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Where the Rocks are in the Pond: Using Critical Race Theory to Gain Access to More Equitable
Educational Opportunities for African Americans

Presented to

The Graduate School of the
University of Missouri – St. Louis

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements of the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

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Summer, 2010

Abstract

“Where the rocks are in the pond” is a metaphor for the concept of empowerment so that those who have traditionally been marginalized and isolated, typically people of color and the poor, can learn the normative strategies that the dominant culture accesses to success. Developmentally, members of marginalized populations are harmed by the lack of access to quality resources for social, economic, political and educational growth. I have chosen autoethnography as the vehicle to carry critical events that illuminate the deleterious effects of racialization in U. S. society.

The study used critical race theory as the theoretical lens to analyze several narratives of a Black, female educator. These stories and counter-stories intend to increase awareness and understanding in how educational institutions at every level, knowingly or not, participate in the perpetuation of racist policies and practices. The goal of this research is to contribute strategies and techniques to a body of knowledge that speaks little about Black educators navigating the waters in predominately white school settings.

Acknowledgements

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has chosen me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free the oppressed.” Luke 4:18 Good News Bible-Today’s English Version

This scripture epitomizes the essence of social justice for me. Jesus is quoting the prophet Isaiah when he states his purpose before the scribes. It dawned on me, as an educator and more specifically as a school counselor, that my calling has been characterized by this verse. Yet, are not we all, as educators, called to offer words of encouragement to our students (good news)? Shouldn’t we encourage the freedom established in knowledge (liberty to the captives) and help open up minds that are closed to new ways of thinking (sight to the blind)? Do we not have a responsibility to teach others to break down barriers that inhibit learning? This has been my clarion call as I embarked on the journey to earn this terminal degree.

I have been confident throughout this process that I was on the right track. I say this not because of my own abilities, but because I have been surrounded by people who have directed, encouraged and supported me all along the way. I had no idea where to begin or what steps to take, but Dr. Mary Ferguson sat down with me and set things in motion. I will be forever grateful to her for directing me to Matthew Davis, who would become my advisor. Dr. Packnett, your tangible support opened the door for me to begin pursuing my degree. Your gentle spirit has been a strength for me.

I must acknowledge two people who offered their skill and expertise to help me complete this work, Claude Weathersby and Alicia Boyd. Claude, we have spent many hours traveling

this road. You never failed to give me valuable input and challenges when I needed it. Your famous last words, "...'overwhelmed' cannot be a part of your vocabulary...". I appreciate you. Alicia, you helped me celebrate every victory along the way; what a friend. Without your technical savvy, this document could not have been completed. How I thank you!

As members of my committee, each of you offered your unique gifts to help me travel the path to completion. Dr. Mayo, you introduced me to the concept of social justice through the training you conducted in the school district where I worked. Your calm approach to the sensitive issue of race inspired me to seek your expertise in providing direction as I explored those muddy waters. Dr. Beckwith, you have been an invaluable mentor. I can still hear your voice, at the beginning of this process, prompting me to stay the course. I appreciate your suggestions and attention to detail. Dr. Hoagland, thank you for your enthusiasm and unbiased willingness to hear my perspective as I developed my topic. You willingly offered every available resource. Dr. Navarro, without the wisdom you shared in showing me how to develop my proposal, I would not be in this place right now. You were capable of cutting to the chase and still generating enthusiasm for me to refine my project. I humbly offer you my gratitude.

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I could not have made it without the prayers that undergirded me from family and friends. Your confidence in my ability spurred me to finish the race; I love you.

My children, from oldest to youngest, have enthusiastically cheered me on. Greg, Angie, Erin and Theresa – I could not ask for anything more. Each of you demonstrated your inimitable personality, as we discussed my going back to school. You never failed to support my efforts, even when things seemed to go somewhat awry. I love each of you more than words can say.

Finally, Mickey, you have been a stalwart warrior on my behalf. You have defended and encouraged my right to choose; in this case, to pursue a doctoral degree after being away from the role of a student for over forty years. These thirty-seven years of marriage have been filled with unspeakable joy. When I had no interest at all in returning to school, you planted little seeds of persuasion. They took root and here we are today. None of this would be possible without your unequivocal support and confidence in me. As I wrote into the wee hours of the morning, you always made sure that I was comfortable, even at the sacrifice of your own comfort. As always, you have provided everything I ever needed. We share this victory!

Dedication

To my husband, Mickey – none of this would have been possible without you. I love you to the depths of my being. I will eternally thank God for you.

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Chapter One- Introduction

The title of this dissertation came from an informal discussion in which I was talking about my passion for helping students and parents, particularly those identified as African Americans, to access available resources in order to support academic success. That conversation inspired me to pursue further learning about social justice concepts in the formal structure of the academy.

“Where the rocks are in the pond” is a metaphor that portrays the concept of empowerment; an empowerment that lets those who have traditionally been marginalized and isolated, typically people of color and the poor, in on the normative strategies that the dominant society has deemed as the road to success. Developmentally, members of these marginalized populations are harmed by the lack of access to quality resources in the areas of social, economic, political and educational growth. As I move into a more detailed discussion of my research, I want to highlight the fact that I will use the terms African American and Black interchangeably throughout the document. Additionally, all names used are pseudonyms.

The community in which my school district is located, has long viewed itself as a bastion of multiculturalism. It is an upper middle-class suburb with a small town feel. The main streets are lined with small shops featuring restaurants, a health food store and outdoor markets. There are local activities, like the annual art fair, on any given weekend. On the surface, it seems that all of its residents are compatible. Yet, when one examines the demographic geography, schisms are evident.

Most folks know that the north side of town is primarily peopled by African American families. Local history reveals the fact that this area was settled for domestics to be housed close

to their employers, restricting them from living in the same neighborhoods where they worked (Morris & Ambrose, 1993).

This issue of racism has been woven into the fabric of the community resulting in repercussions affecting all of its residents. One bit of supporting evidence can be seen in the limited access to equitable educational opportunities for its citizens of color. However, that history is a story for another time. I offer this backdrop to highlight how I arrived at the intersection in the road called social justice and critical race theory.

Because the suburban school district's record of academic achievement for African Americans was so dismal, the district superintendent chose to introduce a professional development program for the entire district's faculty and staff. Though the program was designed to be comprehensive, it had to be delivered in increments. The training fell under the auspices of what was called social justice and the first group to access the training was the central office administrative staff.

As one of a minority of African Americans, I was selected to participate in the second group. I'd had previous exposure to trainings for examining and eliminating the effects of racism and so I assumed that this would be more of the same. The initial phase was a two-day, overnight experience. To my surprise, I found that this experience totally transformed my worldview. Concepts like internalized oppression, collusion, Black and White caucuses were foreign to me. From that point, I knew that I had to learn more about these ideas and how they could change the face of racism for me, personally and professionally.

Education was not my career of choice. My sights were set on something more exotic, definitely not the typical careers relegated for women like the all too familiar nurse, social worker or classroom teacher. I was determined to blaze a new path but had no idea of a direction. Oh, certainly there were a few African American women celebrated as physicians, lawyers, authors and even publishers. I yearned to have my own celebrity, a unique, yet meaningful career that could be admired from afar. However, without a specific plan, I found that my choices slowly narrowed and I ended up completing my undergraduate career at a local teachers' college.

The die was cast and education became my trajectory. I continued my education by pursuing a master's degree in secondary counseling, a decision made to avoid the possibility of spending a lifetime in a classroom. I had spent the requisite two years in a classroom in order to fulfill the state requirement for becoming a certified counselor. By that time I was able to acknowledge the fact that I was an educator, I just couldn't bear the thought of being restricted to a single room for the rest of my career. Counseling was a place where I believed I would be able to broaden my horizon, though I wasn't exactly sure what form that would take.

The memory of my first day as a counselor is as vivid as though it happened yesterday. I was quite impressed with the small, windowless office. It was furnished comfortably and its shelves were filled with resource materials. As I examined a kit filled with counseling programs and activities, I was struck with a most unusual thought. It was then that I realized the entire body of counseling rested on one biblical principle – do unto others as you would have them do unto you. In my young mind, this was revolutionary, yet it became the driving force in my personal approach to the profession. Though the terminology as far as formal study may not

have existed at the time, it was not a difficult leap of faith for me to become immersed in the concept of social justice in education and it became my passion.

As my career unfolded, I found myself as the token Black counselor on a predominately White faculty in a majority White middle school in a suburban district. Kanter (1977) discusses “proportional representation” (p. 966) in her description of tokens. She claims that there are four kinds of groups identifiable by the percentage of their representation in society. They are “uniform groups which have one kind of person, one significant social type...tilted groups...move toward less extreme distributions...at a typological ratio of...50:50, the group becomes balanced” (p. 966). Furthermore, Kanter (1977) argues that “skewed groups are those in which there is a large preponderance of one type over another” (p. 966). She states that tokens fall into a skewed group “because they are often treated as representatives of their category, as symbols rather than individuals” (p. 966). In fact, I was hired specifically because there was a need for a “Black, female counselor” as articulated by the Pupil Personnel Director in the district. I was acutely aware of this situation and was determined to make a good impression, much as Mabokela and Madsen (2007) discuss in their research on performance pressures. Their study, using Kanter’s theoretical framework, suggests that African Americans are forced to deal with what is called symbolic consequences. This subtheme of performance pressures places the burden of disproving stereotypical beliefs about African Americans on those in the workplace, often by representing the race in ways that seem to be acceptable to the dominant group (Introduction section, para 6). Steele (1997) refers to this phenomenon as stereotype threat, whereby “societal stereotypes about groups can influence the intellectual functioning and identity development of individual group members” (p. 613).

Since my professional classroom experience had been in a predominately Black school located in an urban district, my first year in this suburban district created an upward learning curve. Though working with predominately White students was new, I was able to make a smooth transition. I settled into the work and received positive feedback from parents, students and colleagues. I believe this kind of reaction was couched in the belief that, as the token, I was different from the stereotypical view of Blacks held by many Whites. My professional behavior could reasonably be described as cultural switching, a strategy that pressures African Americans to switch from their cultural norms to that of their White peers “as a way to respond to public scrutiny of their actions” (Mabokela & Madsen, 2007, Data analysis section, para. 3).

I will always remember Jade Patton who was a seventh-grader when we met. This adolescent African American girl had eleven siblings and resided in the area of the school district relegated to economically depressed African Americans. She was obviously a bright youngster who underachieved in the classroom. We spent a lot of time together resulting from her numerous referrals to a principal’s office. I wasn’t sure where Jade’s anger originated, but armed with a freshly minted Master’s in counseling, I was certain that I could change her erring ways. Ingenuous as I was, I believed that her value system needed to be adjusted within the framework of middle-class principles. If she could only fit into expectations established by the dominant group, all would be well. Though it wasn’t described as such at the time, this after all was the early seventies, Jade was the quintessential example for what has been defined as the African American Academic Achievement Gap. Ogbu (2003) stated that this gap has historical and national roots dating back to slavery. One of his findings from the Shaker Heights study was that “the belief that unequal opportunity still persisted...made some students skeptical as to the

real value of school credentials and discouraged some students from striving to maximize their academic performance” (Ogbu, p. 253).

My relationship with Jade was one of the most humbling experiences of my life. The concept of critical race theory (CRT) in education did not exist in 1972, and so I did not understand how to ascribe liberation to educational practices. However, Jade taught me that setting the oppressed free did not include devaluing their belief systems. In a discussion about American education, Friere said that our schools teach students “to read only school-words, not reality-words” (Shor & Friere, 1987). He further stated that “the world of struggles, the world of discrimination and economic crisis do not make contact with students in school through the words that school asks students to read” (Shor & Friere, 1987, p. 135). Friere claimed that school was quiet about real world experience which, in essence, limited the growth and development of students. He argued that this country’s system of education needed to be sensitive to and respectful of students’ real lives instead of hiding in a “culture of silence” (Shor & Friere, 1987, p. 135).

Looking back, what I’ve discovered is that I have been both a victim of an inequitable educational system and a perpetrator in terms of colluding with the dominant group to encourage African Americans to fit into its system. In other words, I have assisted in making the victim responsible for correcting the wrongs committed against her or him. As a victim of internalized oppression, I realize that my life has been influenced by standards set for me by White America. Fanon (1952) even claimed that “the black man wants to be like the white man”. He insisted that “a long time ago the black man acknowledged the undeniable superiority of the white man, and all his endeavors aim at achieving a white existence” (Fanon, 1952, p. 202). The subtle images of success; the articulation of what is known as standard English, the nuclear family, the physical

appearance mimicking White women are examples, that by themselves seem innocuous enough. The problem arises, as well, in being ignorant of or denying the rich history of African America. The lesson being taught was that people of color, particularly African Americans, should be ashamed of their heritage borne of slavery. Carter G. Woodson (1933) described this phenomenon as the mis-education of the Negro. Further, he believed that the Negro was misled to believe that if he conformed to white standards that the schism between the races would dissolve (Woodson, 1933, p. 4). I find that I have perpetuated those beliefs by engaging in practices that influence others like me to learn the strategies and fit the mold of the dominant culture in our society.

Even now, I wonder if I am colluding with the hegemonic, oppressive culture. Presently, as a part-time consultant to a suburban school district, my basic duty is to meet with African American parents and articulate the district's academic expectations for their children in order to close the insidious achievement gap. Once again, this sounds like a noble endeavor. Yet, there is a gnawing deep within me that questions not only the efficacy, but the morality of such a program. Are African Americans condemned to live forever in the shadows of a culture that continues to exercise its privilege at the expense of others? When equity looms on the horizon, is it just outside the grasp of those who continue to search for equal opportunity through meaningful work, more than adequate housing and most importantly, a solid education?

These and other questions have led me to this place in the road where there must be answers. Can a journey so personal in nature offer any insight into what next steps will improve the terrain for African Americans in their quest for equitable living in this land of opportunity?

The search for answers began at a visceral level where my emotions became nearly overwhelming. I had to come to grips with the fact that feelings of disgust, frustration and anger, by

themselves were counterproductive. At that point, I chose a path that I believed would stimulate me to explore strategies that could produce both positive and tangible outcomes. My decision to use autoethnography as a means to generate solutions was directly linked to my introduction to critical race theory and its articulation of social justice concepts. In Yosso's (2006) discussion of critical race theory and cultural capital, she points out that "researchers, practitioners, and students are still searching for the necessary tools to analyze and challenge the impact of race and racism in U. S. society" (Yosso, 2006, p. 167). Critical race theory insists that race still matters and that when there is the intersection of race and property rights, there is opportunity to begin to understand these inequities through its use as an analytical instrument (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 47).

Upon making the decision to enter a doctoral program, I had no clue about the magnitude of its impact on my life. I do not like to think of myself as naïve. Nevertheless, there have been those occasions when my worldview seemed over-simplistic, even to me. These last two years, as a graduate student, have been a whirlwind of various kinds of immersions into the deep waters of new knowledge; critical race theory, interest convergence, property rights and white privilege. As I reflect on these experiences, I must have believed that pursuing a doctorate in education with an emphasis in social justice would be pretty straightforward. Taking the required courses and meeting the various requirements along the way would lead me along a generally uncomplicated path. What I have actually encountered could be considered as a life-altering journey.

When I think of social justice, I imagine hearing Martin Luther King, Jr. quoting the Old Testament prophet, Amos, who spoke of justice running "down as waters and righteousness as a mighty stream" (Amos 5:24). There are many other biblical references to injustice and

oppression, and so I had no doubt that I was on the right track in pursuing these social issues in the academy. What I did not count on was the revelatory exposure to research that, over and over, verified the intentionality of injustice suffered by the masses for the benefit of a few. Critical race theory explicates this concept by describing the idea that property and the rights related to it impact education. For example, “the quality and quantity of the curriculum varies with the property values of the school” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, “The Property Issue”, para. 9). It then follows that communities that are affluent will have access to higher quality resources than those communities with lower property values and lower tax assessments. Certainly, I had no way of factoring in my visceral reaction to the details of injustices like this, particularly racial injustice as it has played out in this country. In Cone’s (1990) discussion of a black theology, he states the correct response to racial injustice “is to destroy the oppressor’s definition of blackness by unraveling new meanings in old tales so that the past may emerge as an instrument of black liberation” (p.13).

Similar to Cone’s call, the use of story as a vehicle for assigning new meaning is a critical part of this research.

The “voice” component of critical race theory provides a way to communicate the experience and realities of the oppressed, a first step on the road to justice. As we attempt to make linkages between critical race theory and education, we contend that the voice of people of color is required for a complete analysis of the educational system. (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, “Challenging Claims of Neutrality”, para. 6)

Therefore, it follows that autoethnography is the proper tool for use as a lens to analyze the effects of marginalization and isolation in education of African Americans in the quest for social justice.

Social Justice

North (2008) analyzes the meanings of social justice and at the same time, cautions against its overuse thereby condemning it to the junkyard of buzzwords. She asserts that there is a wide range of terminology and projects created to describe social justice in education. Educational scholars use the term social justice to describe their efforts for positive change in the educational social order. Other phrases often used synonymously, include antioppressive education, antiracist education and some of the tenets of critical race theory, such as the permanence of racism and the convergence of interest and property. It appears that there can be no single definition of social justice and, thus, any attempts to define it are in flux (North, 2008, p. 1184).

North (2008), in her analysis, continues with what she criticizes as “a meritocratic ideology” (p. 1186), which states that all students have equal educational opportunities and that if they are not successful, it is their fault. Conveniently overlooked are the discriminatory policies and practices embedded in our society that prevent the equal distribution of opportunity. The result is that policy and daily micro-aggressions isolate, marginalize and silence those who do not have equal access to goods and services (North, 2008, p. 1186). Derald Wing Sue (2007) describes micro-aggressions as “Brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color” (Sue, 2007, p. 271).

Primarily, the practice of social justice demands dignity and respect for those who have suffered oppression. Pharr (1988) states that

It is virtually impossible to view one oppression, such as sexism, or homophobia in isolation because they are all connected: sexism, racism, homophobia, classism, ableism,

anti-Semitism, ageism. They are linked by a common origin – economic power and control and by common methods of limiting, controlling and destroying lives. (p. 1)

This can be achieved through equitable, not equal, distribution of goods and services. This belief becomes problematic when those members of the dominant group balk at the idea of more resources for those who have been victims of unequal access. When whiteness is viewed as a property right, it allows those who hold this right to exercise their privilege to absolutely exclude others (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006). Jensen (1998) describes white privilege as a complex social phenomenon. He further posits that “in a white supremacist culture, all white people have privilege, whether or not they are overtly racist themselves. There are general patterns, but such privilege plays out differently depending on context and other aspects of one’s identity (Jensen, 1998, p. 1-C).

This view safeguards the position of dominance for those in power. The position of white privilege becomes threatened unless the thought that all people should be treated in exactly the same way, or equally, is upheld. Peggy McIntosh (1988) posits that “whites are carefully taught not to recognize white privilege...” (McIntosh, 1988, para. 3).

Social justice training seems to be currently en vogue. A number of school districts in the area, as well as across the country, have adopted the notion that if faculty and students are properly trained in this curriculum, that opportunity for change becomes a likely possibility. One realization of this training has been the creation of cohorts to offer support to its members throughout the process of change. The members of these cohorts, within school district buildings and across districts, can become allies in the effort to raise awareness around discussions, for example, of institutional racism, oppression of all kinds and poverty. The anticipated outcome is that policy can be affected through changes that support equity of opportunity for all. North

(2008) continues with the notion that “attention to the equalization of power relations in education and society at large begs consideration of who holds power and in what locations” (p. 1189).

Critical Race Theory

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) presented a paper at a conference that would turn out to be revolutionary. They introduced the concept of critical race theory in education at a meeting of the American Education Research Association. Their stance was that critical race theory could be applied to understanding how race matters in our educational systems (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, “Limits of Multicultural Paradigm, para. 1).

As recently as the 1970s, scholars sought to examine how the interpretation of law, or critical legal studies, affected social norms in this country. This new movement referenced critical legal studies and subsequently birthed critical race legal studies in order to more clearly articulate how people of color have been marginalized through interpreting and implementing law. These scholars theorized that making meaning of how civil rights law was enacted left a gaping hole in understanding its inequitable application. Their studies developed into what is now known as critical race theory. It has been described as an intellectual movement made up primarily of law scholars of color (Isaksen, 2007). They saw the law as an accomplice in maintaining the supremacy of Whites in our culture. These scholars observed that the civil rights movement of the sixties seemed to be fading away. Their goal had been to raise a consciousness “that challenges the ways in which race is constructed and represented both in society and in the legal system that helps to define it” (Isaksen, p. 696). For example, legal scholar Cheryl Harris developed a theory declaring that a component of property could be addressed as whiteness. Because many theorists stand on the concept that property has been perceived as a right rather

than an object throughout recorded history in the United States, then it is possible to assign value to that property. Her theory served as the springboard for Ladson-Billings and Tate to apply critical race legal studies to education (Rousseau & Dixon, 2006, p. 32).

There are a number of themes defining critical race theory, perhaps the most important being the belief that racism has been woven into the fabric of life in the U.S. Critical race theory, or CRT, exposes how the practice of white privilege contributes to racial inequity. It questions the validity that we live in a colorblind society that rewards excellence. Much discussion has taken place among critical race theorists regarding the notion of interest convergence, whereby Whites benefit from the manipulation of political, legislative and educational policy (Dingus, 2006, p. 220). Most importantly, CRT strives to use theory as a weapon to eradicate practices of racialization in our society (Dixon & Rousseau, 2005, p. 37); and that influenced my decision to gain more insight into the implication of how social justice can be applied to equity in education.

