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INTERSECTIONS



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Sponsored by the University of New Mexico's Department of Language, Literacy, and Sociocultural Studies, *Intersections: Critical Issues in Education* is an online, peer-reviewed, open access academic journal that serves as a forum for diverse voices and perspectives that interrogate, disrupt, and challenge oppression.

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Editor's Introduction.

Virginia Necochea

University of New Mexico

It is with great pride that we present to you the first issue of *Intersections: Critical Issues in Education* from the Language, Literacy, and Sociocultural Studies (LLSS) department of the University of New Mexico (UNM).

This online journal originated with an idea presented to faculty members while I was a graduate student completing my studies in the Educational Thought and Sociocultural Studies (ETSS) program at UNM. The idea centered on the question that, if other universities had fostered publishing opportunities for their students, why couldn't our university do the same? As someone who was trained in what would be considered one of the most critical programs on campus, I also felt it was imperative that this online journal focus on publishing pieces immersed in critical thought and engaged with the most critical issues in education. The idea became 'real' as it took the form of a small working group composed of graduate students and supportive faculty. Here the "I" shifts to "we," as this journal became a collective work and community-led action.

Over the last couple of years, our small group has been working toward the goal of presenting this inaugural issue of *Intersections*. Through our discussions, we realized that what we were creating was not simply a publishing opportunity for our own students at the University of New Mexico, but also a vital space to showcase academic pieces centered on critical issues that continue to challenge the field of education—those connected to race, gender, class, the body, feminist thought, coloniality, and more. Given the current political climate, the publication of *Intersections* has become a necessity. As academics of color and allies, we believe it is our responsibility to promote pieces that challenge the spectrum of oppressive hierarchies that continue to afflict the current U.S. educational system and the global community.

Everyone on our editorial team also felt strongly that *Intersections* should create a forum for "non-traditional" scholarly works, such as poetry, narratives, photography, art, and videos. This section of the journal, called "Studio," celebrates creative pieces that speak to and challenge societal and educational inequities, be it through a powerful image, free verse poetry, video, or any other medium. We believe that by including alternative, creative works we are redefining scholarship and what is viewed as "worthy" knowledge.

This inaugural issue features "Deep Understandings and Thick Descriptions: Tackling Questions about Race" by Gertrude Tinker Sachs, Rachel Grant, and Shelley Wong. In this article, three professors of color respond to the continuation of White police killings of Black people in the United States. The authors contend that there is a strong need for everyone—professors and educators, in particular—to be proactive in confronting racism by *tackling*, not avoiding, difficult questions and conversations related to race. The authors propose that, through the classroom enactment of deep understandings and thick descriptions, we can encourage a critical humanitarian response to the challenges of not knowing the diverse "Other." The authors present real experiences from their teaching to illustrate activities that can engage students in this important dialogue.

In the second featured article, "The Disestablishment of African American Male Compliant Ambiguity: A Prison Pipeline Essay," Aaron J. Griffen and Isaac C. Carrier present their recommendations to combat the never-ending struggle of African American

male invisibility. The authors discuss the conflicts that African American males encounter each day as they navigate an invisible space that the authors refer to as *compliant ambiguity*.

Our featured essay is “My Mother’s Research/My Daughter’s Voice: A Twofold Tale,” written by Xiomara Ortega-Trinidad and Ruth Trinidad-Galván. This essay highlights the voices of both mother/researcher/teacher and daughter/student as they navigate life and experiences during academic field research in Latin America. The tale interweaves the narratives of a researcher/teacher, who is influenced by her motherly role, and a daughter/student, who experiences the displacement of traveling to a new country for her mother’s academic research. Mother and daughter write simultaneously and present a twofold tale of movement, education, and consciousness.

The Studio showcases a poem by Richard Meyer, “He Is A Poet,” as well as various photographs that represent in visual form the core of what this journal is about—the confrontation and challenge of systemic inequities that continue to plague society and our daily lives.

We end this first issue of *Intersections* with a book review of *Seeds of Freedom: Liberating Education in Guatemala* by Clark Taylor (2014) written by Magdalena Vasquez Dathe.

We are excited to see this “idea” now realized in print form, and we extend our immense gratitude to every individual who contributed to this work. We hope that you enjoy this issue, and we look forward to continuing to publish critical pieces that represent pedagogies, frameworks, and creative pieces that challenge systemic inequities while inspiring hope and pathways for transformation.

Author

Virginia Necochea is currently a Research Assistant Professor in the Teacher Education & Educational Leadership Program at the University of New Mexico. She is most interested in better understanding the racial structure, especially how it impacts the educational system. Dr. Necochea is also the proud director of a local nonprofit in the Valle de Atrisco community that focuses on the protection and preservation of traditions connected to land and water. She is raising four beautiful and powerful children – Maya, Quetzal, Tlalli, and Emilio Tlakael – who instill hope that transformation is possible.

Deep Understandings and Thick Descriptions: Tackling Questions about Race

Gertrude Tinker Sachs, *Georgia State University*
Rachel Grant, *City University of New York - College of Staten Island*
Shelley Wong, *George Mason University*

Abstract

In this article, three professors of color speak out in response to the continuation of White police killings of Black people in the United States. We contend that there is a strong need for everyone, professors and educators in particular, to be proactive in confronting racism by tackling not avoiding, difficult questions and conversations. We propose that through the enactment of deep understandings and thick descriptions in our classrooms at all levels we may encourage a critical humanitarian response to the challenges of not knowing the diverse “Other.” We present real experiences from our teaching to illustrate the kinds of activities that can be done to engage our students in developing thick descriptions and deep understandings of diverse Others. When we all participate in the development of deep understandings and thick descriptions, maybe the killings and misperceptions will cease and we will think first before making devastating and destructive actions, statements and assumptions about “Others” because we truly recognize our shared humanity.

Keywords: *Teacher education, critical multicultural education; conversations about White police killings; activities to develop deep understandings and thick descriptions*

But race is the child of racism, not the father.
Ta-Nehisi Coates (2015)

Introduction

Provocative, thoughtful, and in-depth conversations by scholars about why the nation is divided on the verdict in the Trayvon Martin case and the failure to convict the White policemen responsible for the deaths of Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Tamir Rice, and Samuel Bose, are often difficult to find, or when available, are frequently inaccessible to the communities most impacted by these decisions. Yet, in many cases, where one stands with respect to the outcome of these high-profile cases is obvious because these decisions are symptomatic of a divide steeped in the history, politics, and economics of race and the mass incarceration of Black people (Alexander, 2012; Stevenson, 2015). Lest we forget, the racial chasm has always been there as a permanent feature of U.S. history. “Americans believe in the reality of ‘race’ as a defined, indubitable feature of the natural world” (Coates, 2015, p. 7). Recent events have merely caused race to once again become a part of the national dialogue. The truth is that race is a thread in the fabric of America, the means by which America was built, and the lung through which America breathes.

We are three women of color, university professors who prepare those who will teach “other people’s children” (Delpit, 2006) and prepare “others,” who, like ourselves, will become teachers, teacher educators and scholars (Tinker Sachs & Verma, 2014; Wong & Grant 2014). It is on their behalf we feel compelled to speak out, to show how we—those

who are the so-called “talented tenth” or educated elite (Du Bois, 1932)—are not different from “regular Black folk” or the masses of other racialized minoritized people in America and elsewhere who feel the impact of race intently and regularly. “...[R]acism is a visceral experience, that it dislodges brains, blocks airways, rips muscle, extracts organs, cracks bones, and breaks teeth...[But] you must never look away from this. You must always remember that the sociology, the history, the economics, the graphs, the charts, the regressions all land, with great violence, upon the body” (Coates, 2015, p. 10). To make our point clear, we share one episode of race within and around the academy that serves as a reminder of how racism is very much a part of the air, the soil, and the blood of America.

Episode: On one occasion, one of the co-authors attended a major academic conference. After making a successful presentation of her current research and serving as discussant for a well-attended symposium session, she prepared to enjoy the breakfast buffet in the Honors Club of a local hotel. While waiting in line, with plate and silverware in hand, she was approached by an unknown but fellow conference attendee. Thinking that this was likely someone who had attended one of her sessions, she prepared to greet her White female colleague. However, instead of engaging in the usual conference greeting, the *colleague* paused just long enough to ask her to “run back to the kitchen and bring out more eggs and sausage.” Until that moment, in *post-racial America*, our co-author thought that acquiring a PhD and having one’s research worthy of selection within this major research conference would somehow protect you from a common micro-aggression—i.e., Whites’ assumption that the only reason you are “in the room” is to service them. Apparently, the color of her skin trumped her professional attire and conference badge.

One might imagine that because we are professors, part of the so-called “colored elite,” we are free from, or that we have immunity to racism. Simply put, “hell to-the-no,” we are not. We write this article to say that post-racial is as much a myth for us as it is for other people of color who hail from all walks of life. We speak out because we take responsibility for raising our voices, to being part of the chorus of scholars and “Other folk” who take action in our classrooms, on our campuses, within our communities, in our nation and beyond our nation, internationally. We speak out to say, *enough!* Not another dead child, not another dead father, or mother, not another dead brother, sister, not one more nephew or niece, not one more uncle or aunt, no more cousins or friends, *enough!* Black lives matter.

