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

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

t is my belief that for students to be successful, they need an educator sensi- ive to the obstacles they face. Students need more teachers that understand ully the societal barriers that are preventing youth from reaching their otential. There is a desperate need for educators who have a detailed com- prehension 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 per- sonal and intellectual learning curve, I will be able to enhance students' abil- ity 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, par- ents, and teachers to make a demand on schools and society to deliver qual- ity 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 "constitu- tional people as constitutional property!" (Moses 2010).

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 butterflie 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—wa 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.

1. 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