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) reference three basic assumptions drawn from CRT themes, that had not been widely discussed before the introduction of critical race theory. They believe that inequity is practiced based on the following ideas:

1. Race continues to be a significant factor in determining inequity in the U.S.
2. U.S. society is based on property rights.
3. The intersection of race and property creates an analytic tool through which we can understand social (and consequently, school) inequity. (p. 47)

Their concern was that the affects of critical race theory relative to education practices had been neglected in scholarly writings. Their quest was to see that robust theory was developed around these basic tenets, with a particular focus on the delivery of services in the world of education.

Delpit (1988) claims that “one of the tragedies in this field of education” (p. 23) is the way voices of people of color have been stifled. The work of critical race theorists revolves around the concept that through giving voice to those affected by racial practices, wounds can begin to heal and the realities of those practices can be exposed thereby revealing and correcting oppressive behavior from members of the dominant group. They believe that the voice of the underserved can begin to push our society on the road to justice.

Autoethnography

I determined that the best analytical tool for me to use, as the researcher, was autoethnography. It enabled me to use story as a method of examining personal experiences, relative to the many faces of education. I selected this tool to explicate how I have coped with the oppressive effects of racialization and then chronicled efforts to build a community of liberation within the theoretical framework of critical race theory.

According to Trahar (2009), narrative inquiry is foundational to autoethnography. She posits that “narrative inquirers engage in intense and transparent reflection and questioning of their own position, values, beliefs and cultural background” (Trahar, 2009, para 19). Her description of narrative inquiry relies on the fact that story is used to make meaning of our lives and that narrative inquirers must be careful to delineate how a story is developed, identify the audience and explain the theory on which it rests.

Glowacki-Dudka, et al, (2005) describe autoethnography “as a sociological form of autobiography, autoethnography helps people step outside their immediate personal constraints to examine their social world through new eyes” (Glowacki-Dudka, et al, 2005, para. 1).

Manning (2008) questioned whether the use of autoethnography might be “a journey of self/indulgence” (p. 1). She said that, initially, her introduction to this research tool turned her

off; it seemed to be so unacademic. Yet she found that this instrument allowed her to uncap and reveal her values and beliefs and how they affected her research as she examined her own practice (Manning, 2008, p. 14).

It appears that defining autoethnography can be compared to grabbing a handful of gelatin and attempting to hold it. Many researchers have offered various descriptions, but all appear to agree that it is a social science approach to qualitative research methods with its source embedded in ethnography and deep reflection. There seem to be several units of study incorporated under ethnography which Gall, et al (2007) define as the “intensive study of the features of a given culture and the patterns in those features”. It follows, then, that autoethnography is a unit of ethnography with an autobiographical focus. Burnard (2007) adds that autoethnography “should offer other researchers something to work with, expand on or dismiss” (p. 808). The intent is to capture the influence of personal experience and how it affects cultural interpretations of the self researcher. Additionally, a key feature of this kind of research is the use of story or voice of the researcher.

Conclusion

As I mentioned earlier, my struggle with grasping the enormity of the power and impact of racialization in our country has been painful and circuitous. I have been challenged to consider if and how I can make any sense of these inequities and thus, articulate them in ways that may influence change. By looking at my own transformative development in analytic ways, I hope to illuminate the way race shapes lives.

There must be justice to ameliorate the effects of our woefully inadequate methods of dealing with the way injustice is perpetrated on its victims. The fact of the matter is that all suffer; the perpetrator or oppressor, as well as the victim or oppressed. One key is to unlock the

closets where answers are buried. The closets are the minds and hearts of those who, intentionally or not, continue to act in oppressive ways and those who have internalized the oppression in ways that are harmful.

Delimitations

The delimitations of this study are defined by the methodology. Autoethnography allows only for the perspective of the researcher, and so by definition has established its own limits.

Limitations

The limitations are bounded by the methodology because memory alone may not support archival or factual evidence. The possibility also exists that there may be limited access to archival data. It is here that the legitimacy of autoethnography must be established; the researcher's reality, supported by memory, is the researcher's truth.

Definitions

Throughout this document, I have used scholarly terminology that is salient to my research. For the sake of clarity, it is important to define those terms as I have used them throughout this study.

Counter-stories are personal narratives that challenge dominant beliefs about certain situations such as segregation. Counter-stories seek to restructure commonly held beliefs by permitting voices of the marginalized to be heard. In reference to stories about the harm of segregation, Dingus (2006) counters by stating that

...personal narratives illuminate how race, social class standing, gender, and personal relationships compounded individual support, resistance, and par-

ticipation in the movement to desegregate Southern schools. (p. 213)

Solorzano and Yosso (2002) describe racism as containing three points of importance. First, one group views itself as superior over others, which results in it exercising power over the other, thus gaining benefit at the expense of the other (p. 24). These benefits can be observed in social, economic, political and educational gain, while the other suffers in those same areas.

Autoethnography, a form of narrative inquiry has been defined by Ellis and Bochner (2000) as an

Autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural. Back and forth auto-ethnographers gaze, first through an ethnographic lens, focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of the personal experience; then they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self... (p. 739)

This study considered racialization as behavior that views situations from a racialized perspective. In other words, race is used as a marker to distinguish certain groups from others.

Dominant group refers to those who hold power in a society. This research used the term to identify White people as members of the dominant group which holds control or power in the culture of the United States. Put another way, this dominance can be deemed as white privilege.

Delgado and Stefancic (1995) discuss white privilege in light of immigration law in the United States. “Whiteness...was defined in opposition to non-white, an opposition that also marked a boundary between privilege and its opposite. Only those deemed white were worthy of entry into our community” (p. 77).

Educational scholars use the term social justice to describe their efforts for positive change in the educational social order. Other phrases often used synonymously, include antioppressive education and antiracist education.

Cornel West (1995) offers a definition of critical race theory that reflects its genesis. He states that

In short, Critical Race Theory is an intellectual movement that is both particular to our postmodern (and conservative) times and part of a long tradition of human resistance and liberation...the movement highlights a creative – and tension-ridden fusion of theoretical self-reflection, formal innovation, radical politics...

(p. xi)

Significance of Study

Critical race theory, using the practice of education as its lens, remained an appropriate foundational philosophy to guide this research. CRT takes a searing look at how our social practices are impacted by racism, yet still leaves enough space to remain hopeful that it is possible to eliminate the stench from it. The thought of joining those scholars who “use parables, chronicles, stories, counterstories, poetry, fiction and revisionist histories to illustrate the false necessity and irony of much of current civil rights doctrine” to affect change is a powerful and humbling notion (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, “Challenging Claims, para. 1).

The following chapters utilize CRT to examine several episodes in the life of the researcher. The first story highlights my experience with eminent domain when my family was displaced for the alleged expansion of a school shortly after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. Secondly, I examine the affect on me of serving as the lone Black counselor in two

predominately white school districts. Next, I chronicle the development of a program I co-created to offer academic support to African American students beginning at the ninth grade level. Finally, my research reflect on the efficacy of assisting African American parents in learning the details of supporting and encouraging their children to succeed according to established academic standards.

These narratives were woven together by a single, continuous thread- finding where the rocks are in the pond. Each account had a theme that investigated the strategies learned in order to negotiate a system put in place by the dominant group, White America.

As I thought about the ways my work on the marginalization and isolation of African Americans in our community, particularly relative to education, could affect change, I was encouraged by the work of critical race theorists and their efforts to transform how we think about race and racism. While the permanent status of racism in America is recognized, it ought to lead to a deeper desire to continue the struggle for change.

The assertion that racism is a permanent and pervasive part of the American landscape is not a defeatist position. It is an acknowledgement of the ‘trouble of the world,’ but it is coupled with a vision of hope for the future. (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006, p. 3)

These words have offered me solace in the midst of circumstances that look hopeless on the surface. CRT offered me the opportunity to use one of its main premises, story, to challenge the school of dominant thought and practice.

My rich experiences as a counselor in both a middle and high school settings for more than thirty years, offered a unique point of view for the journey. The stories that I shared came directly from vignettes reflecting my lived experience of isolation and marginalization, as an African American woman, during my career. I proposed a paradigm shift to address these issues

of isolation and marginalization by using the tool of autoethnography. AE (autoethnography) provided the opportunity for me to dig into the deep recesses of memory to make meaning from my life experiences. It set limits for me so that my perspective, my voice, did not drown out the goal to objectify my research outcomes. What I mean by that statement is the opportunity to do self-reflection must not obscure the need to explore opportunities to promote the promise of “social action toward liberation and the end of oppression” (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006, p.3).

Chapter Two- Review of Literature

Introduction

This study sought to answer two questions. The first one asked how to diminish the effects of racialization in education. Critical race theorists insist that “racism is ordinary,...the usual way society does business, the common, everyday experience of most people of color in this country” (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001, p. 6). It appears, then, that the dilemma involves drawing attention to the deleterious effects of continuing racist practices on not only people of color, but the whole of American society. However, the ordinary character of racism makes it “difficult to cure or address” (p. 7).

Secondly, this study sought to interrogate the notion of constructing specific strategies for systemic change. This is a challenge that comes at a time when the vast majority of educators are female and white. Kailin (2002) believes that

while their awareness of the inequities in gender relations has intensified in a largely female profession still managed and controlled by men, unfortunately their consciousness about racism or white supremacy, and its impact on individuals and institutions such as education, has not been significantly altered or challenged. (p. 25)

Kailin (2002) argues that the beginning of significant change must start in the halls of academia; in teacher education programs. She states that curricula for pre-service teachers must include the perspectives of people of color who may not fit the traditional models of success promulgated by the dominant culture (p. 27).

Historical Reflections

Lawrence (1995) maintains that we are bound together by a common thread that runs through our history and culture: racism. He further argues that

Much of one's inability to know racial discrimination when one sees it results from a failure to recognize that racism is both a crime and a disease. This failure is compounded by a reluctance to admit that the illness of racism infects almost everyone.

(Lawrence, 1995, p. 237)

Lawrence (1995) continues the discussion by claiming that Americans have been so contaminated by this condition that our vision is obscured in searching for a cure.

Much of the formal behavior between Blacks and Whites in the U. S. is couched in the concept of color-blindness. In theory, the idea is that each person is judged by her or his character instead of skin color. Gotanda (1995) debunks this notion by claiming that even the U.S. Supreme Court's use of colorblindness as a benchmark actually "fosters white racial domination" (p. 257). He states that "A color-blind interpretation of the Constitution legitimates and thereby maintains the social, economic, and political advantages that whites hold over other Americans..."(Gotanda, 1995, p. 257).

The entrenchment of racism began in colonial America and was exemplified by the codification of rules of behavior and punishment for slaves created by the Virginia Assembly in 1705 (Gotanda, 1995, p.261). He describes this system as the "institutionalism of racial classifications linked to disparate treatment marked the first formal establishment of racial categories in colonial America" (p. 261). Racial differentiation was rationalized then, as normal. Kailin (2002) makes the claim that "Slaveholders and colonizers appropriated the notion of

“race” as a convenient marker of inferiority or superiority to justify the extreme brutalities of colonialism, slavery and genocide “ (Kailin, 2001, p. 29).

The racialization of this country’s culture is an enduring stigma that continues to infect our ability to implement meaningful and lasting healing within our communities. DeGruy Leary (2005) believes that “America’s resistance to accepting its responsibility for slavery and repairing the damage done, continues to prevent the nation from taking its place as the world’s moral leader” (p. 24).

Yet, throughout this dark period of our history, enslaved Blacks fought, often in secret, for the right to an education. This struggle persisted even though laws were created to prosecute those who learned to read and write as well as those who taught them. These men and women realized that literacy held the key to their freedom. Williams (2005) states that “once literate, many used this hard-won skill to disturb the power relations between master and slave, as they fused their desire for literacy with their desire for freedom” (p. 7). In their discussion on racial literacy, Rogers and Mosley (2006) maintain that “When literacy education for African Americans ceased to be prohibited and punishable under state laws, literacy tests continued to function as a replacement of property as a means of preserving the rights of citizenship for whites” (p. 462). Even since the civil rights era, urban schools are still routinely blocked from prospects for delivering an equitable education to its students because of political, economic and educational restrictions (p. 462).

Focus of Study

The focus of this study was to examine how the practice of social justice, through the lens of critical race theory, could be activated to diminish the effects of racist behavior in our society, with particular emphasis toward education. The foundation for this research rested on the

concept that African Americans have historically been isolated and marginalized in a racialized U. S. society. Endemic racism has precluded the delivery of equitable educational opportunities for people of color. How then can racism in our country be diminished in the field of education? What strategies can be employed to articulate its effects and implement change in the educational domain?

Critical race theory has been described as a movement to study and transform how race, racism and power interact with one another (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). CRT scholars insist that critical race theory has an activist component, implying an impatience with traditional civil rights methods, which they view as incremental (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Educational scholars like Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) have found that CRT offers an opportunity to examine how race and property rights affect the delivery of equitable educational opportunities to our citizens.

The employment of critical race theory as an element of analysis can be compared to one of the wheels on a vehicle. That vehicle can then be described as social justice. Educators have described their efforts to transform the social order in education as a social justice movement.

Another of the wheels must represent the use of voice. Delpit (1995) discusses a situation where “white conservatives and liberals were battling each other over what was good for these ‘other people’s children’, while excluding from the conversation those with the most to gain or lose by its outcome” (p. 6). Giving voice to the marginalized, who are all too often African Americans, offers the opportunity to counter uninformed beliefs about the values of those persons, especially in relationship to educational aspirations. Alonso, et al, (2009) contradict the idea that young people of color do not care about being educated. In their research, they found that

Despite images of urban students being antischool, educational concerns abounded in their journals. Again and again, they wrote about hard work being the road to success, about the importance of a good attitude and sustained effort, about the centrality of education to achieve their goals. (Alonso, Anderson, Su & Theoharis, 2009, p. 82)

Theoretical Frames

CRT Beliefs

The roots of critical race theory are found in what is known as critical legal studies and radical feminist studies (Delgado & Stefancic, (2001). The contributions from these schools of thought helped shape CRT into an activist and scholarly movement determined to create a new paradigm that seeks to correct the negative impact of racism in all areas of our society. West (1995) describes CRT as “an intellectual movement that is both particular to postmodern (and conservative) times and part of a long tradition of human resistance and liberation” (p. xi).

There are several basic themes that run throughout CRT literature. First, Taylor (2009) observes that racism is normal in this country and “is neither aberrant or rare” (p. 4). The second tenet is referred to as interest convergence. Bell (1995) posits that “The interest of blacks in achieving racial equality will be accommodated only when it converges with the interests of whites” (p. 22). Delgado & Stefancic (2001) describe the third belief as the “ ‘social construction’ thesis...that race and races are products of social thought and relations” (p. 7). They specifically counter the idea that race has any physiological roots. Further, they discuss another element referred to as “differential racialization” (p. 8). This phenomenon is described as the way Whites assign negative racial connotations to various groups depending on labor needs in the marketplace. An example illustrates how Japanese workers were in great favor at one point in this country’s history and at a later point, they “may have been in intense disfavor

and removed to war relocation camps, while society cultivated other groups of color for jobs in the war industry or as cannon fodder on the front” (p. 8). “In the United States, race has consistently been used to include and exclude certain groups from equal participation, resources, and human rights” (Kohli, 2008, p. 181). The last tenet speaks of the use of voice. Dingus (2006) discusses the importance of hearing the voices of those who have been marginalized through the use of narratives. She states that “personal narratives illuminate how race, social class standing, gender, and personal relationships compounded individual support, resistance, and participation in the movement to desegregate Southern schools” (p. 213).

Milner (2008) conducted research that sought to interrogate how teachers in an urban school would respond to insidious negative concepts about urban schooling. He found that the strategies they employed with their students served “to counter, disrupt, and interrupt pervasive discourses that only focus on the negative characteristics” (p. 1573) believed about them and their students.

At a conference of educational scholars, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) proposed that CRT principles could be applied to education in order to examine educational inequity and serve as the means to deconstruct its deleterious effects in our society. Their premise encompasses three major concepts. First, they believe that race significantly influences inequity; that our society is based on property rights and that race and property intersect in such a way that social and educational inequity can be theorized (p. 47).

Social Justice

The notion of social justice is not a new concept and has been articulated as a process for calling attention to fairness and equity in the treatment of individuals and groups. Kincheloe and McLaren (2000) believe that “A critical social theory is concerned...with issues of power and

justice and the ways that the economy, matters of race, class, gender, ideologies, discourses, education, religion...interact to construct a social system” (p. 281). In extending their discussion, social justice theory can then be viewed as a vehicle used to analyze the dynamics of power and how competing interests influence or gain privilege through the use of power strategies. Educators employ the use of social justice as a tool to bring about positive change in educational systems, often referring to it, as Kailin (2001) does, as antiracist education. As practiced, social justice requires dignity and respect for those who have lived under oppression of any kind.

Social justice practice appears to run counter to the beliefs of those who possess power; power that controls and implements policies and practices to maintain the status quo. In the United States, the dominant group has been reluctant to share that position, often referred to as white privilege. In Williams’ (2005) narrative of African Americans’ efforts to become educated after the end of slavery, she tells of Whites’ efforts to discourage the former slaves. “Witnesses described groups of white men, among them professionals and large property owners, on rampages in which they assaulted and threatened men and women whom they believed challenged their economic and social status” (p. 123).

Duncan (2000) claims that during the early years of the 20th century, White philanthropists influenced and controlled the education of Black young people. He states that the negative effects of their use of power in making educational policy for Blacks “enabled the creation of conditions that continue to plague the education of children and youth of color in urban schools at the turn of the 21st century” (p. 31).

Within social justice training rests the hope of re-educating mis-educated Blacks and Whites about themselves through the lens of an authentic telling of history. Baldwin (1963) believes

If, for example, one managed to change the curriculum in all schools so that Negroes learned more about themselves and their real contributions to this culture, you'd be liberating white people who know nothing about their own history. (p. 683)

It is then incumbent on those of us who consider ourselves educated to take on the obligation of bringing about change in a society whose vision has been blurred by the consequences of racism.

Teacher Education

A dilemma in teacher education programs is that the great majority of those instructors and students are White and middle-class. This has become problematic, particularly in schools where students are of low economic status and are of color. Those students are exposed to fewer examples of educational professionals who resemble them in appearance or culture.

It is critical for predominately White pre-service teachers to be prepared to meet the needs of students who have not had access to equitable educational resources. Ladson-Billings (1994) argues that it is necessary for teacher educators to include the concept of cultural relevance. She characterizes this strategy by claiming that “culturally relevant teaching uses student culture in order to maintain it and to transcend the negative effects of the dominant culture. The focus of culturally relevant teaching is to assist in the development of a “relevant black personality” that allows African American students to choose academic excellence yet still identify with African and African American culture” (p. 17).

Delpit (1995) believes that it is critically important to examine our systems of education to see whether there is significant minority participation in developing policies and best practices. It is “time to reassess what we are doing in public schools and universities to include other voices, other experiences” (p. 20). Kailin (2001) found that there is “a profound lack of knowledge and understanding about racism among teachers, but also found this silence or

confusion applied to the knowledge base or curricula in higher education among those who teach the teachers” (p. xvii)

Rogers and Mosley (2006) conclude from their research of racial literacy that it can be a tool to assist in the delivery of social justice in classrooms. However, by itself, racial literacy is not enough. “Such research and pedagogical designs need to be carried out alongside other social, political, and economic decisions, as changes in talk alone will not lead to the redistribution of wealth and power that underlie institutionalized racism” (p. 486).

School Culture and Climate

School climate has been considered an important predictor of academic success. In Edmond’s (1982) discussion of school improvement programs, he insists that one of the characteristics of effective schools is “an orderly, safe climate conducive to teaching and learning” (p. 4). Environment or climate includes psychological, as well as physical components in school settings. A marked increase in the enrollment of children of color, and additionally those who may also speak a language other than English, requires the examination of the culture and climate in which they are placed as students. Hennen (2005) insists that a healthy school climate takes careful planning and on-going support:

Well-disciplined schools usually balance clearly established and communicated rules of behavior with a climate of concern for students as individuals. Likewise, skilled leaders promote effective faculty behaviors that foster a classroom climate in which students feel safe and motivated to learn. (para. 7)

Pennington (2007) observes that White teachers often see themselves as saving children of color from themselves and their environments away from school. As a result, the classroom climate can inculcate “a dark condescending nature, be unwelcome, and appear to be falsely

empathetic” (p. 98). White women often come with preconceived notions about the rightness of the dominant culture over other cultural settings. They were not compelled to examine the privilege they brought with them in the classroom, which then made them complicit in racializing their students. “Their role was to have heartbreaking lives and our role was to save them from those lives” (p. 99).

While we were relaying our thoughts about our lives within the school we were also describing the larger societal mores of White women as they relate to communities of color. Our desire to help was manifested in our teacher preparation program geared to ‘at-risk’ children... Our notions of saving could be viewed as seeking to conquer the factors that we saw as problematic to our idea of what their lives should be. (p. 98).

Kailin (1999) posits that the research she conducted in a Midwest school district revealed that White children attended schools with primarily White teachers, while schools that were attended by Black students had no Black teachers. “Hence the reality is that they are taught by people who are generally not familiar with cultures, their neighborhoods, or their lived experiences” (p. 728).