This article reflects our desire to lend support to an initiative to encourage deep understandings and thick descriptions for responding to difficult questions and statements people may make about “Other People,” particularly Black people or people of African descent. Black lives matter. We also write for the millions of people around the world who live, work, and exist in places where racial ideologies and racial hierarchies dictate the “natural order.” As women of color we have been personally inspired by Sojourner Truth, Gaytri Chakravorty Spivak, Maya Angelou, Gloria Anzaldúa, Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Ida B. Wells, Angela Davis, Fannie Lou Hamer, Claudia Jones, Alice Walker, Arundhati Roy, Maxine Greene, Maxine Hong Kingston, Grace Lee Boggs, and Yuri Kochiyama. We stand in solidarity with Brie Newsome (2015), who scaled the flagpole to remove the confederate flag from the South Carolina capitol building, and the “Dream” youth who are fighting mass incarceration and deportation of their family members (Andrade, 2015; Duque & Hernandez, 2015). Racism diminishes human capacity and strangles potential. Racism lowers moral standards, and if we cannot eliminate it, racism will drive humanity to the edge of oblivion (Baldwin, 1985). It does not matter what you do for a living, or your racial identity, the need to confront ignorance and prejudice on matters of race and other dimensions of difference is imperative for all of us. Legal scholar Bryan Stevenson states, “...the true measure of our commitment to justice, the

character of our society, our commitment to the rule of law, fairness, and equality cannot be measured by how we treat the rich, the powerful... The true measure of our character is how we treat the poor, the disfavored..." (2015, p. 18). If we do not speak up, speak out, and take action, we are indeed complicit because we fail to assume responsibility in unmasking the racism inherent in universities and in society. In doing so, we need to develop thoughtful and purposeful responses and strategies to counter myths, interrogate whiteness, colorism and privilege, false assumptions and "the outright lies" about Black and other racialized and minoritized people of color (Vandrick, 2009).

Racism is everywhere

No matter how hard we try to break through, to encourage a deeper understanding of race and the impact of racism, it may often seem as if we are "talking to the wind." Negativity and stereotyping of Black people exists in every country and within every context (Back & Solomos, 2000; Fanon, 1963; Macedo & Gounari, 2006; Nelson, 2008; Tinker Sachs, 2006). Among the many systems that perpetuate and sustain the symbolic violence of race and racism, institutions of higher learning (i.e., the ivory towers) still play a central role. Although colleges and universities no longer accept donations of "human capital" (i.e., slaves) as endowments (Wilder, 2013), they engage in practices that ensure low numbers of tenured faculty and students of color and fail to implement support structures and resources to recruit and then retain higher numbers of African American students and faculty. Racism permeates every facet of life and is intensified by its intersection with class and gendered inequalities and empire (Motha, 2014). Racism is not only local, it is global, universal, and historically produced by European colonialism, capitalism, and imperialism (Macedo & Gounari, 2006; Prashad, 2007; Sleeter, 2011). In her groundbreaking book on race in the 21st century, Dorothy Roberts asserts that, "Biologically, there is one human race. Race applied to human beings is a *political* [italics in the original] division: it is a system of governing people that classifies them into a social hierarchy based on invented biological demarcations" (2011, p. x). However, as people of color, there is little comfort in this scientific explanation. For us, race is not imaginary, not an illusion. Race is "real" because it can determine whether you receive a ticket for exceeding the speed limit or a reminder to fix a broken tail light. Race can determine whether you are shot dead reaching for your driver's license or given leave to go home and enjoy dinner with your family. As a result, we contend that race and racism diminishes opportunities and the capacity for each of us to be all that we can be and all that we should be.

Deep understandings and thick descriptions

In this article, we are looking to develop what we refer to as "deep understandings" and "thick descriptions" (Geertz, 1973). What exactly do these terms mean? First, deep understandings are associated with knowing the history of an issue and not just any history but a *critical* history that offers information, voices, and perspectives from both the conquered and the conqueror (Zinn & Arnove, 2004). Deep understandings are related to hearing the real voices and lived experiences of people involved in a given struggle, such as listening to the voices of those who were involved in the civil rights movement (Menkart, Murray & View, 2004; Holseart, et. al., 2010) or listening to the oral histories and narratives of those who were enslaved as well as the slave masters (Rhyne, 1999). Deep understandings come about by talking with the descendants, and involves spending time reading, listening, discussing and writing about the people and the events and

making connections between racist representations of Black people and systems of exploitation (Barton & Coley, 2009; Cohen, 2015; Equal Justice Initiative 2015; Gillispie, 2015; Hall, 1997; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

Deep understandings of racism cannot be reached without a critique of discourse and power: identifying who holds power, analyzing how it was obtained, understanding how to access it, and examining how power is maintained, shared or withheld (Kubota & Lin, 2009). Understanding power relations is critical for developing deep understandings because ultimately those in power choose not to share it and develop rules, laws, and tests that allow them to keep power out of the hands of the “Others.” Many of the “tools of power” become so entrenched in our governments, courts, schools, and churches that we accept them as “that is the way it is,” while failing to question, examine, reevaluate, or change. Because the racially biased instruments of power and privilege are so embedded in our everyday lives, we accept that it’s okay for a White male to be suspicious of, to hunt down, and murder a Black boy carrying a bottle of ice tea and package of Skittles. Some of us accept that it’s okay for a White policeman to use an illegal choke hold to detain and suffocate to death a Black man suspected of an offense that, at best, would result in a hundred dollar fine. Deep understandings facilitate development of critical knowledge of histories, structures, and capital from several vantage points (Grant & Wong, 2008).

Thick descriptions, on the other hand, is a term found in anthropology, ethnic and women’s studies where the researcher goes into a home, school or workplace, for example, to study something or someone up close and personal for a prolonged period of time (Gonzalez, Moll & Amanti, 2005; Grant & Wong, 2008; Tinker Sachs et al, 2017; Wong, Sanchez-Gosnell, Foerster-Lu, & Dodson, in press;). When we conduct this kind of in-depth qualitative research we can then talk in rich detail (not superficially) about what we are seeing (Tinker Sachs, 2013; Tinker Sachs et al, 2017). We then have a different kind of explanation or understanding of the structures, systems, and policies that perpetuate racial injustice and inequality (Nieto, 2009). These thick descriptions come out of our close relationships with the “Other.” This provides us with counter narratives that give us an opposing viewpoint or insight rather than the one that is in the textbook or that is commonly believed and perpetuated to be the “right” one. In other words, “we must rigorously interrogate sources of information” (hooks, 2013, p. 80), and—we would add—guide our students to do likewise.

Deep understandings and thick descriptions help us to see beyond Black and White and reveal our basic humanity; they allow us to see the many ways that we are alike. In the case of Trayvon Martin, jury members might have seen the carefree Black boy trying to return home after visiting the carry-out. Or they might have been able to see Michael Brown as a young man, perhaps with a bit of swagger, on his way to visit his grandmother. So we need to ask, why is it that the majority of people who report the news, who teach our kids, who patrol our streets do not have deep understandings and thick descriptions of Black people? Were the members of the jury in the Martin, Brown, and Garner cases provided with thick descriptions and deep understandings about the victims as young Black teenagers or a Black father and grandfather? Did they possess thick descriptions and deep understandings of the emotional toll that the circumstances of their deaths would have on their families, their communities? Based on the outcomes in each case and public outcry for justice by Blacks, other people of color and many Whites, we can only conclude that the jurors did not.

Thick descriptions and deep understandings provide the opportunity for educators and community leaders to probe more deeply into the meaning and nature of personal and institutional racism. They help us to uncover how racist language, tradition, customs, structures and systems that we take for granted as “natural” and “normal” profoundly influence and impact our lives (Barton & Coley, 2009). They affect our perception, action, and our worldview. Deep understandings and thick descriptions afford teachers and educators to creatively engage in efforts to transform how we think and act and challenge racist perceptions, attitudes, and practices (Ball, 2006; Brisk, 2008; Gay, 2013; Lee, 2007). We endorse the local, national, and global movement for multicultural, multilingual, and multimodal education projects (Darder, Baltodano & Torres, 2009; Souto-Manning, 2010) and peace (Wong & Grant, 2014).

Our goal in this article is not merely to share our alarm and frustration; we hope to remind readers that we can engage critical inquiry and praxis to create awareness interrogate, and challenge *imperialist white supremacist patriarchy* (hooks, 2013). In the next section, we share perspectives and practice that have proven helpful to our students and us for developing thick descriptions and deep understandings.

Perspectives and praxis

As educators, we are constantly bombarded by questions and statements that reflect ignorance, myths, and stereotypes of Black people, immigrants, the undocumented, people living in poverty, and those otherwise “Othered.” Space will not afford us the opportunity to share, nor do we care to inflect the pain and sadness we often feel by the numerous uninformed, and at times, hate-filled comments that in part, have prompted our efforts here.

