional practices found within a few classrooms. Traditionally, the nurturing of African-American students, especially in the segregated "colored" schools in the south, began with academic excellence as not just an expectation, but a demand by their teachers (Siddle-Walker, 1996). Without that expectation and without taking the responsibility to insure that students learn, questions of pedagogy seem irrelevant. For, we all know the research that suggests we get what we expect, regardless of the methodology (Clark 1989; Good 1981 & 1982; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968; Venter, 2000). Delpit (1997), who received the MacArthur genius award, admonished every teacher of African-American students, including elementary teachers, that "Whatever methodology or instructional program is used, demand critical thinking." That demand, for African-American educators, grows naturally from a place of nurture. In too many mainstream college classrooms and in some HBCU classrooms, a nurturing spirit is sorely missing. Hilliard (2000) insists education in the United States is characterized by its "pathological preoccupation with capacity."

Best Practices

Nevertheless, if we are white professors teaching African-Americans in a mainstream college where students' lives on the campus, outside the classroom walls, do not have this kind of nurture or support, then, I believe, we

must diligently engage in "best practices" in our classrooms. Along with the indigenous African vision of a teacher, the framework for a discussion of best practices might include a definition found in Vincent Harding's (1999), *Hope and History*. In that text, Ronald Massanari says, "Being a teacher refers less to one who gives answers and expects conformity . . . and more to one who is capable of providing contexts and stimuli so each learner can discover for him or herself. Such teachers are skillful intermediaries and guides in the search for meaning and self-understanding" (p. 1) That kind of skillful teaching within a cultural "context" is, in my experience, the basis for the academic success of many African-American students in any classroom. And, probably, it is, as Massanari suggests, the basis for teaching students of any ethnicity. Many African-American students, as mentioned earlier, can achieve academic excellence in spite of the absence of such a framework for teaching, even in majority white universities. However, those who fail to achieve at that level probably fail because of the other kind of teaching that caters to "giving information, answers, and demanding conformity," within a Euro-American cultural context—a practice that Dr. Alonzo Crim (1999), the first African-American superintendent of the Atlanta Public School System, called, the "Sage on Stage" model. To increase the rate of success for all African-Americans in colleges, I believe, requires a shift away from that model. It requires an inter-active, participant-centered approach to instruction.

Education for Liberation

Within that shift from conformity into a "search for meaning and self-understanding," I believe, is the demand for a pedagogy and a curriculum that is grounded in a philosophy of education for liberation. The Morehouse campus abounds in those conversations—in history classes, in African studies, in African-American literature classes, in meetings in chapels, in campus-wide colloquium, etc. When taught outside a liberation context, knowledge learned in schools can become not only meaningless to African-Americans and other students of color, but worse, a means to maintain an oppressive society. Culturally responsive pedagogy "prepares students to effect change in society, not merely fit into it" (Ladson-Billings, 1992, p. 382).

In the Americas in the 20th century, great teachers like Ella Baker, Septima Clark, Paulo Friere, Fannie Lou Hamer, Vincent Harding, Myles Horton, Benjamin E. Mays, and others led the way in teaching how to educate to liberate. Indebted to their courage and intellectual integrity, many educators have learned how, as Hilliard (Tapping the Genius, 1997; Structure, 1997) suggests, to invite students, faculties, and communities to engage in conversations that question mainstream society's epistemologies as well as its assumptions about education, power, and social justice. Without those

questions in mind, the disciplines of physics, literature, science, history, mathematics, etc. often become intellectual scaffolds to sustain hegemony. For African-Americans, living within a society that has for 400 years distorted past and present stories of history, economics, civilizations, and superiority, such a dialogue is imperative, if these students are to assert themselves in an accurate historical context (Loewen, 1996). Moreover, if our society is to progress beyond materialism, militarism, domination, and greed, all students, regardless of ethnicity, need to explore knowledge in the context of liberation. So as a classroom strategy, what does that look like?