In her discussion of internalized racism, Kohli (2008) remarked that both faculty and students can suffer long-term effects of pain suffered in a racialized incident. Pre-service teachers of color talked of being “able to make connections between experiencing racism and beginning to view ones’ self as inferior and/or culturally subordinate to White cultural values” (p. 184). A pre-service teacher reflected on an incident she experienced as a high school student. This Mexican-American stated that because there were no honors classes offered in her small community school, she had to be bused to a nearby predominately White school where these academic resources were available. As a result of this structural racism, this woman “internalized the message that Whites were intellectually superior to her (and other Mexicans)

and she began to doubt her own abilities” (p. 185). Often, these messages are delivered in subtle comments or behaviors referred to as microaggressions. Sue, et al (2007) indicate that these remarks

are brief and commonplace daily, verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color. Perpetrators of microaggressions are often unaware that they engage in such communications when they interact with racial/ethnic minorities. (p. 271)

African American parents have often been characterized as disinterested players when it comes to participating in the educational life of their children. The reasons put forth to explain this phenomenon range from low socio-economic status to lack of concern. However, a number of counternarratives exist to refute these statements. For example, Ladson-Billings (1994) makes the claim that because the dominant culture does not recognize the validity of African American culture, that uninformed comparisons have been drawn between Black and White families. If African American children do not assimilate the norms established as acceptable by White educators, the conclusion is made that the parents of these children are disengaged.

As far as back as the early 19th century, Black parents played active roles in seeking an equitable education for their children. At that time, the Boston school system permitted Black students to attend the city’s schools; however Black parents were wary of the possibility of prejudicial treatment to their children (Morris, 2008). During the 1930s, Milwaukee witnessed “the Black community’s 60-year quest for quality schooling for their children” (p. 718). The *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, brought to a head by the strong involvement of Blacks, illustrates the continual involvement of Black parents in pushing for excellent opportunities for

their children. The Brown decision “brought about a renewed sense of hope for Black people...eliminating legalized segregation...and offering promises of equal education” (Morris, p. 717). African American parents continue to seek legal redress for segregated educational programs that are deemed inferior to opportunities provided for White students as demonstrated by a court case in St. Louis in the mid-70s. Minnie Liddell, with others, brought a suit against the St. Louis Board of Education accusing it of “contributing to the circumstances whereby African American children received a segregated education” (Morris, 2004, p. 84). These examples refute the notion that Black parents are not engaged in the educational needs of their children.

Often, Black parents have been marginalized, rather than invited to participate in the shaping of recommendations for improved educational programming. There is research which indicates that community-based programs designed to build relationships between schools, parents and community offer “the promise of broader and deeper participation by families in the education of their children” (Warren, et al, 2009, p.1). A key component of these programs is the building of trust between all of the involved parties. Additionally, “parent storytelling in school contexts has the potential not only to inform educators’ view of students’ multiple worlds but also to enhance parent empowerment and family-school relations” (Auerbach, 2002, p. 1370).

Autoethnography

This study relied on the vehicle of autoethnography to serve as a platform for researching issues of educational equity. Glowacki-Dudka, et al (2005) posit that autoethnography allows a researcher to step outside of her immediate situation and reflect on her social condition from a

different perspective. They indicate that this qualitative tool could facilitate “cross-cultural understanding and social change” (p. 30).

Pennington (2007) uses autoethnography as a learning strategy for pre-service teachers as they reflect on their classroom experiences with students of color; she also incorporates her personal story of examining the impact of racism on her own professional practice. Manning (2008) asserts that in her search for an appropriate instrument to research teaching experiences in multicultural classrooms, she discovered that the use of autoethnography allowed her to “give oneself up to contemplation of the diverse influences of the researcher’s self on her research is enlightening and essential for ethical research” (p. 2).

Miller (2008) used autoethnography to study race in higher education. In writing from an autoethnographic point of view, he discovered inconsistent perceptions of his own concepts of race. Miller (2008) concludes that this form of research “can be used as an effective method for reflecting, interrogating and modifying one’s own perspective to arrive at more nuanced and complex understandings, which reinforce the conclusion that race plays out in messy and complicated ways” (p. 347).

This form of narrative inquiry situates the researcher, not only as the principle investigator, but also as the subject. One of its most salient features is the use of story and counter-story to give voice to those who may not have been privileged to share their experiences in an open forum. Trahar (2009) puts forth the notion that autoethnography used as a tool of “narrative inquiry became the most appropriate methodological approach, because I was investigating meanings of experiences but, at the same time, the research process itself was a series of experiences, a journey” (p. 4).

The use of storytelling is not a new strategy for influencing change. Critical legal scholars have acknowledged its use as a familiar tool in the area of affecting legal outcomes (Farber & Sherry, 2009). Even critics of legal storytelling have determined “that legal stories, ...can play a useful role in legal scholarship” (p. 339).

Solorzano and Yosso (2002) warn that stories referred to as majoritarian are derived from a precedent of white privilege and generally imply that such privilege is normal. “In other words, a majoritarian story is one that privileges Whites, men, the middle and/or upper class, and heterosexuals by naming these social locations as natural or normal points of reference” (p. 28). The story of the “All-American” family implies a deficit in families that don’t fit the majoritarian model of success. This deficit storytelling strategy suggests that the only way people of color can achieve success is by assimilating themselves into the dominant culture (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). The result is that stories from people of color become delegitimized and marginalized.

The anecdote to this dilemma could be the use of counter-stories. Solorzano and Yosso (2002) describe several functions of counter-stories. One outcome could be a sense of community among those who have been marginalized and isolated from contributing in meaningful ways to educational praxis. Additionally, conventional or dominant wisdom can be challenged by “providing a context to understand and transform established belief systems” (p. 36). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) posit that “naming one’s own reality” (p. 5) is a theme that runs through CRT work. Furthermore, they state that use of voice in CRT “provides a way to communicate the experience and realities of the oppressed, a first step on the road to social justice” (p. 6).

Marginalization and Isolation

Smith, et al, (2007) describe their research of racial marginalization and isolation by examining racial priming and misandry on college campuses with a history of being primarily populated by White faculty and students. Racial priming is defined as a process of conditioning Whites to employ learned racialized behaviors from their youth while, at the same time, believing themselves to be color-blind. Misandry refers to the intentional marginalization and fear-mongering regarding African American males, which, over time, becomes institutionalized. This stereotypical behavior seems to bear a distinct resemblance to what has been called micro-aggressions.

As a result of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, many competent Black educators were displaced by their White counterparts (Fultz, 2004). This situation came about as Whites objected to Blacks instructing their children. Fultz describes policies that refuted any form of integration as exemplified by the Georgia Board of Education in 1955. “It unanimously adopted a resolution to revoke ‘forever’ the license of any teacher who supports, encourages, condones, or agrees to teach mixed classes” (p. 17).

When the St. Louis Board of Education determined to implement desegregation incrementally, it decided to begin the process by combining the two local teachers’ colleges; Stowe Teachers College for Blacks and Harris Teachers College for Whites. Though the Stowe facility was a recently constructed building, the decision was made to move all students into the older Harris building. This merge created somewhat of an overlap of staff, which resulted in many Black teachers being displaced or demoted in favor of White teachers. Dr. Ruth Harris, who had served as the president of Stowe Teachers College was placed in a classroom at the newly desegregated school (Wetstein, 2007).

These examples of literature from the annals of our country's educational history illustrate how race and racism have impacted outcomes in all areas of our society. The fact that African Americans, as well as other citizens of color, have been marginalized and/or isolated could be the impetus to continue to research means for dismantling the crippling affect of racialized behaviors in this country.

Chapter Three - Methods

Introduction

This study examined the practice of social justice through the lens of critical race theory (CRT) as the theoretical framework. Autoethnography, a form of narrative inquiry, was used as the analytical tool to explicate the research in this study. The foundation for this qualitative research project is embedded in the assumptions of CRT that African Americans have historically been isolated and marginalized in the racialized culture of the United States of America, precluding the delivery of equitable educational opportunities for people of color.

Principles

The articulation of my argument rested on the methodological framework of my research. My initial supposition was that I have experienced the effects of racialization in the workplace, as well as my world away from my profession. Secondly, locating my experiences in relation to the dominant culture has exposed my perception of being isolated and marginalized in certain situations. For example, a question I might ask in staff meeting is ignored, yet, when a White colleague reiterates the same question in the same meeting, a response is forthcoming. Finally, I argue that solutions do exist for the voice of the marginalized to be heard.

Specifically, I believe that there is a need to interpret and convey strategies to achieve what is measured as success in the dominant culture for those outside of it. Negotiating systems have not always been made apparent to people of color. Therefore, it is imperative that those who have been marginalized learn how to penetrate systemic barriers in order to access goods and services which have been traditionally available to White America. In other words, as people of color, we must find where 'the rocks are in the pond'.

Rationale

The concept of critical race theory in education was developed nearly fifteen years ago, by Gloria Ladson-Billings and William F. Tate (1995). Its foundation has three legs, namely that racism is permanent in the United States. Secondly, they maintain that this country's culture is based on property rights. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) review history from the point where the Pilgrims usurped property from Native Americans to slaves being considered pieces of property to current issues related to property values; for example, the benefits awarded affluent property owners. Lastly, these researchers contend that race and property intersect with one another in a way that can offer an analytical lens for examining inequity in this society (p. 12). Duncan (2000) claims that the concept of property rights is promulgated in ways that influence the dominant discourse on race.

...the preservation of material property rights as well as the extension of the notion property to include skin colour has always played out in ways that maintain an unequal distribution of economic, social and political resources that privileges white people over people of colour in the United States. (p. 187)

One of the tenets of CRT is that stories from the oppressed or marginalized, “may begin a process of adjustment in our system of beliefs and categories by calling attention to neglected evidence and reminding readers of our common humanity” (Delgado & Stefancic, p. 43).

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) further insist that story-telling helps heal the destructive forces of self-condemnation often found in members of marginalized groups. Finally, they believe that stories from the oppressed can have an “affect on the oppressor” (p. 21). They claim that the oppressor does not recognize or realize that oppression even exists. Because of this line of thinking, the oppressor can rationalize his actions, excusing him from examining them. “Stories

by people of color can catalyze the necessary cognitive conflict to jar dysconscious racism” (p.21).

Critical race theory created a dissonance that caused me to consider how I had internalized past racialized experiences in light of CRT’s powerful interpretation of racism in this country. I do not mean to imply that I suddenly encountered a sense of enlightenment. On the contrary, African Americans have always been clear about the racial injustices we have had to endure. The discord I felt came from learning how detailed and intentional racist practices have been created and implemented in our society. The research I read revealed the insidious nature of racism and how embedded it is in this culture. I was disturbed because I realized that I am one of those who Woodson (1933) referred to as having been mis-educated.

Subsequently, I experienced much angst about the apparent hopelessness of the situation. I then had to revisit one of the foundational concepts of CRT, which states that “race, unlike gender and class, remains undertheorized” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p 13). Ladson-Billings and Tate continue their discussion:

By arguing that race remains untheorized, we do not mean that other scholars have not looked carefully at race as a powerful tool for explaining social inequity; rather, we suggest that the intellectual salience of this theorizing has not been systematically employed in the analysis of educational inequality. (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 14)

The idea that by examining racial inequity, particularly in education, solutions for change might emerge inspired me to search for ways to contribute to this body of knowledge known as critical race theory. Upon further research, autoethnography seemed to be the appropriate tool to use in investigating the impact of marginalization and isolation on my worldview and its influence in my more than thirty-year professional practice.

Research Design

I selected this research design, autoethnography, because it allowed me to use years of personal stories that influenced, not only the interpretation of my worldview, but also how I delivered professional services throughout my career as a secondary school counselor. I am reminded of Obama's autobiography (2004), where the reader has opportunity to observe the writer/researcher describe aspects of his life that shaped his view of the world and how he operated within it. His work could well be described as autoethnographic research.

Autoethnography has its roots in ethnography, which is exemplified by reflexivity. Berg (2007) claims that "this reflexive characteristic implies that the researcher understands that he or she is part of the social world(s) that he or she investigates" (p. 178). Berg (2007) also states that "subjective disclosures by researchers allow the reader to better understand why a research area has been selected..." (p. 181). In her description of ethnographic analysis, Merriam (1998) describes two key features of ethnography: (1) the examination of "culture and (2) social regularities of everyday life" (p. 156). Autoethnography is sometimes referred to as narrative analysis. Merriam (1998) suggests that narrative analysis is a research method that allows the use of stories to examine life experiences. Furthermore, she states that "first-person accounts of experience form the narrative 'text' of the research approach" (p. 157). It seems clear that autoethnography meets these standards.

The use of autoethnography as the research instrument, by its very nature, embedded me squarely into the data as the subject and the object. Bochner (Ellis & Bochner, 2000) discusses his traditional training in social science and reflects on what appears to be a concern within some areas of the academic community that this branch of narrative inquiry may lack scholarly rigor. Bochner skillfully counters this argument by claiming that "life and narrative are inextricably

connected...Narrative is both about living and a part of it” (p. 746). He suggests that this form of social science should not have to defend its legitimacy, and further, that narrative cannot be separated from any form of scientific inquiry (p. 746).

Figure 1 illustrates the developmental components of this research model. Imagine a funnel holding several distinct ingredients necessary to create a specific result. The following section describes how each piece or ingredient functioned in the research process.

Critical events – These incidents revealed the manifestation of isolation and marginalization in racialized communities.

Reflections – Introspective interpretation of critical events. Examples of these events included stories and counter-stories about being the lone Black counselor in a predominately White school, the effort to empower African American students to develop academic skills that represent success as defined by the dominant group, the effect of implementing eminent domain on the family home in order to improve a school site and the attempt to help African American parents exercise their authority in partnering with the school to achieve school success for their children.

CRT – Critical race theory was the theoretical framework used in this research.

Autoethnography - a form of narrative inquiry was used as the analytical tool in this study.

Figure 1: Components of Research Model

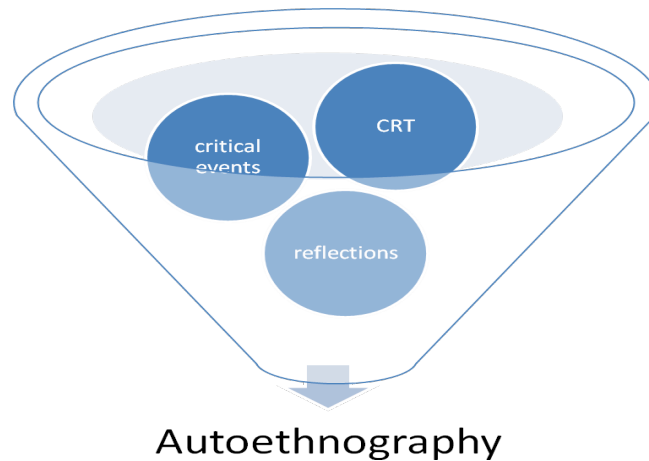


Figure 1 illustrates the elements that constitute the formation of the autoethnography for this study.

Articulation of CRT on Critical Events

Of the CRT principles, four were used as instruments in this inquiry to articulate the critical events that were selected for analysis. The first principle, the permanence of racism, was the lens used to examine two critical events. One episode described my experience as the lone Black counselor in a predominately White school. A second one assessed the effect of the first principle on a program designed to support the efforts of African American students to achieve parity in accessing educational opportunity in the school. Both of these events were also addressed by using the CRT principle of interest convergence and property rights.

The third incident to be analyzed described formal and informal efforts to encourage more visible and positive interaction between African American parents and school personnel. The CRT principle depicting the intersection of race and property was the tool that used for this analysis.

The last event, the use of eminent domain by a school system, was scrutinized through the lens of property rights. Table 1 provides a graphical description of the instruments used in this research project.

Table 1: Critical Events in Relation to CRT Principles

Critical Events	CRT Principles
Lone Black Counselor	Interest Convergence/Permanence of Racism
Partners in Achievement	Property Rights/Permanence of Racism
Engaging African American Parents	Intersection of Race and Property
Use of Eminent Domain	Property Rights

Selecting which critical events to use and which ones to discard required some deep reflection on my part. This use of reflexivity forced me to consider countless micro-aggressions, which Sue (2007) describes as intentional or unintentional demeaning remarks regarding one's race, and several direct confrontations throughout my professional career. Considering some of these experiences brought back bitter memories. The evidence of racialized incidents has left indelible marks on my psyche and shaped my response to racist practices that I've observed, particularly in the area of delivering educational services. As the researcher, I determined not to spend time on a list of endless insults, but invested my energy in communicating the need to seek solutions to eradicating the cancer of racism that affects all of us.

Story and counter-story are employed as tools of both CRT and autoethnography. The following chapters are each devoted to one of the critical events previously identified. These critical events have been enhanced by including stories and counter-stories. So that they are easily identified, the stories are highlighted within the text.

The first three critical events that I've previously noted were directly related to my professional experience as a school counselor working in predominately White school systems. I decided that these events best articulated the need to pursue strategies that illustrate racial inequities in our educational system and ways to ameliorate some of its adverse effects. The deeper meaning of this research project has been to motivate educators, policy-makers and community members to conceptualize and implement solutions to fix our broken educational structures.

The critical event which examined the impact of exercising eminent domain on families was selected because I believe that it first foreshadows my search for equity in the area of public education. The explication of its affect on my family was vital to understanding how my values were shaped by this experience.

Data Collection

Chavez (2009) discusses using CRT and autoethnography as a means to examine issues, such as race. She believes that "together they represent new alternatives in thinking about the voices that have been excluded in the academy" (p. 9). A shared feature of both CRT and autoethnography is the telling of stories or reflections from the researcher's personal and professional experiences. Ellis (2004) claims that

Stories are the ways humans make sense of their worlds. Stories are essential to human understanding and are not unique to autoethnography... Given their importance, I argue that stories should both be a subject and a method of social science research. (Ellis, 2004, p. xii)

The initial source of data came from my memory, an acceptable source in ethnographic and autoethnographic work. Chavez (2009) indicates that relying on memory, is by its very

nature a selective reinterpretation of our experiences. Yet, she states that “inward reflexivity, therefore, is certainly a good place to start if our sustained goals are to change these highly politicized and unequal structures within the field of education” (p. 13).

To support this primary source, data was collected from various archival sources, such as that of the Saint Louis Public Schools. Additional sources were a collection of data accessed from archival material I accumulated during my years of service in my former school district. Examples included, but were not limited to, a funding proposal for a program I co-created to support and encourage Black students to excel academically, documentation of the racial populations of advanced courses in the curriculum and a program design for a parent support program targeting Black families. Furthermore, documents from research databases such as *Teachers College Record*, other articles and books written by researchers in the field of critical race theory and autoethnography were used.

In Quinn’s (2008) discussion of her methodology, she insists that autoethnography is not only scholarly, but provides the opportunity to identify themes through reflexivity. As a result, “a conceptual framework emerges grounded in both theory and practice” (p. 25).

Data Analysis

This study has been about my decision to analyze how I responded to marginalization and isolation as a Black female educator. It was designed to allow my personal reflections to legitimize my professional stance on dismantling what I have observed to be racialized behaviors within the academic environment where I was employed. In my estimation, the most powerful instruments for me to use in the analysis of this research were CRT and autoethnography.

The data collected was analyzed using a primary tenet of critical race theory; story and counter-story. The other analytical tool, autoethnography, provided reflective thought by also

using story and counter-story. The idea behind choosing these strategies for analyzing data was to subsequently influence substantive change, specifically in the area of education. Chavez (2009) posits that

Autoethnography confronts and defies traditional investigative methods....autoethnography makes it possible to challenge the illusion of neutrality in research since it underscores the positionality of the researcher... (p. 15)

Taylor (2009) maintains that “CRT scholars often use storytelling, narrative, autobiography, and parable as a way to expose and challenge social constructions of race” (p. 8). Cone (1990) claims that storytelling, in response to racial injustice, can “destroy the oppressor’s definition of blackness by unraveling new meanings in old tales so that the past may emerge as an instrument of black liberation” (p.13).

As Quinn (2008) celebrates her use of autoethnography, she can “embrace the possibilities of affecting change by being ‘on the ground’ with the research rather than assessing it from a distance” (p. 31). Having served as a school counselor for over thirty years, I found that Griffin (2009) perfectly describes my own position when she states that “through this research process I endeavored to examine my beliefs, values and practices developed through the course of my preparation and professional career as a school counselor” (p. 13).

Though autoethnography, as a qualitative research tool, has been used in academia for nearly thirty years, its use is not universally known. A number of researchers have found it to be useful in explicating issues of educational policy and practice. However, autoethnography has become legitimized in other areas of study.

For example, Gee (2009) wrote her dissertation on growing up with a mentally ill parent. Her research explored themes revolving around managing effective communication, while

struggling with “recurrent themes of guilt, anger and fear” (abstract). Kratz (2008) discusses his adjustment as pastor moving into a new congregation. His use of autoethnography was supported by his collection of data through journaling. Harris (2008) describes her experiences after being diagnosed with terminal cancer. The dissertation studied the role her faith played “through such a tumultuous event and the resulting hope, courage, and improved health recognized from these belief systems” (abstract). Lynn (2009) developed her dissertation around the theoretical framework of Performance Studies. Besides the written word, she uses music, poetry, video and photographs. The goal of another autoethnographic study was to improve the articulation of the mission of a non-profit (DeJong, 2008). Newman’s (2008) self-study investigates his “creative processes as he composes a musical work in a contemporary post-bop style for two pianos” (abstract). These examples of current autoethnographic research reflect its varied uses for illuminating solutions to questions put forth by implementing this form of narrative inquiry.