Decolonizing minds

To meet the challenge of encouraging deep understandings and thick descriptions within our students, the academy, and ourselves we frame our efforts around the principle of “decolonizing minds.” Recalling the words of Malcolm X, bell hooks states that decolonization is “changing our minds and hearts” and looking at each other with “new eyes” (hooks, 2013, p.19). Tuck and Yang (2012) caution against the “metaphorization” of decolonization; however, we use the term because we believe the repatriation of Indigenous land and life should be the goal for all decolonizing pedagogies. Moreover, utilizing pedagogies grounded in feminism and other critical approaches to inquiry and praxis help in guiding students’ understanding of the interconnectedness and intersectionality of power and domination and the impact on peoples and societies (Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016). We take care not to essentialize nor use decolonizing as a metaphor to express other dimensions of diversity. We are ever mindful that our students differ in their awareness, knowledge, and investment in human and civil rights and social justice. So while our efforts in some courses and assignments may differ by task and intensity, the goal is creating a learning context across all courses that builds awareness and knowledge by exposing students to critical readings and thoughtful discussion and then engaging them in projects that require that they “get close” to the children, families, and communities under study (Smith, 1999). For those who teach in colleges and universities, this requires adopting a developmental stance to teaching and learning in all our courses, undergraduate and graduate alike. We must meet students where they are in order to take them where we want them to go. We must be willing to shape positionalities and guide development of dispositions rooted in the rejection of “dominator culture.” Our goal here is not to just vent against racist and colonialist ideologies, but to share processes and strategies for

developing thick descriptions and deep understandings. In such a way, we hope to foster critical awareness of our own identities as educators (both privileged and marginalized) as well as systems of oppression and domination in our classrooms, schools, and community so that we can imagine different possibilities. In the next section, we share some of the ways we do this in our courses that are designed to respond to the question: What type of intellectual activities create awareness, build knowledge, and engage in practices that prepare researchers and educators to explicitly challenge the status quo and aim to transform power relations? We contend it is those activities that foster thick descriptions and deep understandings.

Activity One: Identity Self-Study

Rationale: To begin the path to awareness, knowledge, and activism, you must first know yourself.

Task: Write a reflective autobiographical paper to examine your cultural roots demonstrating thick descriptions and deep understandings. You will detail aspects of your cultural identity and explore dimensions of diversity in terms of race/color, family background/heritage, ethnicity, language/dialect/accent, spirituality/religion, gender, sexual orientation, and any other dimensions of identity that are important to your beliefs and attitudes about yourself and “others.”

Details: Consider the influence of broad factors such as race, ethnicity, social class, gender, sexual orientation, religion, geographic location, as well as personal factors while exploring the following questions: How have I come to be who I am? How have my experiences of diversity influenced my identity? To what extent have I experienced privileges of the dominant culture or marginalization based on some aspect of my identity? How have my cultural identity and experiences with differences such as race, culture, class, gender and sexual orientation influenced my teaching and/or interactions with Others?

Activity Two: Cross-Cultural Family/ Community Study

Rationale: Deep knowledge, thick understandings and ability to use the major concepts, principles, theories, and research related to the nature and role of culture and cultural groups to construct learning environments are crucial.

Task: Select a student and family from a racial, linguistic, socioeconomic, and cultural background different from your own.

Details: (1) Conduct a “cultural tour” of the community, maintain field notes and take pictures of the businesses, hair salons, barbershops, bodegas, liquors stores, churches, community spaces, government offices, etc. (2) Drawing on readings and discussions on the dimensions of diversity, develop a series of open-ended interview questions to learn about the family over the course of 3-4 interview sessions that you conduct in a place convenient to the family. (3) Analyze all qualitative and observational data from the cultural tour, field notes, interview, and home/family visits. (4) Prepare a final report reflecting deep understandings of the family and community.

Activity Three: Getting to Know the People in the Parks

Rationale: Disrupting perceptions and stereotypes about homelessness and homeless diverse Others is crucial for gaining insights into the intersections of race, class, and homelessness.

Task: In pairs, the preservice and in-service teachers will visit nearby parks. They will initiate conversations with the people who frequent the parks and maybe even sleep there.

Details: With the course instructor, students will visit a nearby park. They will select previously discussed critical excerpts from their class texts. They will initiate conversation by asking the respondent to give his or her opinions about the selected text and engage in deep listening and conversation. Conversations may last for one hour. Students may talk with more than one person. Students will tour the park and describe its amenities. Students write reflections about their experiences demonstrating deep understandings with thick descriptions. Upon completion of this task, they will discuss the challenges of overcoming stereotypes with classmates.

Activity Four: Promoting literacies in English – Working in the homes of refugee mothers

Rationale: To develop deep understandings and thick descriptions of the circumstances that impact K-12 refugee students by getting close and personal with the mothers of some of these children.

Task: Develop thick descriptions and deep understandings of a refugee family through teaching English literacy in the home of the mother. Students will collaborate with classmates and the instructor to develop authentic and purposeful curricula to meet the language goals of the mother.

Details: Initial classes in the course are devoted to critical readings, discussions and reflective assignments on refugees and immigrants to challenge deficit discourses and prepare for teaching in the home. The instructor pairs up with a local agency to obtain the necessary permissions. Students are paired with the refugee mothers and work with the mothers' English language goals to develop meaningful curricula. The students meet with the mothers at home for 10 sessions (each lasting an hour and a half) at least once a week. Through weekly one hour in-class discussions, students report on their work and the development of deep understandings and thick descriptions.

Conclusion

In this commentary, we have tried to give a response to the violence and derailing of humanity occurring across the United States against Black people and communities of color. Of particular concern to us are the attacks on the most vulnerable among us—the elderly, children and youth with dis(abilities), and transgendered, and undocumented people (Wong, Sanchez-Gosnell, Foerster-Lu, & Dodson, forthcoming). Some may think that we are missing the point by “blaming White people for all the ills of Black people” and may argue that we fail to address the “real” issues of dysfunctional families, poverty and unemployment, and educational disparities. For example, Sowell (2013) adds weight to this viewpoint when he writes:

To say that slavery will not bear the full weight of responsibility for all subsequent social problems among Black Americans is not to say that it has negligible consequences among other blacks or white, or that its consequences ended when slavery itself ended. But this is only to say that answers to questions about either slavery or race must be sought in facts, in assumptions or visions, and certainly not in attempts to reduce questions of

causation to only those which provide moral melodramas and an opportunity for the intelligentsia to be on the side of angels. (p. 121)

We have not ascribed to “moral melodrama” or “the rant of women of color syndrome” but we have asked readers to consider the development of thick descriptions and deep understandings of the project to decolonizing the mind. By going beyond what may appear to some to be “attempts to reduce questions of causation to moral melodramas” we do want to present a vision of possibility grounded in facts as well as an analysis of the persistence and indeed centrality of racism and intersectionality not only within other systems of domination but also in humanity’s soul. In so doing, we invite our readers to imagine our collective transformation and to stand with us “on the side of angels.”

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The Disestablishment of African American Male Compliant Ambiguity: A Prison Pipeline Essay

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Abstract

There is an apex to each day, a climax, where a decision is made, and a falling action is the result of that decision. Recommendations to combat the never-ending struggle of my invisibility are derived from culturally relevant and culturally responsive frameworks, resiliency frameworks, and ethical caring frameworks. Without systemic reform in local educational settings that includes local teachers, administrators, parents, and students providing new conceptual frameworks for learner and teacher efficacy, the African American male learner will persistently encounter crucial conflicts throughout the School to Prison pipeline while entering a space that has been rendered invisible due to the focus on policy that perpetuates the pipeline. This essay shows that every day when African American boys enter the pipeline, we are faced with two distinct conflicts—Man vs. Man and Man vs. Self—as we navigate an invisible space, compliant ambiguity.

Keywords: *African American, Black, compliant ambiguity, conflict, invisible*

Introduction

¹ I am invisible. Invisible as a result of how I am defined by others, how I define myself, and how others define me historically. I awake this morning, as I do each morning, with hope and aspirations for making it through the day. My journey through the day is filled with choices I would prefer not to have, decisions I would rather someone else make, and triumphs that seem to always be just out of grasp. I walk through each day in heavy contemplation, wondering if the next turn I take may be my last or if it may lead to incarceration or ridicule.

There are expectations laid out for me in my home, in my community, among my peers, and inside the school or classroom. “In America I [am] part of an equation – even if it [isn’t] a part I relish...I am [not] just a father but the father of a [B]lack boy. I [am] not just a spouse but the husband of a [B]lack woman, a freighted symbol of [B]lack love” (Coates, 2015, p. 124). However, the expectations within my community represent a stark contrast to the expectations when I enter the school or classroom; I am invisible as I enter these spaces. My family and friends express the norms of my community. The school, on the other hand, represents a puzzle, a conundrum, a paradox, and a foreign land that I haven’t yet learned to navigate—even in adulthood. There are rules that have not been clearly articulated, to which I have neither contributed nor consented. I am rendered invisible.

Without systemic reform in local educational settings to include local teachers, administrators, parents, and students providing new conceptual frameworks for learner and teacher efficacy, African American male learners will persistently encounter crucial conflicts throughout the school to prison pipeline while entering a space that has been

¹ “I” is used throughout the essay even though there are two authors.

rendered invisible due to the focus on policies that perpetuate the pipeline—a systemic and social metaphor where African American male children are three times as likely to be suspended or expelled from school versus their White peers. This proven phenomenon results in African American males being three times as likely to drop out and enter the justice system prior to graduating high school, a trend that continues into adulthood. The mass incarceration of African American males in the United States due to the criminalization of drug addiction in the 1980s plus zero tolerance school policy reform of the 1990s has perpetuated a pipeline from school to prison that is not only difficult to navigate, but also nearly impossible to escape (Alexander, 2010).