First, in any college classroom whether teaching business or humanities, a professor might begin each new semester with an exploration of the many facets of Education for Liberation. This can cause lively discussions of discovery of self and of the depth and breadth of human knowledge, as professors and students try to examine just what liberation means? Who are we liberating? From what? And for what? What does liberation look like? Feel like? What does it have to do with studying physics, chemistry, mathematics, engineering, literature, history, art, etc? Freire (1970) insists that there is "no such thing as a neutral educational process." It either sustains the status quo of the presently known, he suggests, or it uses what it knows to transform the world. If we choose transformation, then we must do as Hilliard (Structure, 1997) suggests, "change our intellectual structures, definitions and assumptions" that presume and foster white privilege and superiority. This means that in every discipline these conversations must be part of the strategy we use to engage our students in investigating the individual epistemologies of our particular content area. Can the laws of physics be seen only through a Eurocentric cultural lens; or is it possible that other cultures and other ancient traditions can offer new perspectives on those laws? In-service teachers (Perry, 2001) at Wheelock College in Boston have discovered methods of scientific inquiry different from the traditional Western model as they have immersed themselves in the Haitian culture.

The Common Good and Liberation:

Many African-American scholars argue that rooted deep in the culture of people of African descent is a curriculum, pedagogy, and practice that insist on the necessity to learn for the greater good of the community (Delpit 1997; Hilliard, SBA, 1997; Ladson-Billings 1994; Siddle-Walker 1996; Wilson 1998). When the purpose for learning any discipline is explicitly stated within a context larger than self-aggrandizement, these scholars indicate, the achievement level of African-American students is favorably impacted. Benjamin E. Mays (1983), the President of Morehouse College for 27 years, who saw his life's purpose as being "born to rebel," proclaimed that the

purpose of education was not only "to train the mind to think" but also "the heart to feel . . . the injustices of mankind; and to strengthen the will to act in the interest of the common good" (p. 5). We know from such scholars' work that African-American students take their studies more seriously when they assume that the purpose of exploring a discipline is to make a more just and equitable reality for the "whole" (Harding 1999; Hilliard SBA 1997; Moses & Cobb 2001; Siddle-Walker 1996), James Banks (1997) insists "When the school fails to recognize, validate, and testify to the racism, poverty, and inequality that students experience in their daily lives, they are likely to view the school and the curriculum as contrived and sugar-coated constructs that are out of touch with the real world and the struggles of their daily lives" (p. 16). The work of Herb Kohl (1994) indicates that when our curriculum and our pedagogy omit these realities, many students of color choose to resist learning anything from us. At Morehouse, many students come from economically privileged backgrounds, yet there was a concerted effort at the college to remind those students that their economic status demanded that they use their intellectual talents to battle against the poverty of their people. They were encouraged to understand what former SNCC member, Charles Cobb, once said of the students in Mississippi Freedom Schools, "What they must see is the link between a rotting shack and a rotting America" (Payne 1997, p. 5).

Strategies for Liberation Education

Learning disciplinary content and exploring liberation are not mutually exclusive, as some professors might assume. Steeped in a tradition that honors a "pedagogy of the oppressed" (Freire 1998/1970), a science professor might, for example, encourage students to examine scientific content, laws, theories, etc. in a context of thwarting the use of science as a weapon against oppressed peoples. She might ask her students to ponder the probabilities that if they learned science well enough they might, indeed, together with their newly formed scientific community, be the instruments in discovering the end to world hunger, cancer, pollution, high infant mortality rates, etc. Or the physics students might together discuss how to use the principles of physics, like those used to split the atom, to support life instead of death and destruction. For a people whose guiding principle of educational traditions for over 5,000 years is spiritual transformation and liberation, studying to get a job or to make excessive amounts of money pales in the light of these grander purposes. For oppressed people, Ella Baker insisted that radical education "means facing a system that does not lend itself to your needs and devising means by which you change that system" (Grant 1998). A first step in changing that system in education for African-American students, could mean facilitating open

dialogue in the classroom investigating the assumptions of oppression embedded in every discipline studied. For many of us as professors, such discussions might unfold unconscious biases as well as wisdom.