Verification/Limitations

There were inherent limitations built into the use of autoethnography as a research tool. The fact that I am, both the researcher and the researched prohibited traditional measures of verification generally employed in qualitative and quantitative studies. For example, there were no charts or graphs, no sample drawn from a population, or even focus groups from which to derive themes. Memory has been my primary source of data. Yet, the researcher’s perspective shapes her worldview, thus, representing her truth.

Traditionally trained scholars offer the criticism that memory can be capricious, incomplete and self-serving. A major issue seems to be whether autoethnography should be recognized “as a major work of legal scholarship” (Farber & Sherry, 2009, p. 311). Litowitz

(2009) protests that there are political repercussions because of the unpredictable direction story may take in research. He claims that “if one set of narratives can make us more sympathetic to people of color, it stands to reason that a different set of narratives can make us less sensitive” (p. 303). Litowitz (2009) illustrates this statement by referring to conservative scholar, Shelby Steele who uses storytelling with the antithetical perspective of scholar Derrick Bell, who also uses storytelling to substantiate his views on the permanence of racism (p. 303). Even supporters discuss the difficulty of self-examination and its exposure in a written document (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 738). However, Bochner (p. 735) argues that readers of autoethnographic research should experience “moral dilemmas” put forth in such work, rather than the impersonal approach that is often expected. The fact that there may not have been results leading to generalizability was of small concern, since that was not necessarily the intent of using story and counter-story as a research tool. The ultimate goal of this project was to challenge current thought regarding systemic inequality and to explore new paradigms in delivering equitable educational opportunities for all of our citizens, but particularly those of color.

Chapter Four: The Impact of Eminent Domain on African American Communities

Prologue

Once upon a time, there was a little girl who lived with her mother and father, brother and grandfather. They were a very happy family living in the house where the little girl's mother had been born in an old established part of the city, a community of African Americans, known as the Ville. One day, her parents decided that, though it was a lovely old house, it was time to find a place with more space for their growing children. After searching for what seemed like a very long time, the parents announced that they'd found the perfect place.

Moving day was a very exciting time for the whole family. The children had their own rooms; the grandfather had a really big room with a great view and the parents had a room with two closets – a wonderful spot for the children to play hide and seek. The house had a huge backyard and lots of other children lived in the neighborhood, too. There was even a big school right at the end of the block.

There was just one problem. The children and their friends could not attend that school – it was for Whites only. This meant that parents had to transport their children to a school a couple of miles away – the school for Black children. Now the irony was, that after school was dismissed each day, the children in the neighborhood, the Black children, could play in the school yard in their neighborhood. The little girl, who was only six years old, and her friends were oblivious of the challenges and inconveniences that were endured in this Jim Crow environment.

Unbeknownst to the children, change was in the air. The time was soon coming when they would no longer have to travel out of the neighborhood to go to school. Yes, indeed, they would go to the school that was within view, practically outside of their front doors!

Introduction

It was 1954 and I was that little girl. I am not so sure that I understood all that was going on, but I was aware that something very different was happening. According to the official minutes of the St. Louis Public School Board of Education, at the May meeting, the U. S. Supreme Court decision to abolish segregation in public schools was discussed. A special meeting was called on June 22, 1954 (Board of Education minutes, Vol. 51, 121), at which Superintendent Philip J. Hickey introduced the plan he expected the Board to accept so that the desegregation process could be implemented, in order to adhere to the mandate of the Supreme Court. The plan was incremental, in that the schools did not desegregate all at once. First, the Black and White teachers' colleges were merged. This was to be followed by opening up the high schools and then finally, the elementary schools. The grade schools reopened in September of 1955 with Black and White children in the same classrooms. It is important to note here that not all schools experienced this phenomenon. Because schools were still organized by neighborhoods, those neighborhoods without significant racial shifts remained segregated.

At last, all seemed well, at least through the lenses of young children, who were happy to be able to work and play at their neighborhood schools. But, there was yet another cloud on the horizon. By June of 1956, our family, along with seven other families was forced to move. SLPS Board of Education exercised its right of eminent domain to gain ownership of the eight houses that were situated on the south side of the street; the school was located on that same side. The Board decided that the school yard needed to be expanded and our homes were in the way. After we moved away, however, many years passed before any improvement was made to that property.

I don't remember much as a ten-year old; however I can recall my parents' disappointment. My brother and I had made many friends and really didn't want to leave the

neighborhood. Maybe I overheard some conversations among the adults, I'm not sure. I do know that I have harbored resentment towards a decision that seemed so unfair to me over fifty years ago. I have carried the belief that there may have been intentional retribution toward my mother and other parents who were very vocal about eliminating an inequitable system of education. Whether this is true or not, I probably will never know. The difficulty here is that there is no way for me to verify my perceptions. Those men and women, the parents in the families, have long since left the stage of life. Their passing removes any vestiges of communal memory regarding how eminent domain impacted them and their families.

One might ask why there were no subsequent family conversations around the incident. There are a number of reasons. For one thing, why continue to discuss a painful incident in one's life when all involved have moved on in life? Another reason is that this chapter was a part of adult conversation to which children were not privy. This was especially true in African American families where children were taught not to question decisions made by, or the motives of their parents.

Recalling those experiences has catapulted me to another place – a place where I must find answers to questions that have haunted me for years. Was there intentionality in choosing our homes for removal? What was the benefit for that community? Why did it take so long to actually develop that parcel of land? Because these questions have been just under the surface of my consciousness for so long, I have decided that it is important to lay them to rest by exploring the use of eminent domain, particularly in relation to its implementation by the Saint Louis Public Schools.

Eminent Domain

The concept of eminent domain in the United States has its roots in the feudal system of England (Benson, 2008, p. 428). Benson (2008) notes that

By the American Revolution, government's power to take property was clearly established,... For the most part, it was customary for the government to pay compensation, a result of the long struggle to limit the English king's power, so such payments were clearly expected. (p. 429)

The National Assembly of France approved its Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, in August, 1789. Article 17 of that document states that "Property being an inviolable and sacred right no one can be deprived of it, unless the public necessity plainly demands it, and upon condition of a just and previous indemnity." (The Constitution Society, p. 3). Eminent domain is supported in the Fifth Amendment of the United States Constitution. The document reads in part as follows, "nor shall private property be taken for public use, without just compensation" (The Constitution of the United States, Amendment 5). In his discussion of the Takings Clause of the Constitution, Dana (2009) states that

The Takings Clause has been construed to create two distinct limitations on government. The first limitation is that the government may take private property only for a public use: the government may not take private property for a non-public use, no matter how much compensation is paid. The second limitation is that, when the government does take private property for a public use, it must pay "just compensation".
(p. 40)

Dana (2009) also provides examples of public use, such as parks for public use or highways (p. 5).

A notable exception to settling for compensation has been the case of *Kelo v. City of New London* (2005). Suzette Kelo was the lead plaintiff representing a group of homeowners who objected to the taking of their homes by the city for private commercial development. Carpenter and Ross (2009) discuss the New London redevelopment plans and state that the properties of Kelo and the other plaintiffs “were neither substandard or ‘blighted’ “(p. 2448). Furthermore,

The properties were condemned simply because they were located in the planned redevelopment area. The city’s actions were upheld by the narrowly divided US Supreme Court in *Kelo*, which said that promoting economic development is a function of the government and provides a legitimate public purpose for private-to-private transfer of property. (p. 2448)

In delivering the opinion of the Court, Justice Stevens stated that “the Court declines to second-guess the wisdom of the means the city has selected to effectuate its plan” (Syllabus, Supreme Court of the United States, 2005, p. 20).

The background of the *Kelo* case is that the city of New London proposed developing property around an area adjacent to where a pharmaceutical firm planned to build new facilities. The city’s expectation was that its planned development would flourish and that the pharmaceutical firm’s expansion would benefit the city with new income streams (National Conference of State Legislatures, www.ncsl.org). The irony of this case is that after all the litigation and displacement of families, the pharmaceutical company dropped all of its plans (*The Wall Street Journal*, Nov. 11, 2009, p. A20).

Over the years, strong feelings have been expressed over the practice of eminent domain. Berliner (2006) claims that “the Kelo decision opened the floodgates of abuse...”(p. 1). Since that court decision, there have been thousands of condemnations filed on behalf of private companies (p. 1). Berliner (2006) further states that

The threat of condemnation for private development is just as much an abuse of eminent domain as the actual filing of condemnation proceedings. Emboldened by Kelo, cities have aggressively threatened owners with takings for private development. (p. 1)

There has been long-standing conflict throughout the country regarding the perceived benefits and abuses of using eminent domain as a development strategy. In the early 1900s, preservationists in Boston fought to protect historic locations from increasing community changes from urban planning (Holleran, 1991). Holleran (1991) describes the conflict of change during that period by stating that

The shortcomings of private efforts to protect neighborhoods and landmarks led to the use of government powers to supplement deed restrictions and preservation efforts. Bostonians used first eminent domain...setting national precedents that culminated in comprehensive zoning. (Holleran, 1991)

Cypher (2001) has hypothesized that “eminent domain effectively plays a role in the increase of property tax values following the acquisition of and redevelopment of property” (p. iv). In the case of *Berman v. Parker* (1954), the U.S. Supreme Court affirmed the fact that

It is not beyond the power of Congress or its authorized agencies to attack the problem of the blighted parts of the community in an area,... Redevelopment of an entire area under a balanced integrated plan so as to include not only new

homes, but also schools, churches, parks streets, and shopping centers is plainly relevant to the maintenance of the desired housing standards... (Syllabus, U.S. Supreme Court, 1954, p. 34-35)

This decision is considered to be the turning point for broadening the use of eminent domain in property development (Grizzell, 2009, p. 4).

In her dissent of the decision, Justice Sandra Day O'Connor stated that ...the government now has license to transfer property from those with fewer resources to those with more. The Founders cannot have intended this perverse result. (O'Connor, 2005, p. 12-13)

Berliner (2006) cites several examples of what she considers the abusive use of eminent domain in the St. Louis area. The Board of Alderman authorized the use of eminent domain for the Centene Plaza redevelopment project in Clayton in 2005 (Berliner, p. 57). In Florissant, City Council members gave private developers the power of eminent domain to tear down one gas station and put up another (Berliner, p. 59).

Most recently, a local developer has introduced plans to revitalize the north section of St. Louis city. He has petitioned the city's tax commission for TIFs (tax increment financing) in order to "create new, vibrant development. Opposition comes from people who fear displacement with the help of taxpayer money" (Cornute, 2009).

Critical Race Theory and Property

The use of eminent domain seems to generate emotional responses, particularly from those displaced by its use. It has been noted that African Americans have been disproportionately affected by its enactment (Fullilove, 2007, p. 2). The effects of using eminent domain can

be extrapolated into examining the concept of whiteness as property viewed through the lens of critical race theory.

In her discussion of the relationship between race and property, Harris (1995) says that “Through this entangled relationship between race and property, historical forms of domination have evolved to reproduce subordination in the present” (p. 277). Harris (1995) further states that treating Blacks as property was achieved by exploiting “black labor” (p. 278).

Harris (1995) argues that Native Americans were also victimized around issues of property. She asserts that

The conquest, removal, and extermination of Native American life and culture were ratified by conferring and acknowledging the property rights of whites... Only white possession and occupation of land was validated and...privileged as a basis for property rights. These distinct forms of exploitation each contributed... to the construction of whiteness as property. (p. 278)

Ladson-Billings (2009) asserts that African Americans presented a unique problem in the discussion of race and property in the early years of this country (p. 25). “Because not only were they not accorded civil rights because they were not White and owned no property, but they were constructed as property! However, that construction was only in the sense that they could be owned by others. They possessed no rights of property ownership” (p. 25).

In DeCuir-Gunby’s (2006) discussion of whiteness as property, she asserts that Slavery helped to define racial groups...by establishing a racial hierarchy ranging from white as premier to black as inferior. Racial identity was intertwined with property rights in that being white meant having the right to own property while being black meant being considered as property. (p. 101)

DeCuir-Gunby contends that like property, whiteness is transferable. In other words, being white protects that condition as property to be transferred generationally. Whites, then, accept the premise that in possessing whiteness, the privilege of possession is inferred. In her reference to the Plessy v. Ferguson (1896) case, DeCuir-Gunby states that by the Supreme Court ignoring the opportunity to define race, it “continued to value whiteness and uphold its property rights” (p. 107).

Lawrence (1995) claims that there is an extensive body of evidence pointing to the fact that racism, unconscious or not, plays a large part in decisions regarding housing patterns in this country (p. 250).

We have rarely come to live in racially segregated enclaves as the result of happenstance or out of mutual choice. We live in segregated neighborhoods because whites have believed that living with or close to blacks lowers their own status. Where one lives is an important index of one’s status in our culture... (p. 250)

Further, Lawrence (1995) refers to a zoning decision by a city council to deny the building of multiple-family housing in its community. This display of white privilege was supported by the Supreme Court, although it conceded that the council’s decision “might have been motivated by opposition to minority groups” (p. 250).

Freeman (1995) uses the term “vested rights” (p. 42) in his discussion of racially restricted neighborhoods related to school desegregation in Detroit. He claims that the Court chose not to correct the result of white flight by approving the consolidation of the city schools with suburban schools. The result was the eventual all-Black Detroit School District. (p. 41). He states that the Court’s decision in this matter allowed Whites to “legally insulate their finances

and schools...from racial equality. The only additional requirement for that sense of security is the availability of easily manipulated restrictive land-use practices, which the court has graciously provided in other cases” (p.42).

Freeman posits that the decision of the court encouraged white flight to the suburbs, thereby crystallizing the isolation of blacks in urban communities (p. 43).

These historical reflections are important in a discussion of eminent domain use because the battle for property ownership has been an ongoing struggle for African Americans from colonialism to this present day in this country. For example, conditions such as neighborhood covenant restrictions and redlining have proved to limit the range of choices many African Americans have had in acquiring property. In their discussion of critical race theory, Delgado and Stefancic (2001) point out the unequal distribution of material wealth in our society. They maintain that

Real estate steering, redlining, and denial of loans and mortgages, especially after the end of World War II, prevented blacks from owning homes, particularly in desirable neighborhoods. It also excluded them from sharing in the phenomenal appreciation of real estate property values that the last few decades have brought. (p. 108)

Delgado and Stefancic (2001) continue with the concept that because Black families have been limited in their ability to choose where they live, there exists barriers to opportunities for “upward mobility”, including where their children attend school (p. 108). Gostin (2006) supports this line of thought as he states that “Undoubtedly, eminent domain is used more often in poor, minority neighborhoods than in well-heeled communities” (p. 11).

One can conclude that African Americans have most probably experienced racial oppression in seeking better prospects, especially in the area of housing, for themselves and their families. Predictably, to be disproportionately affected by the implementation of eminent domain has become an emotionally charged issue for many African Americans.

Desegregation and eminent domain

Desegregation of St. Louis schools did not occur in isolation. Plans to restructure the face of the city had been in process for years. City planners and politicians struggled with the idea of urban renewal and public housing for at least fifteen years before *Brown v. Board of Education, Topeka* (1954). The city's population exploded during the forties, as Blacks, from the rural South, made their way to urban areas in search of work (Heathcott, 2008). The result was overcrowding in already old housing stock. Property owners rented without maintaining buildings and the neglect quickly turned neighborhoods into slums. By the 1950s and 1960s, federal monies became available to begin the rebuilding or reutilization process in the city. This meant that families had to be displaced in order to achieve the ambitious goals of city planners and politicians alike. The fact that the great majority of these families were African American was not lost on the city's power brokers like Civic Progress. They believed this population depressed property values and that the property needed to be cleared in order to be used for higher income (Heathcott, 2008, p. 226). Gordon (2008) states that "as early as the middle 1940s, it was unclear whether the city's poor (and largely African American) residents were a target of urban renewal or an obstacle to its success" (p. 205). He also alludes to the "turmoil of relocation and dislocation" (p. 206) in his discussion of St. Louis' use of eminent domain for economic development. (Gordon, 2008).

In 1955, the city approved a ten million dollar bond issue to redevelop the Mill Creek Valley where more than twenty thousand African American families lived, all of whom were displaced (*St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, Aug. 8, 2009). This was prime property, running right through the central corridor of the city. As a result, the displaced families found new housing in the central and far west end, which drastically changed the racial balance of those communities. For example, Soldan High School was 100% White in 1953 and 90% Black by 1964 (Billington, 1966, p. 258). Clearly, the face of desegregation was shaped by the effects of relocating families for the sake of land revitalization.

In her study of schools and their use of eminent domain, Jackson (2007) cites three major problems. She claims that “eminent domain proceedings are highly political” (p. 4) mostly because different viewpoints of those involved often requires cases to be litigated (p. 4). Secondly, Jackson (2007) states that schools may come into competition for desirable plots of land with other local entities such as developers (p. 5). Lastly, the cost of using eminent domain can expand with the need to use specialized services such as real estate consultants, lawyers beside the cost of relocation and purchase properties (p. 5)

Interestingly, one can find that minutes from official meetings of the SLPS board of education periodically noted court proceedings against homeowners who were unwilling to give up their properties for the use of the school system. For example, minutes from the April 13, 1954, meeting indicate that *City of St. Louis v. Anna Hartmann, et al* was a suit filed in the Circuit Court, where the city wanted to implement condemnation proceedings on behalf of the school board against Hartmann and other homeowners in the area. The board indicated its desire for the private property because it was adjacent to property already owned by the school system

(SLPS Board of Education minutes, 1954). This case appears to reflect the rancor of homeowners against the taking of their properties regardless of the benefit to the public.

Heathcott (2008) details what he calls local agendas in the move to clear slums in St. Louis. His work highlights a 1948 bond issue initiative to underwrite the cost of slum clearance in the downtown area. Opposition from the Black community was articulated by Nathaniel Sweets, Sr., publisher of the Black weekly newspaper, *The American*. His concern was that no plan was in place to relocate those persons affected by the project (Heathcott, 2008, p. 230). Though the bond issue failed at that time, Heathcott (2008) says that it was only a minor setback. Eventually, funding was secured to clear slums and replace them with public housing projects. Urban housing created an environment where the low-income, mostly Black residents were directed to public housing as a viable alternative to the previous conditions under which they lived (Gordon, 2008).

Despite the fact that these events occurred before *Brown v. Board of Education*, one can conclude that the housing patterns that were put in place in St. Louis influenced school choices for families. As was previously mentioned, many Black families relocated to other parts of the city, but because of restrictive covenants, they were directed to specific neighborhoods, thus containing this population to areas where whites were quickly moving out or no longer lived (Gordon, 2008, p. 99). Therefore, school populations changed based on the changing demographics of the residents of particular neighborhoods.

Frank Kovarik's essay in *St. Louis Magazine* (2008) describes his quest to understand the racial divide in this city since he spent his youth insulated from it in southwest St. Louis County. He had opportunity to interview Colin Gordon about his research in a new book, *Mapping Decline: St. Louis and the Fate of the American City* (2008). Among other things, Kovarik

(2008) learned that urban decline motivated city planners and politicians to create renewal programs to stem the tide. He found that “many programs set up to reverse the tide of urban decline only seemed to worsen the problem. Some black neighborhoods were razed in the interest of urban renewal to make room for highways and for middle-class residents and business development that often never materialized” (Kovarik, 2008).

Tate (2008) discusses the politics of eminent domain in his article, *Geography of Opportunity: Poverty, Place and Educational Outcomes* (2008). Tate supports Heathcott and Murphy’s (2005) description of the efforts of Civic Progress, an organization of corporate leaders, to push for economic growth and development for their benefit, and theoretically, the city. Their claim is that both “the city government and Civic Progress launched a war on slums, using eminent domain as a major tool” (Tate, p. 40). Tate’s (2008) findings reflect the fact that neighborhoods devoid of commerce, as a result of white flight, are affected in terms of the kind of education delivered to the residents who have been moved from revitalization areas into contained communities; in other words, informal redlining of neighborhoods.

Fullilove (2007) discusses the emotional impact that the use of eminent domain has had on African Americans. She cites a series of disruptions, where people of color have been victimized, from Africans being removed from their homes and forced into slavery to the loss of African American homes through urban renewal and gentrification. She posits that legalized “takings” – first of the person, to make him or her a slave, and more recently of houses, to get people’s land – have threatened African Americans’ homes, and family. For the past 50 years, the government’s use of eminent domain... has been an important part of this story of repetitive forced displacement. (Fullilove, p. 10)

Fullilove (2007) claims that displaced families have often run into the challenge of finding affordable housing and rebuilding community. She states that “the tangible effects of forced dislocation include increased risk from stress-related diseases, such as depression and heart attack” (p. 5).

Connolly (2008) describes an African American neighborhood in Florida, where through the power of eminent domain, they took all of twelve hours in 1947 to turn a fifty-year old community of black homeowners into condemned land for a ‘whites only’ park, school and fire station. (p. 2)

Connolly (2008) continues his analysis of African American displacement when city planners built a highway interchange in the middle of a Black neighborhood where over twelve thousand were forced from their homes. He states that “some Miamians even invoke the language of trauma to describe the expense paid by individual blacks and the wider ‘Black community’ ” (p. 12). One woman told him that losing their friends and neighbors was like dying (p. 12).

Conclusion

Use of eminent domain is a complex issue that has negatively impacted communities all over the country, particularly those communities where people of color reside. There is such a tangled web of players that it is often difficult to unravel well-meaning intentions as opposed to those who attempt to secure properties through eminent domain for personal gain. City planners, politicians, community organizers, industry giants; all have become stakeholders in the battle to acquire private properties for public and private use.