The authors of this essay are both African American males. Therefore, this essay speaks from that perspective, showing that every day African American males enter the pipeline faced with two distinct conflicts—Man vs. Man and Man vs. Self—as we navigate an invisible space, *compliant ambiguity*. We speak from a first person singular perspective. Our purpose in this approach is to reflect upon our unique perspective as African American male learners and examine how our decisions positively and negatively impact our reality. In either case, our decisions are commonly perceived as incorrect and often problematic.

Background

Some children come to school with the rules already understood, even if only implicitly. The same holds true in the work life of professionals. Because I am an African American male, I do not know these rules. The rules were created without any thought of me or any concern of how these rules would impact my well-being. I am invisible. I do not exist. “When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination—indeed, everything and anything except me” (Ellison, 1980, p. 3). My uniqueness in speech, movement, and experience does not permit me to be successful under these conditions. Whereas the rules of the classroom and the corporate office are set up to be analytical and topic centered (competitive and individually focused), the African American male is conditioned very differently within his home, community, and among his peer group to be relational and topic chained (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Carter, N.P., Hawkins, T.N., and Nateson, P., 2008; Neil, L.I., McCrary, A.D., Webb-Johnson, G., & Bridgest, S.T., 2003). The analytical orientation is usually how White students learn versus African American students’ relational orientation. “Aspects of analytic style can be found in the requirements that the pupil learn to sit for increasingly long periods of time, to concentrate alone on impersonal stimuli, and to observe and value organized time allotment schedules” (as cited in Hale, 1986, p. 34).

As a result, how I represent myself, carry myself, and express myself has created a conflict. This conflict is external to me and a consequence of my existence. Due to my uniqueness as an African American male, I am in conflict with others who look like me, others who do not, and, most interestingly, those who are supposed to be providing support, nurturance, and guidance—the school and the school personnel. However, I am unseen. “It is sometimes advantageous to be unseen, although it is most often rather wearing on the nerves. Then too, you’re constantly being bumped by those of poor vision” (Ellison, 1980 p. 4). The conflict becomes more apparent as I grow older. “I did not master the streets, because I could read the body language quick enough. I could not master the schools, because I could not see where any of it could possibly lead” (Coates, 2015, p. 115). I am being led to a predestined invisible space unseen due to my navigation of the school to prison pipeline—from here forward known simply as *the pipeline*.

Manifestations of conflict

This conflict has manifested itself in multiple forms—dropout rates, suspension rates, special education referrals—and it is a battle that I know I am losing. Furthermore, this outer conflict, which I shall refer to as Man vs. Man, has now become focused inwardly. There is an inner turmoil eating at my spirit. However, there is no identity conflict, even though according to Robinson (2000) I am believed to have low self-esteem, self-hatred, and a negative racial identity (as cited in K. Michelle Scott, 2003, p. 104). I do not wake up hating myself, nor do I hate my race as the research on Black-on-Black crime indicates. According to Rubenstein (2016), from 1980 to 2016, 93% of crimes against Blacks were committed by other Blacks. Massie (2016) highlights that “64% of respondents to a ‘YouGov’ survey believe that intra-communal violence is a bigger problem for Black Americans than other minority groups.” In other words, if I am in a school or community consisting mostly of other Blacks, I am most likely to lash out at other Blacks. Yet, if I am in a school or community where the majority of my peers are non-Black, I will likely lash out at those individuals also. During the same period, 87% of crimes against Whites were committed by other Whites (Rubenstein, 2016). Therefore, the research data is highly skewed and representative of a much larger issue. I am constantly evading the pipeline, leading to a predetermined future that was specifically designed for the invisible Black body:

In America, it is traditional to destroy the [B]lack body- it is heritage. Enslavement was not merely the antiseptic borrowing of labor – it is not so easy to get a human being to commit their body against its own elemental interest. And so, enslavement must be casual wrath and random mangling, the gashing of heads and brains blown out over the river as the body seeks to escape. (Coates, 2015, p. 103)

I remain enslaved mentally while my Black body, running parallel in the invisible space, seeks an escape. As Chideya (1995) points out, “African Americans are a mere 12 percent of America’s population. The majority of violent crime is committed by Whites, but violent criminals are disproportionately likely to be Black (over 40 percent of violent criminals are black)” (p. 8). In 2014, 374 people were arrested for murder in New York City; of those 374, 61% were Black (Rubenstein, 2016). However, the Black population in New York was 22.6 % while the White population was 32.8% and the White arrest rate for murder was 2.9%. This means that a Black person was 31 times more likely to be arrested for murder than a White person. When Timothy McVeigh, the Oklahoma City bomber, blew up a building that contained large numbers of White people who looked like him, it was considered a travesty. Meanwhile, my violent encounters with other Blacks are viewed as acts of self-hatred or racial self-abdication. Furthermore, Whites have not become symbols of mass murder even though serial killers are disproportionately likely to be White (Chideya, 1995). Therefore, the suggestions made about me tend to be false, misleading, and terribly skewed especially since Northwestern University Professor Robert Entman found that Black pundits only showed up as experts in fifteen of 2,000 minutes of mainstream news not specifically covering racial issues (p. 4)—an indication that Black experts are rarely consulted to dispute and/or provide an insightful defense of research identifying Black perspectives.

According to Tatum (2005) conflict often exists between institutions and Black males because those in positions of leadership lack understanding of the cultural-specific behaviors exhibited by Black males (p. 31). Freire (1993) exhorts:

There is no such thing as a neutral educational process. Education either functions as an instrument that is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world. (p. 16)

Does the establishment truly want to improve the plight of the African American male or does the establishment want to maintain the status quo? When one works in an invisible space, one does so knowingly or unknowingly, and those who are complicit in or actively constructing the invisible space have a goal in mind—*compliant ambiguity*.

The planning of the pipeline

The pipeline is predetermined and predestined. The pipeline is produced unconsciously through the habit of marginalization and systemic racism as well as consciously through policy. The oppressor (Freire, 1993) controls the reality we are attempting to transform within our navigation of the pipeline. The oppressor refers to those who have gained social and economic status and power based on the manipulation and/or the dismantling of another culture.

The conflict within me, referred to here as Man vs. Self consists of the two warring souls of *double consciousness* described by W.E.B Du Bois:

The Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world – a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world...One ever feels his two-ness – an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled striving; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (Du Bois, 1903, p. 3)

“On the one hand [I] am a product of my Afro-American heritage and culture and on the other hand [I] am shaped by the demands of the Anglo-American culture” (Hale, 1986, p. 21). Hale and Du Bois are referring to acculturation of marginalized groups, in this case African Americans, into that of mainstream—European American—culture. It is a constant battle of wills, the African me vs. the American me, that I must navigate each day, and this inner conflict results in decisions and choices that I’d rather not make. Michelle T. Johnson (2004) states that “society will be equal when [B]lack people have the same peace of mind that [W]hites do, so we can just let life happen, without the added stress of hidden agendas constantly tugging at the edges of our consciousness. We still live in a society where being [B]lack is a consideration, which impacts every aspect of our existence” (p. 186). “The same is true with the individual oppressor as a person. Discovering himself to be an oppressor may cause considerable anguish” (Freire, 1993, p. 32). This anguish humanizes the oppressors, so that they become conscious of the evil that has been inflicted. Their anguish is rarely used as a device to remedy the issue; instead, it is displaced as guilt. The marginalized group sees the oppressors’ anguish and guilt as a sign of change, owns some of the guilt and anguish for the oppression, and remains oppressed. This is called hegemony. I am taking part in my own oppression.

Compliant ambiguity

The choice is simple for the oppressors. They can either accept that they wield power and privilege or they can blame others while deflecting attention from the underlying problem. *Compliant ambiguity* results when communities and schools fight to dismantle the pipeline through policy modifications and grassroots protests of school reform. I become compliant in order to fit into the mainstream and not be a part of the pipeline. My compliance then eradicates my uniqueness, so that I am part of the whole and no longer exceptional. I become ambiguous.

Unknown to the change agents is that now that the pipeline has been built, any block of the pipeline requires more resources than can be provided as witnessed in government relations advocates who are focused on restructure rather than reform. The pipeline is a byproduct of the reform frame of thought not a foregone plan of action. As a Black professional, I remain a part of the pipeline since Black professionals cause anguish; this, in turn, drives the oppressor to create situations and conditions to conceal my presence. I am forced to choose between being an American who is defined by upward mobility or being defined as an African whose existence is divisive.

The pipeline and the invisible space —compliant ambiguity—run parallel. As I attempt to deal with the pipeline, the only light I see is the invisible space with the only alternate path being forward into compliance or backwardly remaining in the pipeline. I am uncomfortable with having to choose and am fearful of being individually free. This “fear of freedom” produces a discomfort, forcing me to sabotage my trajectory and move deeper within the pipeline (Freire, 1993).