In the humanities, raising questions of liberation is often more common than in the sciences. An English professor might ask students to connect the purposes of effective writing with countering the misconceptions in printed media about the disenfranchised. After ample student driven discussion of larger contexts for learning to write than passing tests or better ways of competing in the job market, a professor might offer students opportunities to hone their skills by writing letters to editors, members of Congress, mayors, etc., about issues of social concern in their immediate college or home communities. They might also suggest ways to develop web sites or chat rooms for students to discuss issues of social justice. In addition, that same professor when teaching literature might ask students to look at the literary canon not only for its aesthetic qualities, but also in the light of the unexamined racist, sexist, and other hegemonic notions that pervade Western literature as well as to question the choice of works admitted into that canon. In small groups, students might then debate the issues, thereby, strengthening their oratorical and dialogic skills, and, then, use what they are learning to educate students in K-12 institutions. In their exploration of racism and oppression, they might read to youngsters in surrounding schools of the story of an unschooled sharecropper named Fannie Lou Hamer (Harding 1999; Moses 2001) who turned a national Democratic convention upside down by demanding to be seated. Some English professors, a history professor, and a few sociology and psychology professors at Morehouse used service-learning techniques like these to enhance their college students' acquisition of and honing of skills in the individual content area.

Empowering students to use their skills as they learn them in a productive way to better their communities is a liberatory act. The "Service-learning" literature prolifically chronicles the successes of such instruction in student acquisition of new skills as well as its positive impact on the communities these students serve. One of the characters in Barry Lopez's (1990) fables says that, "Sometimes people need a story more than food to stay alive" (p. 60) I believe that the stories of people of color, their histories, their cultural legacies have been ignored or mutilated so often in the United States that their children need and deserve accurate cultural narratives told in schools and universities to "stay intellectually alive."

Through the Algebra project, Bob Moses and his colleagues have taught complicated conceptual material to unschooled adults, the children of those adults, and their teachers in poor, rural, and inner city communities. Along with their new mathematical expertise and higher order thinking skills, these parents and students have become politically active in challenging the

inadequacies of their schools, their teachers, and the systems that told them they couldn't learn algebra "because they are dysfunctional."

The work of Moses, Delpit, Freire, Hilliard, etc. implies that rigorous intellectual growth is a possibility for every college student regardless of his or her SAT scores, prior knowledge of content, or skill base—if the belief system is there at the college that we leave no student behind. Braced by that belief and willing to discover and employ new methods of instruction, every professor can teach any student. If we read Moses' successes with students, whom the larger society assumed could not and would not learn complicated abstract thinking, those of us who teach African-American students in colleges, regardless of our ethnicity, should feel a new sense of hope for facilitating success for students who don't now excel in our discipline. It doesn't matter if their reading, writing, and mathematical skills are inadequate when they come to us. Informed by Moses and others' work, we can assume that anyone can be brought from behind, perceiving a sense of purpose larger than self, given the right instruction, and encouraged to persist at the "hard work" of mastering a subject. As Hilliard says, it is the quality of the instruction, not the quality of the student that creates academic excellence.

Building a Community of Learners

To be able to explore the questions of justice and equity within a classroom, and for students to feel safe enough to risk exposing what they don't know in a specific discipline, a teacher must first build a Community of learners. Most indigenous cultures are rooted in a strong sense of communal values. With the primary focus on individual rights in our U.S. culture, our sense of community is too often neglected. In many college classrooms, competition is the guiding principle, a principle that is outside the African worldview (Diop 1989), a view described by Chibueze Udeani (1989) as "the consciousness of a lively unity with community . . . where cooperation, collective responsibility, and interdependence are the key values" (p. 1). In contrast to that, the predominant Euro-centric worldview is one that relies on competition, independence, separateness, and individual rights (Carruthers 1999). Stark differences exist between the two within the context of seeking knowledge. As educators, how do we create a sense of balance among both, where the individual and the community are equally valued? How do we dance with the creative tensions of the dualities? Can we, as educators in college classrooms, continue to separate our work from the community's work? These questions might make worthy discussion with our students within classrooms as community is sought.