In terms of the situation I described earlier regarding my family, the neighborhood we moved into was in the midst of the changeover from white to black. Clark School was caught in a quagmire; originally designated as a Whites- Only school, it sat in the midst of a community

that was rapidly changing to Black homeowners. The school would not and could not admit Black students before the 1954 Supreme Court decision. However, by September, 1955, Clark School desegregated under the direction of the St. Louis Public Schools (SLPS) Board of Education (SLPS board meeting, June, 1954).

It is noteworthy that the SLPS Board of Education proposed a bond issue in 1955 for the updating of its schools. The proposal included the construction of schools in the neighborhoods of the segregated housing projects. It incorporated the replacement of old buildings that were incapable of housing overcrowded classrooms, and updating and replacing equipment in already existing buildings. Its final point was “expanding school sites where the play space per child is below standard” (School Bond Issue, 1955).

This last point in the bond issue proposal illuminated the stated rationale for the employment of eminent domain that forced my family to relocate. Even though the proposal was legitimate enough, it could never heal the wounds from “the turmoil of relocation and dislocation” (Gordon, p. 206) that our family experienced. Though my parents chose to move into the area, one can easily surmise that many other families had moved as a result of the city’s slum clearance initiatives. It is highly possible that they were forced to move by St. Louis Public School’s use of eminent domain, and most likely, faced the threat of the same thing happening to them again.

Clearly, critical race theorists have articulated the unique positions of African-Americans in this country. Initially, viewed as property during slavery, these people of color were denied property ownership because it was originally accorded to white males (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 25). Gotanda (1995) discusses whiteness as a racial construct. He claims that “a crucial dimension of whiteness is white racial privilege” (p. 271). Even researchers who have supported

the use of eminent domain are aware of its inequitable use in communities populated by people of color (Gostin, 2006).

Employing autoethnography as a research instrument provided some revealing insights for me. I have learned a valuable lesson in this process. I started with a myopic interpretation of how eminent domain impacted me. My view has been expanded to realize that my personal issue is in reality a problem of national proportions; one that must be addressed to find equitable outcomes for all those affected by the questionable use and benefit of eminent domain.

Chapter Five- Marginalization and Isolation of African American Educators in Predominately White Schools

Introduction

This chapter allows me to reflect on my experiences as the one black counselor in a department of six colleagues in a suburban school with a faculty that is 93% white. The discussion centers around a theme of marginalization and isolation in a professional sense while developing strategies to successfully cope with such pressures in a relatively non-hostile environment. My aim is to examine why African American educators are often subjected to feeling marginalized and/or isolated in their schools and explore means to reduce, if not eradicate, this kind of polarization. If persons of color, particularly African Americans are to be employed and retained in the field of education, this issue must be put to rest.

Tokenism in Education

My experience has been mirrored thousands of times in the lives of African American educators who find themselves employed in a school where they, and possibly two or three others, are considered tokens. Kelly (2007) states a Black teacher can be counted as a token as a result of the majority of the faculty being White. He further acknowledges that “workplace pressures and stresses are real for Black teachers in overwhelmingly White schools” (p. 233).

Kelly (2007) makes reference to the work of Kanter (1977) regarding tokenism in the workplace as his backdrop. He explains the processes with which she undergirds the tokenism theory; for example, performance pressures, boundary heightening and role entrapment (Kelly, p. 230). Kanter’s (1977) landmark study on tokenism was a part of her work in teaching business management techniques, as a professor in Harvard’s School of Business, and related to gender tokenism in the corporate world. Kanter (1977) describes performance pressures as a process

whereby the token is expected to outperform her peers to disprove any perceptions of inferiority from those peers or herself. Pressure builds on the token because of high visibility. In other words, since the token is the only one, by definition, she sticks out from the crowd. The process of boundary heightening takes place when there is an exaggeration of differences between members of the dominant group and the minority or token representative by those members of the dominant group. This behavior can be observed in the manifestation of power plays generated from the dominants. Role entrapment can be described as a strategy to contain the token within established stereotypes regarding her culture, in order to limit upward mobility in the dominant culture (Kanter, p. 965).

Kanter (1977) states that tokens are members of a skewed group where one group type is disproportionately represented. She argues that they are seen as symbols, not individuals, of their category. Kanter describes tokens as

people identified by ascribed characteristics (master statuses such as sex, race, religion, ethnic group, age, etc.) or other characteristics that carry with them a set of assumptions about culture, status, and behavior highly salient for majority category members. (p. 968)

Kanter (1977) continues by pointing out that tokens are assigned by the dominant group to represent their entire class, for example, Black or female.

Furthermore, because tokens by definition alone or virtually alone, they are in the position of representing their ascribed category to the group, whether they choose to do so or not. They can never be just another member while their category is so rare; they will always be a hyphenated member, as in “woman-engineer” or “male-nurse” or “black-physician”. (p. 968)

Kelly (2007) is concerned that the ideology of tokenism, to a great extent, ignores the successes of many of those Black teachers, who may initially have been hired as tokens (p. 232). Kelly (2007) continues as he extends Kanter's (1977) work by creating three categories called performance enhancers, border crossing and role integration. Kelly (2007) describes performance enhancement as a strategy to manage pressures emanating from the position of being a token. He observes that there are individuals who choose to counter the pressure by attempting to make things better by increased interaction with the dominant group. The desired outcome is that dominants will somehow go through a conscious-raising experience that alters their original beliefs about tokens and their abilities. Additionally, the token members plan to emulate model behavior and develop support systems for those few other tokens in the environment. Kelly (2007) defines this behavior as a means to break down the boundaries by intentional inter-dialogue, planned interaction and more individual contact (p. 234). Kelly (2007) posits that "Although I am convinced that these processes exist, I argue that they are not independent of the beliefs and attitudes of racial tokens in the school workplace" (p. 230).

At the end of his study, Kelly (2007) concludes that even though the token Black teachers I studied do not transform the structural realities that are associated with being a racial token (performance pressure, boundary heightening, and role entrapment), they are able to manage the effects of minority status and numerical rarity in the school workplace through their ideological work. (p. 249)

Finally, Kelly (2007) states "that traditional civil rights ideology shaped positive work experiences and evaluations of being a racial token" (p. 249).

Kelly (2007) skillfully expands the work of Kanter (1977) by including the emotional element reflected by the teachers in his study. I support much of his work confirming that most of my experience as a token, over a thirty year period, can be viewed as successful. However, the pressures relative to expectations, managing racial micro-aggressions and handling instances of marginalization and isolation cannot be ignored.

A typical example of marginalization plays out in a department meeting. The team has gathered around the table in the conference room for its bi-weekly meeting. We are discussing the pros and cons of restructuring the department. I suggest that we change the way students are assigned to us. My voice is acknowledged with little more than a nod from one or two of my colleagues. A few moments later, one of the other counselors offers the suggestion that we consider changing the way student assignments are made to us. Immediately the other members of the team exclaim that this proposal is a great idea! At this moment, I experience a sense of isolation because there is no one at that table who gets it-that I have been completely ignored and placed on the margins of the discussion. I am so angry that I could just scream. Instead, because I believe that I am being evaluated by the subtle employment of performance pressure, I remain silent.

Mabokela and Madsen (2007) extended Kanter's theory as they wrote about Black educators who work in desegregated, predominately white schools in suburbia. They contend that the category of performance pressures includes three factors: automatic notice, symbolic consequences and fighting discrepant qualities (p. 1174). Automatic notice tends to the notion that because individuals are tokens in their work environment, they are scrutinized more closely because of their visibility. One participant in the Mabokela and Madsen (2007) study called it the "Jackie Robinson" syndrome. That is, as the only male African American

teacher at his school, there was an expectation that he must work harder than his colleagues because his performance was constantly examined...proving that they are qualified, competent teachers who rightfully deserve a position within the school system. (p. 1183)

Symbolic consequences represent the notion that minorities are assigned stereotypical characteristics of their group by members of the majority group. Thus, the treatment they receive is reflective of that stereotypical belief system (Mabokela & Madsen, 2007). The researchers mention an expectation that is in conflict with this factor. Often, the Black educator is viewed as exceptional; one that doesn't fit the stereotype that many Whites believe is the norm. "Because of this misrepresentation, African American teachers believed that they were expected to accept the traditional structure of their schools' norms and hold beliefs similar to their European American colleagues" (p. 1187).

The third factor discussed in Mabokela and Madsen (2007) study was called discrepant stereotypes who they describe as "people of color in the workplace are often not recognized for their achievements" (p. 1193). The researchers found a difference in how male and female participants responded to this factor.

In particular, the male African American teachers conveyed the need to make their accomplishments known because they were often fighting the "African American male stereotype," whereas the female teachers felt that they had to prove that they were "qualified" to teach. (p. 1193)

I was hired to be the freshmen counselor. It had been determined that the transition from middle school to high school was a tremendous leap for many of the young people; often their academic and social adjustment suffered. Because I had the unique background to have been a

middle-school/junior high counselor for nine years, my skills would easily help meet the needs of these students moving into a new environment. My team in the counseling department included an assistant principal, two secretaries and me. One of the secretaries, Lois, was particularly antagonistic towards me, especially when I assigned a task to her. On more than one occasion, she told me that she didn't have time and that I could do it myself. Initially, I suffered in silence, attempting to maintain a professional demeanor. It was not long, though, before I had to have a heart to heart talk with Bob, the assistant principal, about the situation. He, too, had noticed her behavior and had begun to document it. Bob called meetings between the three of us to try to clear the air. However, Lois told him, in my presence, that she felt that I was not qualified to give her directions.

Additionally, Mabokela and Madsen, (2007) examine another theme called cultural switching. This concept of code switching incorporates the process of African American teachers adjusting their personal style as they perceive pressure to conform to the mores and practices of the dominant culture. Mabokela and Madsen (2007) state that “code-switching occurs when an organization or group indicates signs of discomfort with explicit expressions of difference, especially in race matters” (p. 1196).

These restraints have created an environment where many token Black educators feel under-appreciated and restricted. This is a formula that has created stress and difficulty retaining these educators in situations where they feel that they are always under a microscope.

One recent study examined the role of diversity coordinators in independent schools (Hall & Stevenson, 2007). The researchers questioned “What happens when an African-American diversity coordinator is a token, who thereby has little decision-making power within the system, and is made responsible for the ‘multicultural health’ of the school?” (p. 3). Even the word,

diversity, denotes a kind of code indicating that either any title with the word diversity in it is set aside for a person of color, or the services delivered by said diversity coordinator are designated only for students of color. Not only is the person pigeon-holed into a particular role, but, he/she has a limited sphere of influence, thus experiencing the effects of being isolated and marginalized (Hall & Stevenson, 2007, p. 6).

Also, tokens often face the very real challenge of being a threat to the status quo of their schools and so most members of the dominant culture express strong resistance, fearing their own loss of identity (Hall & Stevenson, 2007). The Hall and Stevenson (2007) study found that when an individual designated as the diversity coordinator or some similar title, resists and attempts to alter the status quo or norms established by the dominant group, the person often faced severe challenges. These challenges could take the form of pressure to retreat, resistance to change resulting in, once again, isolation and marginalization (p. 8).

At one point, I was not the lone Black counselor in the department. The other person, also a Black female, chaired the department. In the early stages of my tenure, we collaborated on developing programs to support and strengthen the academic performance of our African American students. The position of chair carried heavy responsibility along with managing a caseload, so she bowed out of actively participating in the support program. Since many of our target students were a part of a desegregation initiative, I had the bright idea to approach the district superintendent to ask for a percentage of the state funding provided to our district for these students so my programming could be maximized. Suddenly, I was told by my immediate supervisor that if I didn't reduce my involvement with these students, that my job was in jeopardy. Though I did not retreat, the sense of isolation was palpable.

Further, Hall and Stevenson (2007) discuss one strategy employed by several participants in the research project to survive the “stress and vulnerability” (p. 8) of marginalization and isolation within their jobs. The researchers describe “racial cognitive dissonance...as having a protective function, in that negative racial experiences are rewritten in memory in such a way as to be less anxiety-provoking” (p. 7).

In developing the concept of racial cognitive dissonance, it seems appropriate to examine the theory of colorblindness. There are different models, however Gotanda (1995) discusses it in the context of constitutionalism. Gotanda (1995) states that “The positive behavior model – government nonrecognition serving as an example for private conduct – also has problems. First, there is the practical impossibility of nonrecognition as a standard for either public or private conduct” (p. 269).

*Mrs. Alcott had arranged an appointment with me to discuss the suspension of her two sons for attempting to sell drugs at school. She was White, a working-class parent by her own description. Mrs. Alcott’s complaint was that her boys were innocent victims. She believed that the suspension was unjust and sought my help to intervene for them. “Mrs. Hassler, I just don’t know what happened! My boys are not trouble-makers. They’ve gotten into occasional scrapes but they’re good boys. I think that they’ve been hanging around other kids, who are a bad influence on them. It just those **niggers** (my emphasis) they’ve been running around with.” I could hardly believe my ears! Did she really say the “n” word? Surely, it was just a slip of the tongue! I continued to listen to her with my best counselor face. “Yeah, I just don’t know what to do” she said. “I just have got to do something! They would never be involved in anything like drugs if it wasn’t for the **niggers**! There – she said it again! I was dumbfounded. Either, this woman is nuts or she doesn’t care or she’s colorblind (literally and figuratively)! The*

conversation (or monologue) continued. After she said it a third time, I just couldn't take it anymore. I told her, "Mrs. Alcott, at this point, I don't think that I am able to help you. Please excuse me while I go and get an administrator who may be able to offer you more assistance." I was too flabbergasted to be angry; just amazed at her boldness and insensitivity. As Hall and Stevenson (2007) observed, "racial cognitive dissonance... a protective function, in that negative racial experiences are rewritten in memory in such a way as to be less anxiety-provoking" (p. 7).

Woodson (1933) spoke to the dilemma of identity in the African American's effort to fit into the dominant society. He said that "in this effort to imitate, however; these 'educated people' are sincere" (p. 4). They believed that by attempting to fit into the normative standard established by whites that racial divisions would virtually disappear. However, Woodson (1933) said that nothing would have been gained by this imitation; there would just be more people trying to fit into the same mold. "The unusual gifts of the race have not thereby been developed, and an unwilling world, therefore, continues to wonder what the Negro is good for" (Woodson, 1933, p. 5).

DuBois (1903) described a dichotomous persona that exists within the African American. He said

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness, - an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (p. 9)

Furthermore, in spite of these efforts to live in two worlds, there still is little authentic community between the two races (DuBois, 1903).

Fanon (1952) also agreed with this line of thought. He said that “the black man possesses two dimensions: one with his fellow Blacks, the other with the Whites. A Black man behaves differently with a white man than he does with another black man” (Fanon, 1952, p. 1).

Even though decades have passed, DuBois, Woodson and Fanon seem to be able to sum up the conflict. Their claim is that within each Black person who is deemed to be the token, they symbolize what means to exist in a latently hostile environment, even today.

The Permanence of Racism and Interest Convergence

My husband and I stood in a long line of jazz fans, shamelessly waiting to get autographs from some of our favorite artists. Behind us stood a young White woman who was probably in her late twenties or early thirties. As is what often occurs, we struck up a conversation. One thing led to another and our talk led to the topic of my dissertation. The young woman was genuinely surprised to learn that racial inequities still exist. She even referred to the election of Barack Obama as a sign that these were no longer issues. I was not insulted, but only saddened to be reminded that such ignorance still exists. Bell states (1992) that “the very absence of visible signs of discrimination creates an atmosphere of racial neutrality and encourages whites to believe that racism is a thing of the past” (p. 6).

Considered by many to be the father of critical race theory, Bell (1992) insists that racism in this country is permanent. He discusses educational and employment disparities between Black and White Americans and posits that this circumstance will continue to exist because of racialized beliefs and behaviors (Bell, p. 10). He believes that “Black people will never gain full

equality in this country... This is a hard-to-accept fact that all history verifies. We must acknowledge it, not as a sign of submission, but as an act of ultimate defiance” (p. 12).

The permanence of racism appears to exist in religious as well as secular areas. In Wilmore’s (1990) discussion of black theology, he refers to “a world order sanctioned ...by the white churches of Europe and North America – an order that is characterized by economic, political, and cultural selfishness and domination” (p. 158). Cone (1990) describes black theology as an opportunity for empowerment in a racist society. He confirms the reality of racism from a religious perspective by stating that

When black persons affirm their freedom in God, they must say no to white racists. By saying no, they say yes to God and their blackness, affirming at the same time the inhumanity of the white neighbor who insists on playing God. Black theology emphasizes the right of blacks to be black... (p. 92)

Delgado (2001) discusses an element of critical race theory known as interest convergence. He also refers to this phenomenon as “material determinism” (p. 7). Delgado (2001) claims that “because racism advances the interests of both white elites (materially) and working-class people (psychically), large segments of society have little incentive to eradicate it” (p. 7). Interest convergence insists that the progress of racial minorities is inextricably tied to the advantage of the dominant group. As long as the privileged status of the dominants is not adversely affected, that group then is willing to grant some opportunities to those deemed as minorities.

When the other Black counselor suddenly left the district for an advanced position in another school district, the rush was on to find a satisfactory replacement. I was asked to offer suggestions for qualified applicants. The school administration stated that several desirable

characteristics would include someone familiar with the community, certified in secondary counseling and with some job experience. During the application period, I discovered that a former student, a young African American woman, met all of the qualifications. She'd grown up in the community, had been a stellar performer, academically and as a contributor to the school community. In fact, I had been her high school counselor. Shana earned her Master's in secondary counseling at a prestigious Midwestern university and had garnered several years of experience in a local district. She eagerly applied and I wrote a letter of recommendation with the blessings of the administration. Shana really looked like the perfect candidate. The person who got the job was a young white woman, who had just moved into the district. She was on staff as a social studies teacher and was in the process of completing her counseling degree. Who was the best qualified? Was it favoritism? What about interest convergence? Whose interests were served by not placing a Black person in the position, lowering the already grim statistic to about five percent Black faculty to twenty-five percent Black student population?

From the viewpoint of those who ascribe to material determinism, dominants portray those they intend to conquer as evil or threatening. This allows them to soothe themselves into believing that exploiting their victims is acceptable and possibly even helpful to their condition.

Delgado (2001) offers the following example:

Planters and ranchers in Texas and the Southwest circulated notions of Mexican inferiority at roughly the same period that they found it necessary to take over Mexican lands or, later, to import Mexican people for backbreaking labor...

Circumstances change so that one group finds it possible to seize advantage, or to exploit another. (pp. 17-18)

Bell (1980) analyzes *Brown v. Board of Education* through the lens of CRT. He contends

That the decision in *Brown* to break with the Court's long-held position on these issues cannot be understood without some consideration of the decision's value to whites, not simply those concerned about the immorality of racial inequality, but also those whites in policymaking positions able to see the economic and political advances at home and abroad that would follow abandonment of segregation.

(p. 524)

This CRT principle of interest convergence is useful in illustrating another event as the lone black counselor. *As I continued to develop the program designed to offer academic support to African American students, I met with little resistance as long as our activities remained on the margins of regular school activities. Once the program was incorporated into the normal school day, the voices of several White teachers were raised in objection. They felt that the program interfered with their instructional time with the students. Though nothing was said to me directly, the principal indicated to me that the program was creating a white backlash and I needed to discontinue it. By activating my social capital as an educator to make decisions about meeting the academic needs of African American students, I was viewed as impinging on the power and privilege of some of the White teachers to determine which students could participate. Several students stated that penalties, such as lowered grades, were assessed by being participants. At this point, it was necessary to proceed carefully so that the Black students in the program were not further penalized by their teachers.*

Conclusion

With a change in district and building leadership, things began to change. These leaders recognized that if the dismal numbers representing low performance of students of color did not change, the district's reputation could be damaged, income streams might be affected and most of all the standards set by the No Child Left Behind legislation might not be met. They were aggressive in their efforts to change school climate and implement principles from formalized social justice training for district personnel. As well meaning as these efforts are, one can still see the specter of interest convergence lurking around the corner.

Jay (2009) recently conducted a study to assess the racialized experiences of African American educators in predominately white schools. She states that the study supports CRT in verifying the permanence of racism in American society.

Indeed, the research of critical scholars in a number of academic fields consistently demonstrates how racial minorities are marginalized via racial(ist) ideologies, imbued with notions of racial superiority and inferiority, which are fundamentally woven into the social, political, economic, and moral fibers of the nation. Further, ...in maintaining and transmitting these ideologies, perhaps no other arena has had a more profound and lasting impact than American public schools. (p. 671)

Jay (2009) puts forth the idea that substantial change in racially charged environments can only exist through the consistent efforts of building-level administration. Yosso (2002) insists that educators must begin "to utilize critical race theory as a tool to analyze and challenge racism and other forms of subordination that pervade U.S. school curriculum structures, processes, and discourses" (p. 93).

In the developmental stages of creating a program that incorporated success strategies for African American students, there seemed to be little support from the administrators or my colleagues. Though, I never wavered in believing that I was on the right track, the dogged pursuit of my goals had other consequences. The loneliness was sometimes overwhelming, especially after the other Black counselor left to pursue other interests.