Conflict #1: Man vs. Man

“How does it feel to be a problem?” (Du Bois, 1903, p. 4). Moreover, how does it feel to know *you* are a problem? How does it feel to know that the expectations you have for yourself are more than others have for you? Black students enter schools and face teachers who do not recognize their distinct language gifts, but instead view them from a deficit orientation; the students’ language becomes “foreign” in their own school.

Milner (2010) states, “Standardization, in many ways, is antithetical to diversity because it suggests that all students live and operate in homogenous environments with equality of opportunity afforded to them” (p. 3). Because the teachers often rely on a colorblind logic, a mode of thinking that does not recognize the diverse living conditions and opportunities differences, African American males are exposed to biases and judgments which overrule any logical understanding of what it means to be African and American and male. This is more the case for African American males where according to the Schott Report, “Black male students... are more than twice as likely to be classified as mentally retarded as White male students, in spite of research demonstrating that the percentages of students from all groups are approximately the same at each intelligence level” (Jackson, 2010). It is disheartening to realize that I believe more in myself than others believe in me. How does it feel to walk into a classroom and immediately you know you do not belong? “You ache with the need to convince yourself that you do exist in the real world that you’re a part of all the sound and anguish, and you strike out with your fists, your curse and you swear to make them recognize you. And, alas, it’s seldom successful” (Ellison, 1993, p. 4).

I have been defined out of existence and am therefore formless. Because of my topic-chained communicative style, the faces I encounter in the classroom exhibit

disdain, repulsion, disgust, and outright hatred. These sentiments emanate mostly from the teacher whose definition of communication is based upon what is deemed appropriate by the powerful Other. "Topic chaining" is highly contextual, and much time is devoted to setting a social stage prior to the performance of an academic task. This is accomplished by the speakers (or writers) providing a lot of back ground information; being passionately and personally involved with the content of the discourse; using indirectness (such as innuendo, symbolism, and metaphor) to convey ideas; weaving many threads or issues into a single story; and embedding talk with feelings of intensity, advocacy, evaluation, and aesthetics (Gay, 2002, p. 112).

Comments and responses such as "they let you out?" "you are back," "why did they put you in here?" "what's your name again?" and "I hope you know I am not slowing down just for you" are a daily exchange between the teacher and me. So, why persist? [I am] in a system that is designed to fail; therefore, when [I]fail, [I] am essentially succeeding at how the system was designed (Neal, McCrary, Webb-Johnson, & Bridgest, 2003, p. 60). Navigating in the invisible space while focusing on the pipeline allows my success within a failed system, designed specifically to maintain my marginalization. As Freire (1993) indicates, "For the oppressors...it is always the oppressed whom they never call the oppressed...those people...or savages...or natives...or subversives who are disaffected, who are violent, barbaric, wicked or ferocious..." (p. 38). As a result of how the system is designed, there is a disconnect that creates a conflict.

The conflict I describe is what literature has defined as Man vs. Man. Rather than talk about the cultural conflicts which are evident by the over-representation of African American males being suspended and/or expelled for the same infractions as their White peers, I am choosing to point out the literal conflict I face each day when entering a school. I enter a space where 76% of my teachers are White females according to the National Center of Educational Statistics (2015), and I along with my brown peers make up 90% of the population in urban schools (Cook, 2015).

Conflict #2: Man vs. Self

In order to clarify the African American male's internal conflict of Man vs. Self, it is imperative that I share intricate and explicit details and methodologies for identifying particular styles, orientations, and "cool poses" that African American learners deploy for the sake of coping within the pipeline (Tatum, 2005):

Although [B]lack males have developed multiple survival techniques throughout their history in the United States, the "cool pose" is perhaps unique...a ritualized form of masculinity, uses certain behavior, scripts, physical posturing, and...crafted performance to convey...pride, strength, and control. (p. 29)

The cool pose is a coping mechanism used to deal with oppression, invisibility, and marginality...communicates power, toughness, detachment, and style (Tatum, 2005, p. 29). Although based in pedagogical practice, identifying styles and orientations as they relate to African American male conflicts will assist teachers' perceptions of what is appropriate vs. inappropriate. In other words, when I become withdrawn, it should not be construed as being disrespectful or not understanding. For instance, pay attention to when I place a hoodie on my head and how I respond to redirection. If embarrassed, I may put the hoodie on my head to hide my face. Upon redirection, the hoodie will come off. However, out of habit, I may put it back on again. I am simply trying to determine how to proceed based on the options provided, and my instinct is to hide my frustration and embarrassment from my peers and you.

When identifying the struggle of Man vs. Self, it is important to note that this is not an identity conflict. For if it were, it would suggest that I do not know who I am as a person, as an African American male, or as an African American period. Despite the research that suggests that my identity conflict is a result of ethnicity, appearance, intelligence, colorism, or “acting white” (Scott, 2003, p. 95), I argue that the conflict that was initially external or Man vs. Man, has now turned inward to Man vs. Self. The focus is not on assimilating to mainstream culture—the battle to steer my way through a classroom whose rules I do not understand and therefore struggle to follow. Instead the focus is now when and if the African “me” can breathe. I am moving into compliant ambiguity in order to survive the pipeline.

Resolving the external conflict

Alfred W. Tatum devised three goals to address feelings of discontent and resentment within the classroom: 1) reduce fear of embarrassment; 2) decrease levels of frustration experienced due to students’ inability to employ word attack strategies; and 3) have students read, understand, discuss, and write about literature (Tatum, 2000, p. 55). By establishing a supportive community—essentially a learning community that utilizes culturally relevant texts to teach skills—the author was successful. The community was comprised of smaller cooperative groups that were mutually responsible for the success and failures of all members. Students assisted one another and completed self-evaluations using portfolios, assessing their strengths and weaknesses in addition to those of their peers.

“Must read” texts

Bawden (1904) tells us “the real self is always a social self” (p. 366). In his essay “The Social Character of Consciousness and Its Bearing on Education” Bawden explores the social character of consciousness as well as how educators can recognize its characteristics. He stipulates that no one can exist on his or her own. From the time we are born, everyone becomes a part of a whole. In essence, we all have a bipolar self – a self-conscious self which is at the same time a socially-conscious self, a person which is at the same time a *socius* (p. 366). Due to this bipolar self, it is essential that African American males learn in a non-traditional educational environment that encourages critical thinking so that they can begin to dismantle compliance and challenge the existing reality. This would include exposing children to stories of heroic adventures wherein they vicariously indulge their passion for adventure (Watras, 2008, p. 223).

In addition to the curriculum *mandatory* texts, *must-read* texts—such as newspaper and magazine articles, and literature written by Black authors—should be included to make the learning culturally relevant and experiential. The purpose, the author contends, is to establish “cultural hooks” to engage [B]lack males (Tatum, 2005, p. 58), allowing the students to understand the context of their positionality and view themselves as agents of change. Texts would include W.E.B. Du Bois, Malcolm X, James Baldwin, Richard Wright, and Dick Gregory. As James Baldwin (1963) reminds us, many Black males are never able to shake their dungeons, “becoming defeated long before they die” (as cited in Tatum, 2005, p. 9). Brozo (2003) suggests using literature with traditional male archetypes as an entry point into literacy for boys. Gilbert and Gilbert (1998) note, “the ways these needs have often been ineffective because they, teachers, have not taken sufficient amount of the gendered construction of the boys they work with” (as cited in Tatum, 2005, p. 10). Discussions of texts should become a recurring theme as students will be better able to relate to the discussion and add their personal experiences. If the African American male is able to enter an environment such as this, he is no longer

foreign or invisible; in such a way, the conflict of “to be or not to be” is no longer an issue. He begins to recognize his power and purpose.

Experiential learning

Dewey (1938) proposed that all experiences are not educative. Some experiences are mis-educative; in other words, they halt, distort or hinder further learning experiences. Learning experiences that stifle communication styles, criminalize movement styles, reinforce Eurocentric and/or colorblind resources and tools are examples of such mis-education (Hale, 1986; Boykin, 1994; Gay, 2002; Landsman, 2004; Freeman and Freeman, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Goodman & Hilton, 2010; Milner, 2010; & Boser, 2014). To call it a learning environment is a falsehood; one should call it simply a “classroom.” A learning environment must be adaptive, stimulating, and evolving, so that student learners do not become extinct (Darwin, 1864). Current curriculum structures and instructional programs are postulated according to Social Darwinism’s *survival of the fittest*. At least, this is the case in urban classroom settings where the reasons why a student hasn’t turned in homework (“no electricity”) or can’t stay awake in class (“babysitting a younger sibling”) are not considered viable considerations. Invisibility limits my choices and narrows my possibilities. I am emerged in the pipeline, and to survive, my invisibility assures my *compliant ambiguity*.

In order to dismantle, deconstruct, immobilize, disrupt, or change the current landscape of what counts as education in U.S. schooling, authentic learning experiences must be the only desired outcome. It is essential to provide divergent experiences where all students are able to take what they have learned and apply it to multiple situations and circumstances. Students will thereby create a new reality where they themselves are able to “change their stars” (Helgeland, 2001). After all, the school is the educational beacon of a community, charged with the responsibility to ensure that students are being educated in such a way as to ensure the progress of the community. If I am not progressing within the community or helping the community, I remain invisible both in a known space, the pipeline, and in the foreign space, compliant ambiguity.