Especially, for African-American students, taking the time to build a community within the classroom makes the most sense. Furthermore, if we have the integrity to honor the ancient traditions of the culture of the students we are

teaching, then we must pay attention to the social nature of the African educational experience. Often on the Morehouse campus, I saw the reflection of Hilliard's research (SBA 1997) which found that "Education, to our [African] ancestors was regarded as a social, rather than an individual process. Serious efforts were taken to establish the social bonds necessary to create a cohort of learners who not only were students, but who would be lifelong brothers and sisters in the most profound sense of those words" (p. 9). Instinctively, Morehouse capitulated to that ancestral wisdom and those ancient practices. Though deliberate attempts to establish social bonds might not be practiced in every classroom, the emphasis of brotherhood outside the classroom walls sustained campus life and academic achievement.

Moreover, numbers of scholars suggest that there is scientific data from ancient Egypt to modern physics, which indicates the interdependence of all humanity, all species, and all components of the universe from the subatomic level to the formation of the galaxies (Berry 1990; Eisler 1987; Thomas 1974; Swimme 1992). Given those assumptions, why would we model in our classrooms a format of isolated thought and competition, a format incongruent with what we accept as true in cosmic terms? Building a community of students in the classroom seems, then, not just educationally sound, but also well-grounded in ancient and modern scientific theories.

For those of us who teach where the campus life does not offer that sense of community for African-American students, or for those of us, who have consistent problems with student failure, I suggest we, especially, give classroom time to build a community of learners. My students during course evaluations have repeatedly asserted that their being part of such an experience assisted their performance in the classroom. Because I am convinced of the efficacy of this bonding, I use at least 30 minutes of the first class period of all my courses to begin establishing those bonds. Thereafter, I establish small collaborative groups who will become peer editing teams, literature discussion circles, speech critique groups, or textual analysis response groups in any discipline. Important to the construction of these groups is at least one session dedicated to the simulation of just what makes good teams. Because the mainstream culture of the United States primarily promotes competition, too few of us come to college with an adequate background in just what it means to be an effective team player and little experience in group roles that lead to individual and group success. Nevertheless, we can find guides to facilitate such a process. Research literature and popular bookstores are replete with examples describing specific activities that create social bonding, team process, and group success (Campbell & Smith 1997; Felder & Brent 1994; Felder & Brent 2001; Haller et al 2000; Johnson & Johnson 1989 & 1995; Maton & Hrabowski 1999; Starfield & Bleloch et al. 1994). Such success with group process in college classrooms was recently validated by a

group of African-American graduate students. These teachers comprised three different, graduating cohorts of an urban teacher leadership master's degree program. As a deliberately formed cohort, these students attended together every course in their five-semester program. When asked during exit interviews to evaluate the program, all graduates remarked that the bonding of the cohort influenced their success more than any other component in the program. This type of peer support system is enormously important if we want to foster the intellectual growth of African-American students in a mainstream college.

With the pressure on professors to cover material, to raise standards, to produce adequately prepared graduates ready either for a competitive market or for graduate school, many believe that bonding is a "nice idea," but too much fluff and too little substance. However, after many trials and errors of others and mine, I have come to agree with Parker Palmer (1993), who says that, "In the absence of the communal virtues, intellectual rigor too easily turns into intellectual rigor mortis" (p. xvii).

The Developing of Personal Relationships with Faculty

Professors at Morehouse spent many hours developing mentor relationships with their students. Professors felt an obligation to know their students beyond the classroom. Many a professor met students during late evenings to tutor or counsel them. One of the professors there, a departmental chairperson, not only used his night hours to tutor college students, but also tutored high school students who showed promise in science, but did not have adequate instruction in the high school. He performed these uncompensated tasks in the midst of writing texts, grants, research, and teaching a full load. I used to tease him that he "needed to get a life." His practices, however, reminded me of the African vision of the teacher as "selfless." In the indigenous African context of education, serious learning happens when teachers have established a personal bond with their students. In the Swahili tradition, this relationship of passing on knowledge through direct contact with people who are skilled craftsmen and instructors is referred to as fundi (Moses & Cobb 2001; Grant 1998). Unlike many white universities whose major focus is chasing research dollars, at Morehouse teaching is considered a serious and meaningful responsibility, the act of a fundi.