Chapter Six-Partners in Achievement

Introduction

There is a history of African American students lagging behind White American students when the two groups are compared on an academic platform. Ogbu (2003) claims that the problem has grown to national proportions. Even before the term achievement gap was coined, this thorny issue has been discussed in education administration, policy-making and community advocate circles. In his discussion of the achievement gap, Ogbu (2003) states that part of the background of the issue surfaces in the early days of school desegregation (p. 3). He posits that

...a few years after the U.S. Supreme Court decision in 1954 that school segregation by statute was unconstitutional, several southern school districts began to publish the gaps in test scores of Black and White students. They used the lower test scores of Blacks to justify their opposition to school desegregation. They argued that Black and White children should not be educated in the same school because the former were not as capable as the latter. (Ogbu, 2003, p. 3)

Singham (2003) calls it “one of the most infuriating problems afflicting education” (p. 586). Many researchers have concluded that there is no one source of the problem. For example, Singham (2003) cites an array of statements, including standardized testing biased toward the dominant group, funding discrepancies between Black and White students, different learning styles, culturally insensitive teaching and a number of other circumstances (p. 587).

Jencks and Phillips (1998) discuss the conservative perspective of the 60s and 70s, which states that Blacks are the source of their own problems. Many conservatives believed that “black problems” rested “on a culture of poverty that rejected school achievement, the work ethic, and the two-parent family in favor of instant gratification and episodic violence” (p. 10). While there

exist a number of believers in the natural inferiority of persons of color, Jencks and Phillips (1998) state that “we have no direct genetic evidence regarding innate cognitive differences between blacks and whites” (p. 11). Critical race theorists have suggested the endemic nature of racial discrimination as foundational to understanding why the academic performance differential exists (Parker & Lynn, 2009, p. 153). From the sublime to the ridiculous, the search for answers seems to be elusive. Researchers have, figuratively speaking, banged their heads against the wall in attempts to conjure up solutions designed to close this onerous gap.

Background

However, before forging ahead to any further discussion of remedies, it seems important to explore some causes and effects of this phenomenon. In the late 1960s, Kozol (1967) observed blatant racism at schools desegregated in name only; Black children being insulted and punished indiscriminately, being placed in special education programs. Neighborhood schools that remained segregated were antiquated, poorly maintained and provided minimal and inferior materials for their students. Kozol (1967) believed that these children were made to suffer under the impression that their academic struggles were of their own doing (p. 60). He said that “you could not mistake the absolute assumption that this mess was not only their own fault but something to ashamed of” (p. 60). Kozol continues:

The result of this atmosphere was that too many children became believers in their own responsibility for being ruined and they themselves, like the teachers, began to believe that some human material is just biologically better and some of it worse. (1967, p. 60)

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) posit that this gap is predictable and logical from the critical race theory perspective. They claim that these inequalities continue to exist because

discussions about overt racism are quieted and isolated in the racialized state of our society.

Further, they state that race and property intersect in such a way as to affect education, which in turn offers a way to explain the inequitable delivery of educational services to students of color.

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) state that

Property relates to education in explicit and implicit ways. Recurring discussions about property tax relief indicate that more affluent communities (which have higher property values, hence higher tax assessments) resent paying for a public school system whose clientele is largely non-white and poor...those with “better” property are entitled to “better schools”. (p. 17)

Steele (1997) discusses a theory of domain identification that can lead to what he describes as stereotype threat. He claims that

This predicament threatens one with being negatively stereotyped, with being judged or treated stereotypically, or with the prospect of conforming to that stereotype... Where bad stereotypes about these groups apply, members of these groups can fear being reduced to that stereotype. Negative stereotypes about women and African Americans bear on important academic abilities. (p. 164)

Steele (1997) concludes that negative stereotyping has a dramatic effect on even the most able students. Despite their efforts to resist stereotypical images, the threat of being stereotyped can depress academic performance.

Duncan (2000) believes that “the main purpose of urban public schools in the lives of students of color has been largely to prepare them to occupy and accept subordinate roles within the U.S. economy...” (p. 29). He believes that he is not alone in accepting the premise that for

this particular population, limited opportunities and low achievement in the educational arena, lead to a poor employment outlook. It follows, then, that many are put at risk for incarceration, which can supply cheap labor for industry (p. 30).

These dismal analyses could certainly put a damper on any belief that these discrepancies can be ameliorated. However, it is not an entirely hopeless set of circumstances. Programs have been introduced and implemented with some measure of success. Some of these bear further examination.

Successful Strategies

Conceptually, many of the ideas bear some merit. For example, role model programs have been created to offer African American students exposure to African American men and women willing to share their stories of struggle and success.

There was a buzz in the air. Everyone in 'Partners' was looking forward to 7th period! I'd assembled a panel of six African American professionals who enthusiastically agreed to spend a portion of their day with the students in my program. I had to admit that, although I was as eager as the students, I was a bit nervous. I had no qualms about the behavior of the kids; they'd never been a disappointment when we'd had guests in the past. But this was different. My physician was coming; a close friend's son-an architect; a nationally respected author – some heavy hitters! I wanted everyone, kids and adults alike, to have a positive experience. Of course, for the moment, it was all out of my hands.

After it was over, I wondered why I could ever have been anxious. The panelists were all authentic in sharing their experiences and the kids were animated in offering questions. The most rewarding part of the event was when Robbie and Kent (the architect) connected. Robbie was a squirrely tenth-grader; he just had a hard time settling down in most situations. As the

students shared their own dreams, Robbie blurted out that he wanted to be an architect. Kent offered some great general information, but asked to speak with Robbie after the program. To make a long story short, Kent mentored Robbie through high school and college. After college, Robbie moved to Atlanta and has grown an extremely successful architectural practice.

Some researchers have examined after school programs, extended school days, mentorships and summer enrichment opportunities which have also been designed; all with varying success.

Much of the research examines successful strategies that have been implemented in schools in urban communities with very high, if not exclusively, African American populations. For example, in a study conducted over a five-year period, Morris (2004) discussed the fact that because Black school personnel share a cultural history they can often positively identify with their students. He states that “the educators used their cultural capital-in this case, their knowledge of African American history and culture-to begin to shape the children’s critical understanding of their history” (p. 93). Morris (2004) continues the discussion by proposing that “the integral role that African American educators historically played in the schooling of Black children should not be minimized” (p. 103).

Whitman (2007) conducted research that led him to study six outstanding schools populated by students of color. He describes what he calls a “new paternalism” (p. 53) in these schools. The researcher found that the tenets of academic success for these students were strongly prescribed behaviors relative to what are called traditional values , or might be visualized as strict, no-nonsense expectations regarding behavior and academic performance. Whitman (2007) claims that “the new breed of paternalistic schools appears to be the single most effective way of closing the achievement gap” (p. 57).

Finally, Suarez-Orozco, et al (2007) examined how relationships impact the success of immigrant youth entering school in this country. The results indicate that practices which enhance school-based relationships with peers and adults in the building, positively impact academic success (p. 741). Further, the research team found that

Practices that enrich school-based supportive relationships with both peers and school-based adults, including fostering nurturing safe environments, creating advisory groups, grouping students in smaller multiyear cohorts, and the like, would serve to enhance both the relational and the academic engagement of immigrant youth. (Suarez-Orozco, et al, 2007)

Their findings can clearly be extrapolated to apply to African-American youth as well.

Permanence of Racism and Property Rights

The ubiquitous achievement gap continues to influence the educational outcomes of African American students, though it has been turned inside out by researchers for a number of years. In particular, there have been conversations about the state of achievement about Black boys. Duncan (2000) claims that educational practices aimed at young people of color are instituted to make “them less competitive economically by subjecting them to an education that emphasizes discipline and control and that minimizes intellectual rigor and the development of meaningful skills” (p. 30). In her discussion of the positioning of Black boys, Fordham (2008) states

there is a “patriarchal dividend” that accrues to Black males despite their racial subordination. Sports stars are rewarded and appreciated for their “public service to the school community” (trans., “making the institution attractive and respectable so that others will desire to attend and support it”) and for giving up a

myopic preoccupation with individual, academic achievement...this positioning of Black males means that they are rewarded for not competing with White males for dominance in academic achievement. (p. 238)

It seemed that almost every time I saw Mark, he was angry about something. He insisted that his teachers were prejudiced and didn't like him, especially since he was opinionated and liked to ask questions. It didn't help that Mark was a frequent visitor to the principal's office for some rule infraction or other. Was this boy a "rebel without a cause"?

There was something really appealing about him- you could just sense that there was more to him than met the eye. I decided to invite him to participate in the Partners in Achievement program and he enthusiastically agreed. His grades left much to be desired, but it was clear that he had potential. He told me that when he was an elementary school student, he'd been placed in the school's gifted program. How then, did Mark become such an under-achiever at the high school level? Why was he placed in the lowest level of coursework available? What happened to him?

Fordham (2008) referred to her original research project where she interviewed a number of African American high school students and found that they reported "being confident and outgoing when they entered school but, over time, became more uncertain about their academic abilities..." (p. 234). These students concluded that the most influential impact on their self-assessment came from their teachers' treatment and expectations (Fordham, 2008).

Moore, et al (2008) reported that disproportional numbers of African American males are referred for special education services. They claim that "in many of these school systems, special education seems to be the preferred educational intervention or curriculum for...African American males" (p. 908). Further, the research team states that "nationally, it is estimated that

nearly 20,000 African American male students are inappropriately classified as mentally retarded” (Moore, et al, 2008, p. 908).

Bonilla-Silva (1997) suggests that racism is structural. He proposes that its hierarchal nature has been fluid over time, but maintains certain qualities that have not changed. For example, “the unchanging element...is that Blacks’ life chances are significantly lower than those of Whites, and ultimately a racialized social order is distinguished by this difference in life chances” (p. 470). Bonilla-Silva (1997) maintains that

Historically the classification of a people in racial terms has been a highly political act associated with practices such as conquest and colonization, enslavement, peonage, indentured servitude, and more recently, colonial and neocolonial labor immigration. (p. 471)

These statements bring us back, then, to the concept of property rights. Clearly, the classifications that Bonilla-Silva (1997) refers to suggest the right of ownership; ownership or at the very least, subordination of a people by a people.

The nexus of the permanence of racism and property rights can be observed in the structural nature of schools in the United States. The research that has been examined thus far, points toward systemic differences made in performance expectations between Black and White students. Steele (1997) concludes that stereotype threat can negatively influence the academic success of students of color. Weissglass (2001) posits that

I contend...many of the assumptions, values, and practices of people and institutions hinder the learning of students of color and students from low-socioeconomic classes. Race and class biases in particular are major causes of differential success. (p. 72)

McIntosh (2009) states that “I now believe that white privilege, rather than discrimination, is the central actor in racism—the central force that creates racism and keeps it in place” (p. 1). In her original discussion of white privilege, McIntosh (1989) says that “I was taught to see racism only in individual acts of meanness, not in invisible systems conferring dominance on my group” (p. 10).

The achievement gap has been problematized regardless of the many conclusions drawn about its origins and solutions. It is not unlike medical researchers searching for ways to eradicate disease. Nevertheless, there have been programmatic thrusts that seem to have met with a modicum of success.

What works?

Uwah, et al (2008) claim that “by seeking to close the achievement gap by focusing solely on high-stakes assessments, NCLB appears to neglect the numerous personal and social variables that impact student learning” (p. 297). Their research suggests that “a sense of belonging or connectedness is important for all students... (p. 297). The research team found that “academic self-efficacy” (Uwah, et al, p. 298) appears to be a key component in assessing student belief to succeed academically. Finally, these researchers support the concept that “students who have high academic aspirations are more likely to take advantage of educational opportunities that may lead to academic success” (Uwah, et al, p. 298).

Stewart (2007) hypothesizes that “those students who care about and feel supported by their teachers and friends are more likely to develop affective ties to school and display socially acceptable behavior” (p. 28). Further, she theorizes that

school contexts in which there was a great deal of cooperation among teachers and administrators, support for students, and clear expectations about the mission

of the school appeared to translate into higher levels of achievement, irrespective of school social ills. (p. 29)

Neu and Stewart (2009) conducted research that ignored deficit theories regarding the achievement gap. Instead, their study “sought to learn from African Americans who have succeeded academically despite the formal and informal obstacles in their way” (p. 4). Their objective

was to investigate the problem of the academic achievement gap between black and white students by learning from those African Americans who successfully completed high school and college and apply these lessons in a useful and meaningful way for educational leaders. (p. 8)

Wiggin (2008) states that the narrative used to explain the achievement gap has used the dominant culture as the measuring rod to compare academic achievement of black students. He suggests that “rather than imposing a racial standard for achievement, excellence should be the standard for all students” (p. 318). A portion of Wiggin’s (2008) findings reveal that “according to students, teacher practices were the most instrumental school effect impacting their school success” (p. 327).

Building on the work of Steele and Aronson (1995) regarding stereotype threat and Steele’s (1997) later research on the effect of self-affirmation, Purdie-Vaughn, et al (2009) tested an intervention strategy on African American middle school children. They used values-affirmation prompts to determine if the achievement gap could be diminished. Students were asked to write essays in response to these prompts. The research team’s findings indicate “that affirmed African American students earned higher fall-term grades and GPA from official school records, in the affirmation condition than those not affirmed” (p. 1).

The greatest benefit...was that it eliminated roughly 40% of the achievement gap in the class that had existed between the races prior to the intervention. Additionally, the intervention's benefits were apparent across all levels of performance... the effects of the intervention spilled over to benefit African Americans' grades in their other core classes. (p. 2)

Singham (2003) posits that "improving the high school curriculum has a *disproportionately* positive effect on students from groups who typically underachieve" (p. 587). Lewis, et al (2008) suggest that "any serious attempt to address the achievement gap between African American and White students must be approached from multiple perspectives and theoretical positions" (p. 136). As a result of their research, they make a series of recommendations to administrators, parents, community members and teachers. These include equity audits, substantive professional development and non-routine means of building relationships with families (p. 147).

Partners in Achievement

This program was born in 1986 and has since had several manifestations, many of which included some of the strategies previously mentioned. It was created to address the needs of African American students who were matriculating through a predominately White school district in a mid-size Midwestern suburban community.

Bill had just been appointed to the position of principal at the high school. He displayed enthusiasm in his desire to add me to the team that he was assembling at the school. Our relationship was not new, since we both had previously worked in a similar school district in the area. Shortly after I left that district to become an educational consultant, Bill became the principal of the middle school where I was formerly a counselor. During that period, he

contacted me to see if I would develop some programming for a selected group of African American boys who seemed to have academic promise, but were performing below expectations.

So, of course, it followed that he wanted to put something similar in place at the high school level. We met with an African American female, who was already in place as an assistant principal in the building, and brainstormed strategies to execute such a program. It seemed better to start with a small group of freshmen, both boys and girls. One of the areas that we agreed needed to be addressed was that the program had to be considered a supplement to the regular curriculum and so offered as a part of the regular school day.

Ladson-Billings (1995) claims that an effective educational model should incorporate “student achievement but also helps students to accept and affirm their cultural identity” (p. 469). She extends this thought by stating that educators must “look for exemplary practice in those classrooms and communities that too many of us are ready to dismiss as incapable of producing excellence” (p. 483).

There were about sixteen kids, more girls than boys; almost evenly distributed between those based in students and those residing in the district. This is noteworthy because part of building community meant breaking down misperceptions they had about one another, particularly in terms of where they lived.

I started by initiating individual meetings with each student to explain the goals of the program; primarily to teach them ways to maximize their education while being in an environment that may not have always identified their potential. I asked them if they were willing to commit themselves to this experiment. Without exception, each student agreed to become a participant.

We met each week for an hour. I scheduled it so that they never missed the same class in a seven week period. I sent announcements to their teachers with a semester schedule. I often called on teachers individually to explain our goals. It was still an uphill struggle; the teachers were suspicious of such an activity that offered time away from class to discuss issues important to students of color. They were equally suspicious of this new young principal who wanted to push for open discussion regarding the inequities in education for African American students. Nevertheless, with Bill's support and that of the African American administrator, I forged ahead.

Perry (2003) insists that

...since learning is fundamentally contextual, I would argue that there are extra social, emotional, cognitive, and political competencies required of African-American youth, precisely because they are African-American, if they are to be able to commit themselves over time to perform at high levels in school. (p. 4)

Perry (2003) continues by stating that “we have a whole generation of teachers, Black and white, who don't have a clue about the history of Black education and the African-American narrative and intellectual tradition” (p. 101).

Partners in Achievement was designed to address four main areas. The first objective was to create a curriculum that specifically addressed the needs of the participants. It included a system for building personal esteem, enhancing achievement and teaching strategies for setting goals. Next, a mechanism was put in place to instruct students about the impact of societal inequities that affected their education and how to shift the paradigm through actively engaging their teachers to focus on their individual needs. Lastly, at the end of each semester, the students responded to an evaluation instrument built to determine the efficacy of the program.

At the beginning of the second year, another group of first-year students was added to the program. Each year, another group was added until there was a cohort in each grade level.

The following list, which is certainly not exhaustive, highlights some of the experiences that were put into practice:

- Activities to build community within and among the cohorts
- Professionals from various fields made individual presentations and/or participated on panels
- Used faculty and staff as facilitators
- Specific training regarding valued classroom performance skills
- Field experiences such as college visits and job shadowing
- Understanding and learning to negotiate favorably in the current societal climate

Most of these students had never been on a college campus, so we put a four-stage visitation program in place. Sophomores visited the local community college during the first semester, and then close to the end of the school year, they were taken to a local private four-year institution. As juniors, they traveled to state institutions outside of the local vicinity. During the first semester of the senior year, they met with representatives at college fairs.

Rodney was a tall, dark, handsome young man. He displayed a lot of self-confidence and was equally popular with the boys as well as girls. We took a chartered bus to a state university, a little over a hundred miles away. Upon our arrival, we had a guided tour, we were provided a lunch in one of the campus cafeterias and met with students on a panel. All in all, the day had gone very well. However, I noticed on our return trip that Rodney was extremely quiet (a great departure from his usual loquacious demeanor). When I asked him

if anything was wrong, he just gave a deep sigh and said, “Mrs. Hassler, I thought that school was going to be a pushover, but it’s way too big for me!”

I was glad that he had that experience. It caused him to reflect on the various other choices he could make, instead of a place that he felt was overwhelming. That was exactly the point for taking that and other field trips! One of the most important focal points of conducting a program like Partners was to give voice to students who may not have otherwise had the opportunity to participate in events like our trips or meet people like those on our panels.

Students in the first two cohorts decided that their program needed a name that aptly articulated and described their goals. They decided to have a contest and hold a vote. The group whose offering was selected won a pizza party. Though the party was a temporary reward, the name seemed to shape the image they’d created for themselves. For over sixteen years, Partners in Achievement met with favorable results. Nearly every student graduated with his/her cohort and pursued some form of post-secondary education. Now in their late twenties to late thirties, these young men and women have become viable contributors to their communities. My hope is that their commitment to Partners in Achievement helped articulate their dreams.

Conclusion

There is a post-script that must be added here. Though the Partners in Achievement met with many individual successes, this is not a story of the celebration of substantive change. On the contrary, the struggle for the program’s legitimation never ended. Over all those years, a few students fell away; either feeling threatened by their own inadequacies or their own oppression. The isolation and marginalization of racism never went away. My

motivation to continue the work despite obstacles of all kinds has been clearly articulated by Bell (1995) as he spoke about CRT and critical race theorists. He stated that

We emphasize our marginality and try to turn it toward advantageous perspective building and concrete advocacy on behalf of those oppressed by race and other interlocking factors of gender, economic class, and sexual orientation. When I say we are marginalized, it is not because we are victim-mongers seeking sympathy in return for a sacrifice of pride. Rather, we see such identification as one of the only hopes of transformative resistance strategy. (p. 41)

Chapter Seven- Engaging African American Parents

Introduction

It isn't a secret that, all too often, African American parents are viewed as being unengaged in their children's education. Cooper (2007) claims that urban school educators particularly voice their frustration at what they assess to be the inadequate parental involvement rates of African- American parents... They question whether the parents promote learning at home, and many also question the extent to which African-American families care about their children's school achievement. (p. 492)

There is a body of documents that strains to explain why this lack of involvement exists. Some claim that socio-economic status influences the level of participation that can be expected from parents, particularly parents of color. Jeynes (2010) states that time constraints, for example, inflexible work schedules impact the amount of time some parents have available for school participation. The lack of financial resources often creates uncomfortable moments for some low-income parents. "Many times, school events, such as bake sales and fund-raisers, involve the payment of money. In these situations, some parents feel awkward attending unless they purchase something" (Jeynes, p. 763). The thought exists, in some settings, that this group of parents has not had positive school experiences, thus their resistance to playing an active part in the education of their own children. For example, Jeynes (2010) claims that "parents also sometimes feel intimidated because of friction they or their children experience with the teacher" (p. 763). These attempts at rationalizing the problem fall short because the core issue of racialization in our society is not often addressed.

In order to begin to understand how to effectively engage parents of color, there must be an examination of how the critical race theory tenets, the intersection of race and property shape the outcomes of parental involvement. Furthermore, it is also critical to lay a foundation highlighting the harm of institutionalized racism and its flip side, internalized oppression on parents of color. These impediments have limited access to many educational opportunities that are routinely available to the dominant group, that is, White Americans.

Additionally, strategies to empower parents of color and enhance their influence in the schools where their children attend will be discussed. African American parents will not be able to access available resources without attracting firm commitments from educators and policy makers to support and implement models of parental participation that break down old barriers.

The Intersection of Race and Property

Harris (1995) analyzes the concept of race and property in her discussion of whiteness as property. She claims that from early on in our history “the origins of property rights in the United States are rooted in racial domination” (Harris, p. 277). Furthermore, Harris (1995) argues that “it was the interaction between conceptions of race and property which played a critical role in establishing and maintaining racial and economic subordination” (p. 277). In her discussion of slavery as commerce of humanity, Harris (1995) illuminates the concept of whiteness as property.