Resolving the Man vs. Self conflict

African American boys must reinvent the invisible space. The oppressor cannot be the architect of this reinvention (Freire, 1993). Therefore, those who seek the dismantling of the pipeline cannot be the authors of the policy that produced the pipeline in the first place. “In order for the oppressed to be able to wage the struggle for their liberation [from the invisible space] they must first 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” (Freire, 1993, p. 31). The key to such a reinvention is engaging African American males in academic discourse in the classroom setting. Conversations about science, in particular, may hold the key to dismantling “learned helplessness” and invisibility through argumentation. Duschl (2008) proposes five potential contributions: First is the supporting access to cognitive and meta-cognitive reasoning. Second is supporting the development of communication and critical thinking. Third is supporting the development of scientific literacy and enabling students to engage in the language of science. Fourth is supporting participation in practices of scientific culture and developing epistemic criteria to evaluate knowledge. Fifth is supporting the growth of reasoning employing rational criteria (p. 284).

Educators can achieve these five contributions for African American male learners by utilizing a dialectic discourse called “Science Talk” as well as the cultural capital of “the code of the streets” (Anderson, 1999). As a means of survival, children acquire a

repertoire of behaviors that garner them respect on the street that provides them with security. The image of being “nerdy” or “geeky” contradicts the profile. However, the ability to communicate, to signify, to be topic chained does fit the “code of the street.”

Bridging the gap: Scaffolding

To examine the applications of such cultural capital, Sieler (2001) conducted a study involving students eating lunch together while talking about science. The key was to help the students to understand that science was part of their everyday life. In doing so, Sieler (2001) used scaffolding. “We began with what the students knew, could do, and wanted to do” (p. 1007). There is a tendency, according to Boykin (1986), in curricular reform to avoid considerations of students’ motivations, interests, and values (as cited in Seiler, 2001. p. 1008). By engaging the students’ motivations, interests, and values the lunch group grew and they began to engage in scientific dialogue, Science Talk. Using newspapers and other resources, students built a case to support their choice for the most valuable player (MVP) of the National Basketball Association (p. 1009). In such a way, the power structure was changed from the Initiation Response Evaluation (IRE) model which was the standard format of the students’ regular science classes (p. 1009).

If all schools and classrooms implemented dialectic modalities within all content areas, there would be more effective schools since learning would be culturally relevant. Waxman and Huang (1997) conducted research comparing effective and ineffective schools. They point out that some studies (Lomotey, 1989, 1999; Sizemore, 1985) have found that there are similar characteristics of African American principals in effective, predominantly African American schools such as (a) commitment toward educating, (b) compassion and understanding of their students and communities, and (c) confidence in the ability of African American students to learn (as cited in Waxman & Huang, 1997, p 35).

Address the opportunity gap

Milner (2009) writes,

Educators must recognize that the essence of curricular content (what is actually included, how and why) is very important as students come to understand themselves and others in a pluralistic and every changing society, because students need to see themselves and their cultural group through positions of strength and tenacity. (p. 7)

African American males must see themselves as strong and tenacious in order to successfully navigate the invisible space (compliant ambiguity), reinvent the invisible space, and change their trajectory in the pipeline. This reformation is accomplished only through experiential learning opportunities such as travel. In a foreign environment, exposed to a different language and culture, the Black male learner gains a new perspective. As noted with experiential learning via Dewey (1938), the experience produces learning that is transferable. “Opportunity...forces us to think about how systems, processes, and institutions are overtly and covertly designed to maintain the status quo and sustain depressingly complicated disparities in education” (Milner, 2009, p. 8). We can often find such disparities in the opportunities for African American males to enroll in advanced placement (AP) and dual enrollment (DE) courses. Whereas AP classes provide rigorous college level instruction in the high school setting, DE courses allow learners to gain dual credit, thereby producing a trajectory leading to early college success.

Furthermore, providing field learning opportunities via study abroad programs and field research initiatives places African American males at an equitable playing field with their White peers. Through programs such as PASA (Peruvian Amazon Study Abroad), African American males can explore ideas and experiences outside their community and country. They are immersed in a foreign culture, communicating in a new language, and gaining valuable sensory and affective knowledge. Whereas previously he was a passive passenger, now the African American male is visible as he recognizes his place in the world as an explorer, inventor, and navigator. The pipeline no longer appears as comfortable and inevitable since new experiences create new emotions and ways of thinking.

Conclusion

As I navigated my way through public school, suicide, invisibility, and defeat preoccupied my thoughts. Ridicule and low-expectations were my companions. Hope was nowhere to be found. However, I did not develop, according to Henderson & Milstein (2003), the litany of problems educators have come to expect. I became “resilient” (p. 5). As I experienced adversity, I also experienced habits that buffered that adversity (p. 5). I became alive when I recognized my invisibility (Ellison, 1993). Key to the survival of African American male learners is recognizing their invisibility and, in so doing, becoming “alive.”

Ideally, through this essay, others have recognized that African American male learners are unaware of a vital component to our existence—a recognition of their invisibility. For African American male learners to become aware of this invisibility, learning environments must begin to redefine what it means to be a student and how an effective learning environment is defined. As it currently exists, Black boys who fidget are loud and those who “play the dozens” are troublesome. Meanwhile, Black boys who sit quietly and behave “respectfully” are either acting White or are ignored. However, movement and expression are all cultural norms of African American identity.

If I accept this imposed silence, I remain invisible. Failure to recognize my unique position will continue to manifest in a multitude of scenarios most often leading to the pipeline. When I am expelled or suspended, I miss out on learning opportunities which allow me to graduate from high school. When I do not graduate, I am less likely to earn a decent wage. The domino effect leads to dead-end solutions (Griffen, 2015). Do I feed my child or pay the rent? How do I gain income quickly so that I am not evicted? Where can I gain the most income to support a dying mother or father? I am more likely to go to prison than to college unless I am able to comply with the standards and reforms that ensure my safety out of the school to prison pipeline. However, we enter another pipeline called *compliant ambiguity* when we conform in order to be safe. My uniqueness is no longer an issue or a question as I am now a part of the whole. Exceptionalism is a question of the past for it was my exceptionality that placed me in the pipeline. My movements, speech and mannerisms have left me ambiguous because I move and sound like everybody else. I am as invisible to others as I am to myself. As a result, the conflict remains because I am not permitted to simply go to school and later go to work. I do not meet the definitions prescribed to or about me. I am rationalized out of dual existences. I am not a part of the “mainstream” culture, nor am I a part of the “marginalized” culture. I have to tell myself,

You exist. You matter. You have value. You have every right to wear your hoodie, to play your music as loud as you want. You have every right to be you. And no one should deter you from being you. You have to be you. And you can never be afraid of you. (Coates, 2015, p. 113)

I have to make the decision to be the African me or the American me. One of the two conflicts emerge each day and on some days, I am both at one time, especially when I find myself in a setting where mainstream culture is mixed with the African American culture. I draw the disdainful glances, the disgusted stares, and the threat-laden commentary from my teachers and peers (African American and mainstream) forcing yet another conflict, *Man vs. Nature*.

Man vs. Nature is the conflict erupting between psyche and the ego, manifesting as an ongoing battle of who I believe I am vs. who others tell me I am. To disrupt this compliant ambiguity, teachers of African American male learners need to provide exemplars of male visibility via “must read” texts concurrently with “mainstream texts” as well as experiential learning activities that force me to see myself in a positive, heroic, and intellectual light. In addition, there is a need to reinvent academic discourse and close the opportunities gaps that prevent me from accessing resources that offer exits out of the school to prison pipeline, such as AP courses, study abroad trips, internships, and academic scholarships.

How does it feel to know that I am a problem, and not understand how I am a problem? Such questions should be considered when educational policies and instructional methods are developed and evaluated. We must see the conflict from the African American male cultural, historical and social perspective, rather than the “this is how we fix the problem” point of view. Failure to do so only perpetuates the African American male’s rising conflicts about who to believe and which pathway to choose.

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My Mother's Research/ My Daughter's Voice: A Twofold Tale

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We
write about
experiences in the field
as mother/researcher/teacher
and daughter/student. How was the
researcher/teacher influenced by her motherly role?
How does a daughter/student experience the displacement
of traveling to a new country for her mother's research?
We write simultaneously and present a twofold tale of
movement, education, and consciousness.¹

I. Xiomara (my mother's daughter)

I was tired. The plane had circled endlessly over the city thanks to the thick clouds, making it hard to see the copper sparkle of the city below and therefore too risky for the plane to land on time. When we finally did land, we spent an endless amount of time going through immigration, so much that I wished I were smaller so that I could demand my already tired and frazzled mother to carry me. But I was thankful that we were in a shorter line designated for families.

I was not thankful for the white florescent lights that were suddenly piercing my eyes after we'd gotten our luggage. They were too bright for tired eyes. I also didn't like the swarm of people waiting just past the escalator for other passengers. I was paranoid about getting lost in them, or losing one of my two sisters, or getting robbed. At fourteen, I definitely wouldn't have been able to stop a thief or a kidnapper. The multiple signs warning human traffickers against coming to this country didn't help matters, nor did the spike of my mother's nervousness once we

II. Ruth (my daughter's mother)

We stepped off the plane in the dark of a January night unsure if my daughters and I were ready for this second international adventure in a country we had never visited. I remember vividly the weight of leading this journey as the only adult and parent of three young daughters. Exiting the Quito airport at 11 pm at night after a day of travel, customs inspections, and lots of luggage to carry us through the next six months, we looked around for the cab that was scheduled to pick us up. A gentleman approached us and helped us with our luggage to a minivan in the parking lot. From the sky, the rain continued to fall.