At the college, it was not an uncommon practice for professors to invite their students in small groups to their homes. Long before the administration officially initiated advisory groups for all freshmen, many professors chose to occasionally meet students at their homes. In my classroom, at the end of

each semester, nearly 100% of the students, on evaluation cards I issued, commented on the benefit for them of the meetings at my home in creating a harmony for struggling with difficult questions and concepts. In my experience with African-American students in high school, college, and graduate school, this practice seemed to cement relationships that made room for a "mutual criticism of thought" (Palmer, p. 74). Many African-American scholars insist that relationship building is a key value in the African culture, and, thus, African-American students perform best for those teachers, whatever their ethnicity, who have authentically bonded with their students.

Other Issues of Culture

Intertwined within discussions of relationship building and other elements of African-American culture lay questions about culture in general. How do we respect each other's cultures; learn from all the variations; recognize the "hidden dimensions of unconscious culture" (Hall 1989); and move as Edward T. Hall suggests "Beyond Culture"? How do we grapple with the thoughts, feelings, communications and behaviors that are molded by our separate cultures? How do we reckon with the good and bad in every culture? And, perhaps, most importantly, through the investigation of culture, can we begin to break the chains of a hegemonic society where all citizens are held captive, not only the disenfranchised?

For most professors in the U. S., issues of culture are deeply embedded in how we teach. Because most of us were schooled in a Euro-centric (or a British) model of education, including those who have come to the university from previously colonized countries (Carruthers & Harris 1997), we seem obliged to consider the limits of teaching within that one cultural frame. Connecting our classroom instruction to the culture of our students to help unfold their brilliance has been validated by a host of educational researchers (Delpit 1995, 1997; Hilliard SBA 1997; Irvine 2000; Ladson-Billings 1993; Wilson 1999). Yet, in my numerous years of sitting in meetings with white university professors, I have been perplexed by our attempts to look outside the context of the African-American culture, in fact, to look among ourselves, for answers to pedagogical problems in teaching students from another's culture—a practice that seems not only arrogant, but also stupid. We seem to assume that our wisdom, emanating from our one cultural perspective, is somehow universal—that our truths are not grounded in our particular cultural belief system, rather somehow gleaned from a cosmic logic. Delpit's research (1995) indicates that many mainstream teachers' confusion of culturally relevant instruction is common no matter where we teach—in African-American communities, in indigenous communities in Alaska, Papua New Guinea, in elementary through college classrooms. Along with

Delpit's, my experience, too, suggests that many of us in mainstream contexts seem confused as well about the significance of culture in the personal and the political lives of all people.

Because of institutional and societal failures to recognize diverse cultural realities and wisdom, can we who teach African-American students in college assume that our content knowledge is enough to optimally support the intellectual growth of our students? Though expertise in a discipline is crucial, a culturally responsive context for teaching that discipline seems equally significant to the academic achievement of African-American students, as it is for all students. Too few students achieve at their highest potential when the instructional climate is alien to their cultural experience. White students are always taught in the United States within their cultural context. But, for African-American students, and most students of color, whose culture and history have been denied or distorted in our schools, teaching within a cultural context becomes a mandate of intellectual integrity.

Sometimes when confronting the racist epistemology that dictates policies and practices of most of our institutions, especially education, I sink into disillusionment and hopelessness. In those moments I remind myself, however, that part of my hopelessness is driven by my own racism. Being white and a product of mainstream schooling, I have unconsciously absorbed many notions of supremacy. One of those is the assumption that if white people don't find a solution to the problems we have created in schools that supposedly serve African-American youth, then those youth are all doomed. I now understand more clearly, however, that what we really need to do is get out of the way of those African-American teachers, scholars, and researchers who already know the "way out of no way" (Young 1994). For, the reality is that, with or without us—their teachers, as Richard Wright (1941) proclaimed in *12 Million Black Voices*, "Hundreds of thousands [of African-Americans] are moving into the sphere of conscious history" (p. 147) a history that includes Hilliard's assumption of intellectual and spiritual transformation.