Because the system of slavery was contingent on and conflated with racial identity, it became crucial to be “white”, to be identified as white, to have the property of being white. Whiteness was the characteristic, the attribute, the property of free human beings... (p. 279)

Finally, Harris (1995) states that “owning white identity as property affirmed the self-identity and liberty of whites and, conversely, denied the self-identity and liberty of blacks” (p. 285).

According to Ladson-Billings (2009):

Thus, even without the use of a sophisticated legal rhetorical argument, Whites know they possess a property that people of color do not and that to possess it confers aspects of citizenship not available to others...African Americans, thus represent a unique form of citizen in the USA-property transformed into citizen. (pp. 26-27)

The smartly dressed White woman entered my office, without an appointment, to discuss the needs of her son, a junior at the high school. By her appearance and demeanor, my assessment was that she belonged to the mid-upper strata of local society. As she gave me a brief overview of her background, I found that my mental evaluation was right on target. She was very comfortable and relaxed as she explained her request.

Dennis had registered for the ACT which was to be administered in a couple of months. He had taken it previously, but neither of them was pleased with the result, she said. She wanted me to refer him for evaluation to determine if he suffered from ADHD. I explained to her the criteria for that kind of an assessment and showed her why Dennis did not meet any of those benchmarks. Although very courteous, she was insistent that there was some reason for his “lackluster” performance. As a matter of fact, Dennis was in the top 10% of the class and scored a 30 on the ACT, which falls in the 95%ile + range!

What this mother wanted was for Dennis to have a diagnosis in order to qualify for extra time on this national assessment tool. I described the necessary process, but gently warned her

that because of his strong academic standing, he probably would not receive any special services.

Over the years, I have observed that White parents often expect to be granted privileges unavailable to most students, particularly those of color. They will go to great lengths to acquire a diagnosis of some sort of perceived disability, if it will afford their children an advantage over others. However, these parents are careful to note that they do want what may be considered a stigma; some label like “emotionally disturbed,” “behavior disorder,” “mentally retarded” or even “learning disabled”, which was the label of choice in the mid-seventies.. These titles generally connote a status of inferiority and some form of services administered to students with like findings. Actually, Dennis’ mom was clear that she did not want any services for her son, only enough of a diagnosis to get him extra time on the test. She, unlike most parents of color, knew where the rocks were in the pond.

Calabrese (1990) posits that

Public school officials refuse to identify the American educational process itself as discriminatory. Instead, armed with research findings, they continue to blame the victims of discrimination, suggesting that poor environmental circumstances produce disadvantaged students who are thus predisposed to second-class status and failure. (p. 148)

In her research, Miretzky (2004) found that a teacher, one of the subjects in her project, stated that “...the school has such low expectations of the parents...part of the reason parents won’t...play an active role because they know the school administration doesn’t expect them to...” (p. 6). Cooper (2007) articulated the belief that “many educators, along with policy-makers, have come to accept the idea that low-income and working class African-American

parents are more of a deficit to their children's educational development than an asset" (p. 492). Cooper (2007) quotes a school superintendent who said "handling the 'angry' Black mothers who 'hassle' his principals was a key concern" (p. 491).

Mrs. Sanford had two daughters attending the high school, one a freshman and the other was a sophomore. This African American family resided in the central city, but attended our suburban school because of a state mandated desegregation program. The "deseg" kids were in a double-bind; Black and perceived as urban poor. She was a formidable advocate for her girls and was determined that they get all the opportunities available.

Mrs. Sanford received notification that Karen, the younger of the girls, had been suspended from school. She immediately came to the school and asked to see the building principal, though she had no appointment. When told that the administrator was busy, she said that she would wait. After waiting for more than an hour, she came to see me and asked if I could intervene. When the principal became available, I was permitted to sit in on the meeting. Full of emotion, this mother asked for details about the incident. The principal was visibly uncomfortable with the confrontation and deflected each one of Mrs. Sanford's questions. Though not satisfied, she accepted the consequences for her child. Later, she told me that she felt that the principal was patronizing and did not really want to listen to her concerns.

This parent believed that Karen's poor choices were related to a diagnosis she'd received a number of years ago for which she was being treated in a school-based program. Because she was cognizant of district policies regarding suspension, Mrs. Sanford was fully aware that a special hearing should have been held before any disciplinary action was taken. Even though she demanded a right to be heard, whenever she came to the building, there were whispers among the staff that the "trouble-maker" was back, making excuses for her children.

This parent was being marginalized in her zeal to advocate on behalf of her child by those who felt they had the right to demean her efforts.

It seems to be apparent that a power dynamic exists in the intersection of race and property, that privileges one group over another. Calabrese (1990) argues that “there is general agreement that minorities are alienated from social structures in general and from school organization in particular” (p. 148). In their work with African American mothers whose children attend suburban schools, Beard and Brown (2008) have concluded that “an important and sometime problematic issue within education’s discourse has been how to build trusting, collaborative, and reciprocal relationships between school faculty and students and parents” (p. 471).

Institutionalized and Internalized Racism

Stokely Carmichael of the Black Panther Party, has been credited with coining the phrase, “institutionalized racism”, in the late 1960s. He defined it as “the collective failure of an organization to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their color, culture or ethnic origin” (Race, 2006, p. 12). This form of racism is said to occur in corporations, educational institutions and other public entities such as organizational healthcare providers. Its insidious nature permeates our society by routinely denying access to quality programs and services available in the public sector.

In her discussion of internalized racism, Speight (2007) claims that

Because racism is pervasive, operating at the interpersonal and institutional levels simultaneously, its effects are cumulative, spanning generations, individuals, time, and place-encompassing much more than discrete acts.

Consequently, psychological injury that is due to racism is not limited to

that caused directly by one perpetrator, at one time, in one place. (pp. 126-127)

Speight (2007) analyzes the dynamics of racism and insists that not only is racism oppressive, but that it is embedded in the culture and structure of this country (p. 127). One of the dimensions of racism is that people of color are situated in spaces without power. “Often in interpersonal encounters, people of color have to first prove their respectability” (Speight, 2007, p. 128). One of the by-products of this condition is that the members of the minority culture begin to internalize the stereotypical views of the dominant culture about themselves (Speight, 2007). She insists that “the internalization of racism may arguably be the most damaging psychological injury that is due to racism” (p. 130).

In their examination of internalized racism and what they call “internalized dominance” (p. 67), Joseph and Williams (2008) argue that one of the symptoms is a multifaceted and extreme psychological, social, and economic self-sabotage that was implanted by and works toward the benefit of White society that depends on systematically limiting, blocking, and undermining Black success, innovation, and power. (p. 67).

Tappan (2006) asserts that “any solution to the problems of privilege and oppression must focus as much on structural/systemic change as it does on personal transformation” (p. 2117).

Johnson (1975) offers the concept that the educational system is the single most powerful purveyor of the socialization process in this country. Johnson (1975) further posits that this socialization is rife with institutional racism by establishing “norms, standards, behavioral patterns, morals, and sense of social position in such a manner that the socializee is unaware of his absorption of a curriculum that is fundamentally racist” (p. 1). This concept is particularly

noteworthy because minority and ethnic groups have historically viewed education as a vehicle on the road to equity.

It is apparent that the issue still has not been put to rest. As recently as 2004, the school board in Seattle, Washington issued a resolution declaring its intent to eradicate institutional racism. The chief architect of the resolution indicated that white children and those of color experience different forms of education that appear to make it difficult for certain groups to achieve academic success. The board's goal was to incorporate the efforts of all stakeholders in the system to eradicate this virulent form of racism under a five-year plan (Seattleschools.org, 2004).

Woodson (1933) expresses the effects of internalized oppression by describing how schools in the United States have impacted African American students. He says that the educational system that encourages and reinforces the oppressor to believe that he is always right and makes worthwhile contributions to society, "depresses and crushes at the same time the spark of genius in the Negro by making him feel that his race does not amount to much and never will measure up to the standards of other people" (p. ix).

This, then, is the crux of internalized oppression or internalized racism. Its far-reaching effects have damaged the collective psyche of African Americans. These persons of color find themselves questioning their self-worth by comparing their accomplishments, or lack thereof, with the dominant group. Too often, they feel as though they come up short. Self-fulfilling prophecy dominates this line of thinking and plays out in feelings of helplessness and attempting to live up to the dominate norms of beauty and success, for example. Delpit (1995) describes a conversation she had with a graduate student enrolled

“it becomes futile because they think they know everything about everybody. What you have to say about your life, your children, doesn’t mean anything. They don’t really want to hear what you have to say. ...It just doesn’t make sense to keep talking to them” (p. 22).

A direct result of this practice can be found in schools with little participation from parents of color. They have expressed frustration in their efforts to be listened to as advocates for their children and have concluded that for school officials to hear them does not equate to having their input valued (Miretzy, 2004). These parents recognize the imbalance in power and that they are at the short end of it. This sense of disenfranchisement can lead to withdrawing from active participation in the academic decisions made for their children. Those from the dominant group who exercise their privilege often dismiss any worldview other than their own as unimportant and without merit. Leonardo (2009) claims that “whites are taught to normalize their dominant position in society, they are susceptible to these forms of teaching because they benefit from them” (p. 268). Additionally, Leonardo (2009) claims that

In order for white racial hegemony to saturate everyday life, it has to be secured by a process of domination, or those acts, decisions, and policies that white subjects perpetrate on people of color... Racial privilege is the notion that white subjects accrue advantages by virtue of constructed as whites. (p. 261)

Perceptions of inferiority regarding African American parents are reinforced by teachers viewing parents as problems with limited potential for input. One of the major themes that Kailin (2002) discovered in her research on racism in a predominately white school district that teachers believed “the time-worn myth that it really doesn’t matter what teachers do because

‘these people do not value education’ (p. 103) and that it “is deeply ingrained in the thinking of many white Americans regarding African Americans” (p. 103).

What are the Rocks?

Much research has indicated that the active engagement of parents in their children’s education will result in higher levels of academic achievement for them. Sanders (2009) indicates in a discussion of educational reform that “school, family, and community partnerships...promotes collaboration...to achieve school excellence and student success” (p. 1694). In other words, parents who have accumulated social or cultural capital win. They can potentially become captains of this culture of power. So how do parents go about gaining social capital? This is no easy task, especially for parents of color. Breaking through the culture of institutional racism can be compared to breaking through the proverbial glass ceiling and yet, would appear to be the first step. Sanders (2009) suggests that “schools must create systemic structures and channels of communication that promote and sustain collaborative action” (p. 1695).

Mrs. Davis made an appointment to meet with me in order to discuss her grandson’s academic struggles. When she arrived, I met a well dressed middle-aged Black woman; she was soft-spoken, but very willing to speak with me about her dilemma. I knew that her grandson, Glen, was new to our school, just entering at the beginning of his junior year. However, I hadn’t had the opportunity to get to know him very well. Glen’s parents lived in the metropolitan area, but in another community. Their concern over their son’s academic struggles led them to turn educational custody over to the grandparents; this being done for Glen to gain eligibility to attend what they all deemed a better school district than the one in which he resided.

His grandmother explained that Glen had labored through school for years with mixed results. Eventually, his parents took him to a physician where he was tested and diagnosed with

ADHD. Glen took medicine for a period and experienced great improvement in his studies. Because he was doing so well, his parents removed him from medication. Although he was able to maintain the status quo, after a while things started to go down hill. In desperation, the parents and grandparents agreed that a move to another school would be in Glen's best interests. Unfortunately, things had not improved; hence Mrs. Davis' meeting with me.

What I learned was that the family was embarrassed that Glen was on medication. They believed that it was a stigma indicating mental inferiority; they didn't want family or friends to think that Glen was "crazy". (As I consider it now, this line of thinking was a perfect example of internalized oppression. That perception of inferiority, in comparing self to others, was preventing this young man from receiving the care he deserved and needed.) I thought of the many White parents I'd had contact with over the years, who sought any means necessary to give their children an advantage even if it meant labeling them with some sort of diagnosis. Immediately, I assured Mrs. Davis that her family had an extremely legitimate case for accessing supplemental services to ensure Glen's academic success. She still seemed a little reluctant until I explained that I was not referring to special education services. I described the benefits of a 504 Plan (much sought after by many White parents), which would allow Glen to access all the supplemental resources necessary to support his progress without labeling him as "retarded". All that Glen's parents had to do was get an updated diagnosis from the physician for me. At that point, I would convene a meeting, including Mrs. Davis and/or the parents and any available teachers. Once the plan was drawn up, it would be disseminated to Glen's teachers for their implementation. The plan was to be reviewed annually.

Here is a classic example of how the ordinary parent, particularly one of color, would have no clue about negotiating this part of the system. I felt victorious in being able to let Mrs. Davis in on that not so public strategy.

Current stereotypes must be countered with building alliances of mutual respect. This can only be done in an environment designed to build relationships between teachers and parents. Beard and Brown (2008) consider “the issue of trust...a key component” (p. 471) in establishing meaningful relationships between schools and parents. They continue by stating that “the complexity of working across cultural and/or racial borders, trust takes on a particularly critical role” (p. 471). The study that Miretzky (2004) conducted revealed that both parents and teachers recognized the need for three crucial initiatives: time to talk with each other, the opportunity to create an atmosphere of respect and recognition of their common investment in the students they share (p. 13). There was one caveat; if there was no support from administration, these efforts would be fruitless (Miretzky, 2004). However, these factors can contribute to the building of social or cultural capital, or finding the rocks in the pond, with positive administrative commitment.

Reflections on African American Parent Involvement

Education researchers have continuously looked at ways to encourage more involvement of Black parents. Too often, there seems to have been an assumption that they are not interested in the education of their children. Fields-Smith (2005) states that

The discourse on parental involvement tends to favor the perspectives of White, middle-income families and to marginalize the views regarding African American parental involvement. In fact, teachers often perceive African American parents as uninvolved and disinterested... Such negative

perceptions disdain historical portraits of African American parents. (p. 129)

Morris (2004) says that “Black people collectively created functional institutions that worked for the betterment of their children, families, and communities within an oppressive social structure” (p. 72). Fairclough (2001) conveys the fact that “slavery and racial segregation meant that white southerners and black southerners perceived and experienced education in profoundly different ways. The efforts of the slave regime to prevent black literacy meant that blacks early on associated education with liberation” (p. 3). Berry and Blassingame (1982) describe the zeal for education demonstrated by Blacks in the mid-nineteenth century. They point out that

barred from white schools in the South, and having few schools of their own in the 1860s, black youngsters clutched at any morsel of education... Blacks sometimes forced planters to establish schools, organized their own or refused to vote for politicians who would not support black schools. (p. 263)

In modern times, there exists a body of knowledge that evidences the ongoing belief among African American families about the importance of education. Fields-Smith (2001) continues by describing “documented history of African American education demonstrates the way in which home, school, church, and community were intertwined intimately during segregated schooling...” (p. 132). Siddle-Walker (2000) posits “that confining explanations of the education in the schools to descriptions of resources has not adequately explained the kind of education African American teachers, principals, and parents attempted to provide under externally restrictive circumstances” (p. 254). Furthermore, Siddle-Walker (2000) insists that negative portrayals has produced a history of education of African Americans that focuses only on inequalities and ignores the caring behaviors of teachers and principals, the support of parents, the forms of institutional support for students,

and the high expectations placed upon students by the school and community.

(p. 254)

Historically, Black families have maintained a persistent confidence in the ability of schools to educate their children (Morris, 2004).

As a little girl, I can recall the sense of community in my neighborhood. Several black churches were in the area, all within walking distance. The illustrious Sumner High School was three blocks away and cascading away from that building were the black elementary schools, all in close proximity to one another. And of course, across the street from Sumner was Homer G. Phillips Hospital, the city-run hospital for Black folks. Principals, teachers, laborers, physicians-all lived in the general area. Relationships and accountability were built through regular contact with one another. For example, conversations could be overhead where a parent would inquire, on the church steps, about the academic progress of a son or daughter.

I mention accountability because it was a known fact that if you were seen misbehaving in public, in all likelihood, the message would have gotten to your parents before you reached home. Neighbors shared in keeping children accountable for their actions but also were on hand to celebrate their victories, which generally revolved around some academic achievement or other. These events were shared not only in our homes and neighborhoods; they were often acknowledged in our churches, too. The local community covered all facets of our lives.

Parent Advocacy for African American Children

One of the objects of this document is to examine ways in which African American families can access and exercise their power to enhance the quality of education their children receive in a school and community that is composed of primarily White residents. After years of frustration because there seemed such little movement in this area, I proposed a plan that would

engage more Black parents in the fabric of the culture of schools. What follows is a summary of those concepts.

Parents who are visible on a frequent basis gain access to success strategies and services that might not otherwise be made apparent. The students in these families can benefit in tangible ways. More opportunities often become available for accessing educational resources in the form of tutorials, internships, and financial resources. It appears that there is one area where little visible impact has been made which is significant; African American parent involvement. Active engagement of this population should yield the following outcomes for their students:

- More consistent and higher academic performance
- More participation in ancillary programs, such as fine arts productions
- More participation in supplementary programming, such as summer camps on college campuses.

An initial aspect of this project is to pilot small group meetings with African American parents. The idea is to meet at homes, coffee shops, restaurants, or some other neutral location where they might feel more comfortable than in a school building. The format for discussion would revolve around encouraging the participating parents to express their desires and concerns regarding the goals they have for their children. Meetings would be scheduled on a regular basis, at least monthly, to allow for consistent feedback. In this informal environment, the desire is to gain the confidence and trust of parents, so that they would be willing to experiment with strategies to create positive change in the academic performance of their children. What is being proposed here is to actually conduct parent involvement workshops. It does not necessarily follow that African American parents should assimilate into the existing culture established by

White parents, but they must learn what it takes to ensure that their children have equal access to available resources. For example, when African American families are not present at the annual financial aid workshop, it is difficult for them to navigate what can be a complicated process to maximize financial aid benefits for their families' educational needs. The goal is for these parents to understand that this kind of information is not a privilege, but a right. Aggressive motivational-communication training will be made available for parents to learn the necessary skills to advocate for their children and develop regular positive contacts with school personnel.

Parents can influence their children to participate in other areas of school life. In predominately Black schools, it is easy to find students on newspaper staffs, performing in plays and musicals, populating bands, and orchestras. Much research seems to indicate that students involved in these activities perform better in the classroom. The belief here is that once parents understand the significance of their students' involvement, they will actively encourage them. "Children need to be inspired and guided to feel the thrill of victory through genuine accomplishment" (Cosby & Poussaint, 2007).

Impacting the achievement gap requires the participation of the objects of discussion – the students. The plan to engage parents in the educational process must also include the voices of their children. Through narratives, parents will be able to report the efficacy of employing newly learned strategies and the benefits for their children and themselves. Evidence to support the projected academic objectives will be measured through improved classroom performance, lower behavior referrals, higher scores on standardized tests and more active participation in school related activities.

The significance of the discrepancy between the performance of African American and White students is an inconvenient truth. The impact has a deleterious affect on both the

community as well as the individual. Because of the lack of preparedness, there is limited opportunity in current and emerging careers for the underperforming African American student. That problem then results in a loss of revenue and a shrinking tax base for that community.

It is clear that the task described is one of huge proportions. Its success will be dependent on a number of factors. First, the school and district administration must be able to capture the vision of improving the involvement of African American families in the total educational experience of their children. A critical part of developing this concept is for the administration to more aggressively seek and hire qualified teaching staff. Secondly, and probably the most important aspect, is the commitment of these families to the process of change. Of course, the faculty must be willing to extend themselves beyond the traditional means of inclusiveness, particularly in the case of African American parents. Lastly, none of the parties involved must view the employment of intentional strategies to engage this population as an anomaly, but as a sincere effort to create an environment that will reap tangible benefits for, not only African American students, but for all students.

Conclusion

Over ten years ago, I proposed such a concept to an administrator in the district administration offices. I'd prepared a written proposal, which included staff development training, student –self advocacy programs, community involvement, as well as the centerpiece of parent engagement programming. I explained that I thought the issues of student achievement for African American students required such a comprehensive intervention and a full-time employee to implement it. (Of course, I communicated that I should be that person.) The administrator agreed that it was a wonderful idea, but that the climate was not quite ready. It was suggested that I wait a few months and return after the much anticipated change in the

superintendency. I returned about a year later to take up the discussion again. This time I was told that the new administration was still settling in but that my proposal was still a good idea, however, that it was probably not a full-time opportunity.

Fast forward three or four years; once again, I visit with the administrator. By this time, many things had changed in the district, for the better. Social justice training had been made available to the entire district faculty and staff. Plans were implemented to make that training permanent and in some cases required. It really seemed that substantive changes were being made in the infrastructure. However, the onerous achievement gap appeared to have taken up permanent residence. My visit was for the express purpose of reminding the administrator of my idea. On this occasion, I am told that the district is looking at belt-tightening strategies and that it might be better to share my ideas with my building principal. Well, I immediately followed up with that suggestion and found that my proposal was well-received. Discussions went on for more than a year in an attempt to determine how to integrate my plan into my already jammed day.

Time just ran out and I decided to retire. However, the principal asked if I would consider being part of a program he was developing that would have the parent component. I eagerly agreed and became a part-time consultant serving as the parent advocate I'd so vividly described in my original proposal. There's just this little caveat. When I examine the program that is now in place in the school building, it looks eerily just like mine! Is there unconscious white privilege being exercised here? I guess it really doesn't matter whether it was intentional or not, it sure would be nice to have its original source acknowledged.