Our arrival to the hostel was a short 30-minute ride where the friendly staff awaited. Although the hostel was reasonable in cost, the room was quite spacious and comfortable for what I assumed were 'hostel' standards around the world. The girls were now excited and dropped bags and chatted as they decided who would share a bed with whom. Anayansi, 12-years old, decided to share her bed, as always, with her younger sister

¹ As a suggestion, we recommend reading left side first to the break before moving to the right side of the text.

went outside.

Once outside in the dark and rainy night, where cabs roamed the parking lot, I personally didn't see anything to be nervous about. I was too busy enjoying the feel of that sprinkling rain on my too warm skin. A day of traveling and sitting and trying to sleep and entertain myself without much room made for a wonderful feeling to be outdoors. Then again, I only had to concern myself with pulling a large suitcase; goodness knows how many worries my mother was mulling over as she hailed the four of us a cab.

There was a hostel room waiting for us, which my mother patiently explained was a lot like a hotel but cheaper when we all gave her blank looks. The driver was friendly and the ride relatively short, especially considering that the sway of the car and my mother's voice prompted me to doze in and out of sleep. It was against my better judgment. My younger sister, Anayansi, wanted to chat, and I wanted to stay awake in case my mother needed something.

When we arrived at the hostel the still sprinkling rain helped keep me awake as I grabbed one of the bigger suitcases and rolled it behind my mother into our room. Soon, as my mother pulled out toiletries and our pajamas, my sisters and I debated over sleeping arrangements. It didn't take long. Anayansi and Nemiliztli were instantly enamored with the queen bed located on the second floor and, as they were used to sharing a room, immediately decided this was the place for them. I smiled wryly at my mother and pulled out a book to read from my suitcase—a novel that I was too tired to read tonight but wanted at my bedside anyway. Before sleeping, I saw on my mother's bedside an Ecuador tourism book. I chuckled, but hoped we'd be able to put it to good use. After all, we'd only get a few days to be tourists before we had to start school again.

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Nemiliztli, who was six at the time, while my eldest, Xiomara, and I shared the other queen bed.

Flooded with all the responsibilities that lay ahead, it took me a while to fall asleep that first night and several nights after that. It was my first endeavor out of the U.S. as a single parent and the weight was excruciating. It meant I alone was responsible for their safety, education, and overall wellbeing. Although I tried for the entire six months to look content and excited about our temporary new life, I was fragile and confused not just with the move, but also with many other events during the past five years.

In Ecuador, we not only did not have housing or a school for any of the girls upon our arrival, I also left behind a broken relationship of four years and looked ahead in the hopes of new beginnings. Although my partner and I reconciled during our time in Ecuador, it was an initial three months of agony as we tried to put the pieces together.

My unease did not go unnoticed. During those first few months, as we acclimated to our new surroundings and relationships, I could sense my daughters' nervousness. They consistently looked to me for reassurance and a sense of security. In hindsight, it was to be expected; after all, we were in a new country with much to learn and only had each other for support. These instances of uncertainty were the biggest reminder that I was not in the country strictly to attend to the research and teaching expectations of my Fulbright grant. Indeed, I was never disconnected from my multiple roles, especially as a single mother. For the first month, at least, my motherly role took center stage as we attended to the minutiae of housing, schooling, and our overall transition to our new environment. However, as the months progressed, my daughters and I were also often reminded of how fortunate we were to experience this 'displacement' of our own volition and to be fully supported financially.

* * * * *

III. I found myself annoyed with the first part of my school-search experience in Ecuador—mainly because it was composed of begging schools to accept me only to get rejected over and over again. To be fair it wasn't anyone's fault. We had no idea when we left the United States that we needed a stack of official school documents because, unlike my elementary-aged sisters, I would be attending middle school.

My mother talked about our situation often at these meetings, as I was rarely invited to speak. I sat with my sisters while we waited around trying to entertain ourselves. I knew things had gotten ridiculous when we rode a complicated series of buses for over an hour to meet with a nun at a school who rejected our petition for admittance right off the bat. I was interviewed only once and that mainly consisted of sitting in an office with a man speaking to me while interrupting every one of my questions and talking endlessly.

Our saving grace was an international school that didn't care about governmental paperwork. The catch: They were a Christian school, and I was Catholic. The worse catch: It cost a small fortune a month. Despite this, it ended up being our only choice, so my mother found the means to pay for this school and a bus route to take me there every morning.

I wasn't entirely sure what my mother did all day while we were at school. She mentioned interviews every so often and talked about classes. When she did, I remembered the nice-looking building she pointed out once when we were getting to know the city.

My favorite part of my daily school routine was the end of the day when I finally got to leave, though my reasons were probably different than the average student. Yes, I enjoyed the end of a day at school, but more than that I enjoyed who was there to see me right after. Every day my mother was there, right at the entrance of the school, waiting with a big smile.

Ironically enough, I felt more culture shock in my secluded diverse Christian school than I did in most of Quito. Every

IV. Because I arrived when the semester had already begun at the *Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales Sede Ecuador* (FLACSO - Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences Ecuador Branch), my teaching responsibilities in the Gender Studies Program did not begin until March when I was scheduled to teach a variation of a course I often taught back in my institution. Before beginning my eight-week intensive course, I had to first worry about the care of my daughters. I left them on one side of the city in our small apartment while I attended to my class. So far, I was only really acquainted with the owners of our apartment—a sweet couple who lived on the first floor—and my good friend Sofia Villenas' aunt who lived down the street. I temporarily resolved the issue when my mother visited during the first two weeks of the course, but was then left with the concern of leaving them under lock and key (with the owners of the building on notice in case of an emergency) during a couple of evenings a week for six weeks. I contended that this was part of the reality of going abroad alone with my daughters.

On the other side of town and in the classroom is where I participated and observed as both teacher and researcher, where I heard of Quito life, began to understand some of the customs, and was informed of the contemporary political history and turmoil of the country. Students clarified for me why it was unprecedented that a president—like Rafael Correa—was still in office after one year. (His term began in 2007 and just concluded in 2017.) I learned that in the years before President Correa, the country had gone through nine presidents in 10 years (1996 – 2007).

My Mexican Spanish variation as well as my academic Spanish were tested and expanded in the classroom. Students were comfortable and forgiving of my Spanglish when theoretical and academic jargon became difficult to produce in Spanish, and students helped translate or provide the Spanish equivalency. I was also challenged to expand my *Education and*

child was different, with different backgrounds (one-third of the student population was Ecuadorian; one-third from the U.S. or Canada; and one-third from Asian) and different personalities, but all had a reverence towards religion that I was unaccustomed to. I got transferred out of my Bible class because my teacher could tell I was overwhelmed. In my defense, it was an hour of loud preaching and “Satan-is-everywhere” talk.

I had trouble relating to anyone in my Bible class even when I was moved to a less ‘orthodox’ class. The stigma toward other religions was still there after all, and I distinctly remember watching two videos about the consequences of believing anything but Christianity, all of which ended with some sort of hell or bad morality. I left each of those classes shell shocked and unhappy. Religion was private to me. I was accustomed to New Mexican approaches to religion—which is to say, no one bothered anyone about their religious beliefs or really tried to push the subject. You thought what you thought, believed what you believed, never once actually reading what was in the Bible and were left to your devices. To have it basically shoved in my face now with such heat and strict judgment—with the knowledge that if I spoke out, my life at school would suddenly become complicated—made my head reel.

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V. The bus routes in the morning were a particular adventure for my mother and me as my sisters’ school was just walking distance from our apartment. The bus we took was often crammed, almost bursting. You had one moment to hop on before it took off, not even paying when you jumped in. At times a man slipped through the crowds, obviously with some sixth sense informing him about what hidden person in the chaos hadn’t paid the bus fee. My mother always handed him the money while gesturing to me, so that he would know I was covered.

If there was ever room next to a pole for me to latch onto, it was a lucky morning. If there was ever a seat available it was a

Gender Equity course bibliography to include text in Spanish—something completely missing in my course offerings in the United States. Quiteños were also challenged to read through Spanglish texts of the likes of Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherrie Moraga and other Chicana writers.

Although my initial thoughts about teaching were really a commitment at contributing something to the local community during my stay, it actually became the most significant aspect of the Fulbright and of my time in Quito. It was the classroom that brought me closest to Ecuadorians and to the issues that most rattled the country and where I gained significant insight from which to later analyze and interpret the interviews I conducted during my stay.

The course ended a few weeks before the end of my daughters’ school year. Anayansi was fortunate to end her academic year with a class trip to the Galapagos Islands, and while Xiomara initially struggled with the faith-based curriculum of her school, she actually ended the school year quite content with the strong friendships she formed there and maintained for several years after.