Summary

Two of the philosophical and instructional constructs for the classroom, discussed in this chapter are not only valuable but also imperative for delivering consistently positive academic results and for grounding all of our classroom work in intellectual integrity.

The first is discussed in the chapter under the category of *Nature Vs. Nurture.* The nature of the learner, in colleges and universities, is too often questioned. Without a record of past high performance or high test scores accompanying admittance, a student's ability to withstand the rigor of the college classroom

is strongly doubted. What this chapter suggests is that, as instructors, when we do not believe in the capacity of all students to achieve at high levels, regardless of SAT scores, previous skill-based competence in a discipline, or ethnic or socio-economic history, we stunt the intellectual growth of those who are in our classroom, and we weaken the nation's capacity to profit from its human intellectual capital. Too much research and too many life stories emphatically demonstrate that those who work hard to pursue excellence, regardless of previous manifestations of talent, can and do achieve at high levels when they know that their teachers expect from them and demand excellence. Within such a climate of respect and nurture, the students perform well, regardless of the methodology that those professors use (Hilliard, Delpit, Steele). Septima Clark and others in the Southern Freedom Movement proved this over and over again, while teaching illiterate adults in the rural south. Bob Moses continues that tradition in the Algebra Project. Asa G. Hilliard, III creates that for graduate students. As professors, we need to school ourselves in those lessons.

The second imperative is discussed under the category *Education for Liberation.* Denying our students the opportunity to examine the faulty notions of a history and epistemology rooted in oppression, which taints all of our individual disciplines, is a negligence that hinders honest intellectual discourse. Within a discourse of liberation, African-Americans like Vincent Harding seem to be asking educators the right questions. Harding (1999) wrote that, "Langston Hughes, our poet/teacher, said, 'We, the people, must redeem our land . . . And make America again.' What does it mean to redeem a land, to remake a nation? Who are 'the people' who must do it? And who are the teachers, and what is the curriculum that will prepare us for such a task?" Theresa Perry, Charles Payne (Perry et al. 2003; Payne 1995, 1997) and hundreds of other African American scholars suggest that a curriculum grounded in the old African-American traditions of liberatory education is a first step in transforming our students, our schools and colleges, ourselves, and our nation.

Therefore, if we really want to call forth in the classroom the intellectual dimension of African-American students, we need to honor their histories which demonstrate that struggles for liberation have been an on-going movement in America since the days of slavery, that their ancestors for centuries have been pushing America to reach its dream. These stories are powerfully instructive. They privilege a narrative that counters society's diminishment of their cultural vigor and intellectual traditions (Perry et al. 2003). When students investigate science, mathematics, philosophy, and the humanities within a context that acknowledges the ancient Black civilizations that existed while Europe was still in the dark ages, possibilities emerge for new ways of thinking about each discipline, about knowledge, and about the making of knowledge. If we ignore the significance of examining cultural truths, then no

matter how creative or "cutting edge" our strategies are, they become meaningless and lead nowhere except to further buoy a spiritually and intellectually corrupt "military industrial complex." If students are reading and writing historical and cultural distortions, and ignoring the impact of those distortions on sustaining a hegemonic worldview, who cares what strategy we're using, or how well the students read and write. In such classrooms, I think about the words of Maori writer, Patricia Grace who said that, "Books are Dangerous" because most books lie about indigenous people's values, actions, customs, culture, identity, and, ultimately, their existence (Smith, 1999, p. 35). When we do not confront the erroneous constructions of knowledge embedded in all of our disciplines, are not our classrooms dangerous as well?

Martin Luther King, Jr. said that, "The American Negro may be the vanguard of a prolonged struggle that may change the shape of the world, as billions of deprived shake and transform the earth in the quest for life, freedom and justice" (Harding, 1998, p. 108) From reading the stories of the long history of African people's resistance to oppression, I believe that the "American Negro" has been in the vanguard for over 400 years, struggling, changing, challenging the society to transform itself, and if we as teachers cannot usher those ancestors' children to the top of their game, then we need to step aside and allow those who do know how to do it.

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