Chapter Eight- The Conclusion of the Matter

Introduction

“Good autoethnographic writing is truthful, vulnerable, evocative, and therapeutic” (Ellis, 2004, p. 135).

Methodologically, doing autoethnography seemed to be a perfect fit for me. What a great opportunity to take events from my professional life and examine them through the theoretical lens of CRT! How difficult could that be? Just tell the story and let it speak for itself. Despite reading about how autoethnographic work can make one vulnerable to the effects of the past on one’s life, I thought it really can’t be that painful, can it? I did not, could not factor in the pain of opening what I’d made myself believe were closed chapters in my life.

Over the years, I have pontificated about my belief that every Black person lives with a kernel of rage buried deep within the psyche. In my opinion, I have and still believe that rage is sublimated to the degree that 99 and 99/100 percent of those persons never respond overtly. It’s certainly not a newsflash, but we now know that the effects of subverting this rage have wreaked havoc on the intellectual, mental, physical and spiritual well-being of people of color and African Americans, in particular. Daily micro-aggressions, routine incidents of marginalization and isolation in our professional and personal lives have had deleterious effects through generations. Is there a way to break this generational curse?

One approach may be in choosing this particular mode of ethnographic research. Autoethnography and critical race theory share a unique feature – that of story-telling. Stories and counter-stories privilege the writer to offer a personal narrative with the goal of influencing change; change in how we see ourselves in a society couched in racialized practices.

Thus, we are offered the opportunity to decide whether changing the way we do business is worth the risk.

Autoethnography

Though recognized as a legitimate form of qualitative research, questions have arisen about how to validate autoethnography. In her writings about how to do autoethnography, Ellis (2004) discusses how to authenticate such research. She insists that

Stories and theories have different purposes... a story's generalizability is always being tested – not in the traditional way through random samples of respondents, but by readers as they determine if a story speaks to them about their experience or about the lives of others they know. Readers provide theoretical validation by comparing their lives to ours... (Ellis, 2004, p. 195)

Ellis (2004) writes about conducting autoethnographic research by doing an autoethnography; her method is called a methodological novel. She uses her syllabus and notes from classes she's taught about doing this kind of work. Ellis (2004) states in the introduction of her book that not only did she use real characters, but also composites in order to mask individual identities without losing the essence of the research. Ellis (2004) gives her definition of autoethnography as "research, writing, story, and method that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social and political" (p. xviii). She continues by stating that "this book is based on these ethnographic details, making it possible to construct ethnographic scenes that happened and fictional scenes that didn't – but could have" (p. xx). In an excerpt out of a chapter, one of Ellis' characters reflects on a previous class session and says,

I have to admit that last week's conversation freed me from being obsessed with whether I had everything exactly in the right order, and whether I had described my reflections

exactly as they happened. I stopped being so concerned about accuracy and became more involved in telling the best story I could from the information I had. (p. 137)

I haven't obsessed, but have been careful to give the most accurate rendition of the stories I've written. Actually, my biggest concern has been accuracy. One of my professors, as well as a classmate, challenged me on the truthfulness of my memory. I recall feeling defensive and responding that my perception is my truth. How can someone else challenge whether or not my memory is correct; by whose standards? I am certain that researchers of whatever stripe, qualitative or quantitative, must reconstruct observations through their notes. These notes are built on perception and memory. Why should autoethnography have to prove its veracity any more than other methodologies?

Ellis (2004) continues,

If the book works as I intend, this approach should offer an engaging way to learn the autoethnographic method. That does not mean the process will be pain free; usually some degree of emotional turmoil accompanies the vulnerability required to scrutinize yourself and reveal to others what you find. (p. xx)

The new principal called an assembly of just the African American students who were a part of the voluntary desegregation program. These were the kids who were bussed in from various parts of the city; they numbered a little over one hundred. As the building coordinator for the program, I was also present. Ostensibly, Mrs. Parker wanted to encourage these students to take a more active part in after school activities. She seemed to not have taken into account that their time was limited because of the restraints of busing schedules. Anyway, she plunged on into a monologue about how much she loved each one of them and wanted to please them. It was an embarrassing moment on a number of levels. First of all, the kids started to snicker.

Secondly, I was insulted by the approach – as though they were all little pickaninnies who needed a hug and a pat on the head. She insulted their personhood and intellect. After all, this was the first time that she had even seen these young people. There had been no previous effort to build relationships with them; how could she “love” them? They saw right through her insincerity and began to become quite inattentive. The harder she tried, the more they ignored her. I was standing behind her and attempted to silently signal to the kids to give their attention to her. When she realized what I was doing, she became furious and stormed out of the room.

After that incident, she made life very difficult for me. She told me that she felt threatened by my presence and influence with the students. There were efforts to marginalize me from events; a move to have my evaluation changed; lying to an African American colleague, thus destroying a relationship, and on and on for nearly two years. At times, the loneliness and heartache was almost unbearable. I manifested health symptoms that required medical attention.

Why had this happened? Was she just a crazy woman or was there something more insidious? As I look back, I see a pitifully insecure White woman attempting to exert her privilege – privilege as a White person as well as being in a position of authority. I see internalized oppression in her ability to influence a fellow African American (this woman and I ate lunch together and shared a lot of experiences personal to us) to take a stand against me.

Finally, Mrs. Parker left the job abruptly and moved out of state. It took several years for me to reestablish a relationship with my colleague and trust her again.

Critical Race Theory

“To make matters worse, the power structure within the white community would listen to the demands by these Negroes only when the demands fitted with what they were willing to give.” (Ogden, 1965)

This quote comes from an article in the *Massachusetts Review*, published forty-five years ago. Before critical race theory was officially born, here is illustrated a classic example of interest convergence. In his discussion of the civil rights movement, Ogden (1965) challenges other Whites to a different stance in terms of their contribution to the movement. Ogden (1965) declares that “the white intellectual must rid himself of the paternalism inbred in him from years of stewardship of the black man’s right to speak” (p. 74).

The fact that this discussion continues, after nearly fifty years, is a testament to another tenet of critical race theory- that being the permanence of racism. Carmichael (1966) speaks not to the eradication of racism, but to the right for self-definition. In an essay on black liberation, Carmichael (1966) states “the necessity to reclaim our history and our identity...” (p. 76). He continues,

To do this we shall have to struggle for the right to create our own terms through which to define ourselves and our relationship to society, and to have these terms recognized. This is the necessity of a free people, and the first right that any oppressor must suspend. (Carmichael, p. 76)

Though considered a major architect of critical race theory and an esteemed law professor, Derrick Bell has mastered the art of storytelling as a means of discussing CRT and its impact on critical thought. For example, Bell (1992) uses story to discuss the permanence of racism. The following excerpt reflects a portion of his theory:

For years I believed law was the answer... Now, though, I'm convinced that racism is a permanent part of the American landscape. The problem is...most people conclude that I have given up, or surrendered, or, worse, sold out. The real problem is that my view – conflicts with...their world view. I try to explain that a realistic appraisal of racism's crucial role in the society, far from being capitulation, would enable us to recognize the potential for effecting reform in even what appear to be setbacks. (p. 92)

The annual golf tournament was a fundraiser for the school district foundation. The players were generally made up of faculty, administration and a few invited friends. My husband was invited to play and by all accounts, had a great time. In fact, the last time he played, the superintendent was his partner and they won!

As usual the tournament was scheduled at the end of the school year. That year, there had been little response to the call for sign-ups. Daily email announcements implored players to come forward. The invitation seemed to be wide open. So as usual, I signed up my husband. However, since there seemed to be such a shortage of participants, I inquired about signing up my son-in-law to round out a team. The person processing the sign-ups (the same one who'd been soliciting players at the behest of her boss, the athletic director) thought it was a fabulous idea!

A couple of days before the event, the athletic director came to my office and asked if he could have a moment. I told him of course and he closed the door before taking a seat. Mr. Smith explained to me that the tournament was in reality a closed event. He said that it was only for employees of the district – no outsiders. He hoped I could understand that my son-in-law would not be able to participate and for this time only, my husband could. I was so incensed, I

couldn't speak. Tears welled up in my eyes, but I certainly did not want this man to see them. Once he left my office, the tears flowed. How dare he? What could the explanation be anything other than racism? Was it exercising the CRT principle of property rights, in this case meaning the right to exclude? Or maybe Mr. Smith was just exercising his whiteness as property and privilege? Explain to me why friends of other players were acceptable, but not my family? I called and asked his secretary to return my check. Then I called my husband and made up some lame excuse. There was, simultaneously, a sense of rage and helplessness. I could have spit in his eye, but for what benefit? Who could I tell and what difference would it make?

I'd put that memory away until a couple of nights ago, when I told my husband what actually occurred. Bitter tears started to flow as that wound was once again laid bare.

Social Justice

Justice – fairness, impartiality, evenhandedness, fair dealing, honesty, integrity

Equity – fairness, impartiality, evenhandedness, fair play

Equality – fairness, impartiality

Integrity – honesty

The search has been driven by the quest for meaning in the phrase, “equity in education for African Americans”. What does this mean, really? Is it simply a nice little catch phrase or a snazzy title for a dissertation? I checked a thesaurus to hunt for some clues. If one looks closely, it is clear that the term justice encompasses each characteristic of equity, equality and integrity. Interestingly enough, the words justice and equity appear to be nearly synonymous. The next step in this journey is to discover if it is possible to apply equity and justice in the systems of education found in the United States.

From a societal point of view, it would seem that equity and justice would be acceptable and desirable qualities to employ for the enjoyment of all citizens. However, the checkered legacy of this country's history tells a different story. The vestiges of a slave economy have created an environment that supports the benefits of an unjust system for those whose ancestors reaped profit from it. In her discussion of whiteness as property, Harris (1995) states that "because the children of blackwomen assumed the status of their mother, slaves were bred through black-women's bodies" (p. 279). Harris (1995) continues her argument by asserting that

Despite Thomas Jefferson's belief that slavery should be abolished, like other slaveholders, he viewed slaves as economic assets, noting that their value could be realized more efficiently from breeding than from labor...Because whites could not be enslaved or held as slaves, the racial line between white and black was extremely critical...White identity and whiteness were sources of privilege and protection... (p. 279)

Harris (1995) has connected the need for unjust, inequitable conditions as necessary to maintain an economy built to protect the privilege that whiteness carries as an attribute of superiority. Furthermore, Harris (1995) comments on the relationship of race and property describing how Blacks driven into the labor force were considered pieces of property. "Race and property were thus conflated by establishing a form of property contingent on race: only blacks were subjugated as slaves and treated as property" (Harris, p. 278). This historical retrospective is critical to understanding why equity between Blacks and Whites is such a difficult issue to resolve.

The equitable distribution of education has fallen victim to this heritage of racism established centuries ago. Slaves were forbidden to learn how to read and write; "...whites enacted laws in slave states to proscribe teaching enslaved and sometimes free blacks to read and

write” (Williams, 2005, p. 13). Yet, there is documented evidence of their often clandestine efforts to seek an education. “As slave owners and legislators suspected, African Americans, free and slave, designed all manner of strategies to elude the laws against learning” (Williams, 2005, p. 18).

Williams (2005) maintains that

The presence of literate slaves threatened to give lie to the entire system. Reading indicated to the world that this so-called property had a mind, and writing foretold the ability to construct an alternative narrative about bondage itself. Literacy among slaves would expose slavery, and masters knew it.
(p. 7)

What seems to generally not be known beyond academia is that it would be erroneous to assume that the desire for education among African Americans was without understanding and a carbon copy of white culture (Fairclough, 2001). Though missionaries from the North were sympathetic to the desire that Blacks had for education, “the freedmen did not need New England missionaries to teach them the value of literacy; they knew its importance already” (Fairclough, p. 3).

There are other factors to consider as to why educational equity still eludes a great number of people of color in this country. Bartlett, et al (2002) claim that “public education became ‘marketized’ ”(p. 5). Their discussion centers around the influence of those outside of the education sphere, who insisted that business principles could and should be applied to education; for example, deregulation, creating competition and a caste system. Bartlett, et al (2002) also argue that “the goal of social equity through education...was eclipsed by economic uses of schools” (p. 5).

Education became a political football when it, particularly the public school sector, was accused of creating a culture that produced mediocre results. Bartlett, et al (2002) maintain that Companies deflected attention from their own contributions to school failure and economic recession: the flux their new mobility created; the benefits and low tax rates they wrangled from cities that competed over their relocation; and the layoffs they instigated, creating instability and economic uncertainty in families. (p. 9).

Shakman (2009) discusses the fact that detractors of social justice education believe that its direction is not focused or measurable. Its supporters suggest that limiting teaching to instruction and measurable outcomes restricts teachers and students' creative potential. Further, Shakman (2009) claims that "some scholars have argued that the central focus on test score results is fundamentally linked to efforts to privatize education" (p. 9). Shakman (2009) suggests that there are those who

have argued that a market-based model of reform challenges American democratic ideals and is antithetical to much of the ideology of teacher education committed to social justice, such as the goals of equity and access to high quality education for all. (p. 9)

Our department had been "invited" to meet with a group of parents and community members. The goal of the meeting was to share insights into the work of the high school counselor. As we walked into the boardroom at the district office, we were met by a sea of white faces. Immediately, I was struck with the thought, "Are there no African American parents or community members who might be interested in hearing what we have to say in this ostensibly

diverse community?” Uh-oh! That alarm is going off again – that deep-seated rage of marginalization. Oh, well – it’s just business as usual.

After we’d completed our informal presentation, the floor was open for questions and comments. A rather petite forty-something woman, dressed in a dark brown business suit, spoke up. She identified herself as a parent and a member of the corporate world. She thanked us for the information, but stated that there seemed to be no way to measure our results/effectiveness. If we were to convince the larger community of the merit of our work, we would need to come up with the “metrics”. Her comments felt like a slap in the face, but there was little response from any of us in that environment; after all, she was a taxpayer. Where’s the equity in this incident?

White Privilege

Young (2010) has used CRT to examine attitudes of educators relative to race consciousness. The research revealed several results, one showing that “the participants largely perceived racism as an individual pathology, not a system of privilege” (abstract). Young (2010) reports that

...these findings revealed issues of power, positionality, and privilege that were deeply entrenched in the policies and practices of the school, which suggested that greater collaboration between scholars and practitioners was necessary in order to engender ongoing self-reflection and reconceptualization of theories... to begin the work of antiracism.

Shannon (2006) discusses the insidious nature of white privilege. In it, there seems to be a non-conscious or subconscious manifestation that is so subtle that the possessor of this status is not normally aware that it even exists. Shannon (2006) contends “white privilege operates as unseen, invisible even seemingly nonexistent, ...” (p. 1). The argument continues with the

notion that white privilege has been inculcated as habit; a habit that must be approached with indirect means of eradicating it. “White privilege will help constitute a different person – say, a black man – in different ways from me [a white woman], but in both cases our habits (our selves) are composed in transaction with a world that privileges white people” (p. 2).

Friere (1970) describes the possessor of privilege as the oppressor and claims that “the oppressors are afraid of losing the ‘freedom to oppress’ ” (p. 31). Friere (1983) states that “Every attempt at liberation of the poor appears to the rich as a threat, and every attempt at liberation of the poor is seen by the rich as a restriction of their own freedom” (p. 219). So, it seems that whether the possessor is described as White, or the oppressor, or the rich, the conclusion is that each retains a kind of privilege that can only exist in the denial of rights to the non-privileged.

DeCuir-Gunby (2006) posits that whiteness as property, racial identity and constructed race have affected every strata of society in the United States. Her research details how skin color, hair texture and facial features have been a tool of internalized oppression in the African American community. DeCuir-Gunby (2006) suggests that

Race is a socially and historically constructed ideological system that permeates all social, cultural, economic, and political domains, and thus a major determinant of power. Race is especially a determinant of power if one’s race is white. (p. 93).

White privilege, then, is seen as key factor in the maintenance of racialized structures in every area of our society, especially in the area of education. The challenge to create and establish opportunities for equity and justice seems formidable.

Gaining Access

Using stories and counter-stories through the lens of CRT has allowed me to explore, in retrospect, the salient experience of marginalization and isolation in the racialized environment of our country. Not only have I examined my experiences reflexively, but as a result of my research, I have glimpsed into the hearts and minds of those who are as deeply troubled as I am about the current state of affairs.

It has been a roller-coaster journey; from the lows of depression about the enduring state of racism to the highs of recognition that there also exists an enduring hope for challenging and changing the status quo. It is true that racism couched in white privilege is a cornerstone of our social, political, economic and educational framework. However, there appears to exist a growing number of scholars, who not only question the current status of our educational systems, but also are demanding that policy and practice, relative to the meting out of equity and justice, are instituted with integrity.

Hilliard (2003) argues that any child can be taught to excel regardless of socio-economic background; what is necessary is a teacher of excellence. He claims that “we should not begin with a search for student deficiencies as the explanation for their academic failure or success” (Hilliard, p. 133).

I begin where there is no gap. Or if there is a gap, it is the opposite of the one that people normally find. It is a gap displayed in circumstances where the poor, cultural minorities, Africans often surpass the performances of their more wealthy peers of any ethnic background. Few educators have seen these examples, even though they have always been around and can still be found in virtually all places where large numbers of Africans and others are. In these places, we are free to explore all kinds of pedagogical

speculations, since our students are already in a protected environment of the success that good teachers produce. (Hilliard, p. 134)

I was so young when I had Black teachers that what remains is a fuzzy picture of men and women who looked like me and my family. I do remember Mrs. West, a woman of small stature who possessed a warm, no-nonsense attitude. She was my third-grade teacher and always seemed to encourage me to do my best. Almost always, I completed my assignments before anyone else and so I turned to talk with my neighbors, who weren't finished. Well, Mrs. West knew she had to engage me in something that would keep me out of trouble. So, I was free to go to the "library", whenever I finished my work. The "library" was a series of three-shelf book-cases in our classroom, but it was filled with all kinds of interesting books. I fell in love with Greek mythology. The books were old and tattered, but they kept me quietly occupied until the next lesson. Mrs. West always made sure I was challenged to read something a little more difficult than the last book. It was actually no big deal, because each child in our classroom was the recipient of the same kind of challenge.

Implications

Ladson-Billings (2009) warns that before we get too carried away with CRT as a tool to ameliorate the effects of inequitable educational opportunities, much more research must be conducted. Citing the need to understand how legal studies contributes to the impact of CRT in education, Ladson-Billings (2009) states

If we are serious about solving these problems in schools and classrooms, we have to be serious about intense study and careful rethinking of race and education.

Adopting and adapting CRT as a framework for educational equity means that we will

have to expose racism in education and propose radical solutions for addressing it. (p. 33)

Dixson and Rousseau (2006) support the notion of relying on CRT's roots in critical legal studies to explicate the importance of the relationship between the legal literature and education in CRT. They claim that "while CRT in education must necessarily grow and develop to become its own entity, there is much support and needed nourishment yet to be gained from the legal roots of CRT" (Dixson & Rousseau, p. 51).

In her discussion of cultural capital, Yosso (2006) states that CRT provides a vehicle to view the research "with the perspective that Communities of Color are places with multiple strengths" (p.180). Furthermore, Yosso (2006) challenges dominant rhetoric by reminding us that

CRT centers the view of research, pedagogy and policy on Communities of Color and calls into question White middle-class communities as the standard by which all others are to be judged...community cultural wealth involves a commitment to conduct research, teach, and develop schools that serve a larger purpose of struggling toward social and racial justice. (p. 181)

Duncan (2006) argues the usefulness of CRT stories and counterstories because "the words of people of color" are taken "seriously and, instead of stopping there, to allow these voices to inform how we approach our examination of the material conditions basic to and inextricably a part of lived experience" (p. 205). Further, Duncan (2006) maintains that "critical race theory makes the once invisible visible..." (p. 209). Duncan (2006) insists that

...knowledge production informed by critical race theory can readily contribute to educational reforms that position black children and youth as change agents

to transform their schools and communities in their best interests and in the better interests of the larger society. (p. 209)

Though Gillborn (2006) has centered much of his research outside of the United States, he has found critical race theory useful in his examination of racism outside of, as well as within its borders. Gillborn (2006) describes his viewpoint of CRT by stating that

...CRT is not so much a theory as a perspective. That is, CRT does not offer a finished and exclusive set of propositions that claim to explain precisely current situations and to predict what will occur...in the future. Rather, it is a set of interrelated beliefs about the significance of race/racism and how it operates... especially in the United States. (p. 250)

Gillborn (2006) claims that critical race theory can easily be transferred to contexts outside of the United States, for example, Great Britain and Europe and “nations in the global south” (p. 250).

Finally, Dixson and Rousseau (2006) indicate the importance of the contributions of CRT scholars in litigation involving educational issues. “For example, both Solorzano and Ladson-Billings have been called as expert witnesses in cases that address educational inequity... In this way, CRT scholars in education have taken action in the struggle against racial inequality” (Dixson & Rousseau, p. 52).

My hope as a result of this study is that it will not sit on a shelf somewhere gathering dust. When I started this journey, I told my faculty advisor that I wanted it to mean something. Not only would it be an addition to the current literature, but it might, in some way contribute to considerations of changes in educational policies and practices. There is so much more work to do. For example, there are not nearly enough African Americans who know how to access all

the resources available to enhance their learning and the learning of their children and their children's children. Somebody needs to help them find *where the rocks are in the pond*.

In order for the oppressed to be able to wage the struggle for their liberation, they must perceive the reality of oppression not as a closed world from which there is no exit, but as a limiting situation which they can transform.

(Paulo Friere, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 1970, p.34)

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