* * * * *

VI. Although I was most excited about my research project and work in the field, it was difficult and complicated work. It shouldn’t have surprised me, as research is never clean-cut or straightforward. My problems began when I contacted Leonor, a new colleague who had done a lot of the footwork to connect me with a non-profit women’s organization before submitting my Fulbright proposal. We scheduled a meeting soon after our arrival in January and made plans to visit the director of the organization to begin my research project.

We met in a café near the city’s shopping mall where Leonor and I became acquainted with each other and spoke about mutual friends in Albuquerque. We proceeded to the *Centro Ecuatoriano para la Promoción y Acción de la Mujer* (CEPAM / “Ecuadorian Center for the Promotion and Action of Women”). Our

miracle. My mother always seemed to find those and smiled when she did. I was jealous more than once because standing around trying not to lose your balance was hard, but I figured she'd earned it and never did anything but smile back when she sat down.

There were moments, however, when the heat and the claustrophobic feeling of fifty people shoved together on one bus almost made me lose consciousness. I remember the first morning it happened. It started with a numbing in my fingertips. I couldn't feel the pole I held onto. Then I couldn't feel my legs. And then my vision washed into a nondescript grey. After that, things got a bit blurry, and I felt some sort of oppressive wave all through my body; it wiped out all thought, and I could barely remember how to move. My mother tugged me along through the crowd of people and yelled at them to get out of the way—that her daughter was about to faint. We tumbled down the stairs and off the bus to the cold air. My head was still numb, my ears roaring, but I knew the bus left us there alone and that my mother was panicking. Later she'd told me I'd been sweating and pale. I tried to laugh; with dark skin like mine, how could I ever look pale?

As I gasped for breath outside the random spot where the bus left us, I remembered a little girl I'd seen some weeks back waiting for the bus and felt embarrassed. She couldn't have been more than seven years old, and she was with a younger sister who couldn't have been more than three. Goodness knew how long she'd been riding the bus alone to look so confident about it when I saw her. She stood in her school uniform with a backpack and a lunchbox. In comparison, here I was, almost a grown up, attending a private school with a five-dollar allowance for lunch in my backpack and accompanied by my mother every morning, and I was failing at standing upright.

I pushed the memory of the little girl away focused on standing upright then, with my mother's hands flittering around, unzipping my jacket, rubbing my back, and brushing my hair away from my face. She

meeting with the director made clear that the realities of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) are always precarious and unpredictable. The director explained how the organization was down to its last funding dollars and about to terminate many of its programs. These cuts included a program directed at women that had been the focus of my initial interest in the organization and of my study. I was devastated.

The next couple of months were an odyssey of coming and going with various people attempting to redirect my research focus and the population I would work with. Since my Fulbright was contingent on conducting research on gendered migration and the work of NGOs in addressing the problems that led the citizenry to migrate or ways to impede migration, I soon became aware through the scholarship of Ecuadorian researchers in the area that the migration phenomenon of the country looked drastically different from that I encountered in Mexico.

In Ecuador, many women were the initiators of the family's migration stream and that had drastically different consequences for those that stayed behind. After a colleague from FLACSO, where I was teaching, suggested I speak with a grassroots organization located on the outskirts of the city and where many families who lived there had relatives abroad, I was finally in conversation with a community member who helped me identify sons of women who lived and worked abroad. I did all of this while my daughters attended school. Interviews and meetings were always arranged just in time to pick each one of them at the end of the day and never on weekends. At the time, and while writing up my findings months later, I often reflected on the privilege of receiving a Fulbright to travel *with* my daughters, while the mothers of the young men I interviewed cared for the children of even more privileged parents who left the caregiving of their children to *other mothers*. While not necessarily based on my research with young sons, my daughters and I often reflected on our

kept asking me if I was all right, if I was better, if I needed to sit down, if I felt I was going to throw up.

I could see in front of me again and figured that was a good sign. I smiled and told her I was better as we stood there waiting to catch another bus. We stood there waiting for what seemed like a very long time. I still don't understand how I made it to school on time that day.

* * * * *

VII. The first stories we raved about when we got back to Albuquerque, were about the cab drivers who flirted with my mother while we drove around Quito. She quickly grew sick of those stories as she scoffed and rolled her eyes every time they were brought up. But it was hard not to share them as they were always crowd-pleasers among all age groups: her professor friends, my teenage friends, and our neighbors. And I needed something to make Ecuador seem real to me when I entered high school and fell into old rhythms with my old friends.

The stories that followed the embarrassing cab driver stories were of Ecuador's amazing geography—of its waterfalls, the lush green canopy of leaves above us, and moist air on our skin as we hiked—and of the pirated DVD stores we frequented so often for family movie night every weekend.

I told everyone who would listen about the glorious banana bread we found in the town of Mindo, about how much a hair that poked out of my sister's teacher's nose bothered all four of us up until the day we left. I told them about getting our shoes polished by young boys in plazas, always wondering why they weren't in school, and spending hours exploring the world's largest outdoor market in Quevedo. I told them anything and everything. And I looked over at my mother every time I spoke, a silent thank you for the adventures I had to tell.

surroundings and privileged position in the country. My daughters most often noticed the amount of work and responsibilities young people their age assumed. Xiomara would point to the young girl who tended to her little sister on the bus on their way to school; Anayansi commented on the heavy responsibility of the young man who oversaw the family business that my daughters visited often for computer and internet access; and Nemiliztli—although too young to understand—felt special as the most fluent speaker of English in her second grade class.

* * * * *

VIII. After six-months in Quito we boarded our plane back to the States, excited to return home with bags full of experiences and memories. Before going to Albuquerque, we made a few stops to visit family in Los Angeles, and while my daughters spent time with their father in Salt Lake City, my partner and I visited his family in Wisconsin. We all came back together in Albuquerque just in time to start the new school year. We were back to our friends and routine like we'd never left. But we had left, and every so often I would recall our many routines in Quito: the morning run to school, my bus rides across town to the university, our amazing trips to the small towns of Mindo and Baños, and the conversations I had with the young men in my research. And most importantly, my daughters and I would recall the many funny stories of riding in taxis, of missing the concert of our favorite Mexican rock band, Mana, of late night outings for dessert, and the generosity of our landlords—Carmencita and Jorgito. All those memories we brought back not just as part of my teaching and research experience, but as mother and learner. A learner of the country, of the customs, of the people, and even of my own daughters.

Authors

Xiomara Ortega-Trinidad holds a BA in Fine Arts and Creative Writing from the University of New Mexico and is currently in her second term of service in Americorps. She considers herself a world traveler, artist at heart, and an overly complicated storyteller. Her art appears in the book *Women who stay behind: Pedagogies of survival in rural transmigrant Mexico*, and she strives towards one day having her art grace the covers of her own novels.

Ruth Trinidad-Galván is Professor in the Language, Literacy, and Sociocultural Studies department at the University of New Mexico. She is a twice Fulbright Research and Teaching Scholar in Ecuador and Mexico and the author of *Women who stay behind: Pedagogies of survival in rural transmigrant Mexico* [University of Arizona Press]. She is also the co-editor of the *Handbook of Latinos and Education*, which received the Critics' Choice Award in 2010 from the American Educational Studies Association. Amongst her most significant accomplishments she includes raising three remarkable daughters who inspire her each day and being a classroom teacher in inner city Los Angeles.

He Is A Poet

Richard J. Meyer

University of New Mexico

He is a poet.
And he suffers the Chicano, Mestizo, Judeo-Christian, Zen-aspiring angst that only a poet
can know.
He weaves words into clouds
clouds into storms
storms into tornadoes.
When he steps up to the mic and begins, he draws the first breath that any man has ever
drawn.
Crafting air into sounds that resonate with the soul of any true sufferer
With all the angst that only a poet can know.
His performance rivets--
First himself
and observers if they dare
—his life to the metaphorically steel structures that oppress him.

His words envelop him and her
And her, and her, and...in a cloud of soft blue that each feels as a cocoon of safety and
healing
Surely she and he are the only ones to feel and know, the only to ones understand it.
She sees it as a sign of their belonging to each other.
Later, as he watches beads of her sweat roll down her neck and into the pillow on his bed,
He imagines taking these beads and stringing them into a story of their love—
A story that will envelop others in that blue.

His life, his short life, has been long on pain and suffering.
He sits at the table with an old lucky Bic pen, a pen he'll write an ode to some day, and
some yellow paper, and writes.
Immersed in the angst that only a poet can know.

I don't know how they met or how they wound up together—but I do know this:
that some place deep in his universe he gave himself permission to rage and vent
and his suffering was sufficient capital for him to invest in a poet's life.
And this capital afforded him a wealth few could know, an anger few would dare, and
authority few could sanction.
So that day, when he grew tall in that rage and it raised him high above her
and he came crashing down upon her with
the angst only a poet could know,
landing his fist to her face...
He found himself well within his rights, well within what he was allowed.
And what she would, without hesitation, excuse.
Surely a poet with this much sensitivity and this much passion most certainly could
brutalize someone and say
"I love you. I'll always love you."
But not say, "And always hit you."
Surely he could, indeed MUST, be afforded forgiveness because of his suffered life.

So she picked up the blame and owned it
Like a gift to a poet's muse
a crown of lead and thorns
that she would gladly wear.
She convinced herself that it was all okay because, after all, she did not have the angst
that only a poet could know.
She was merely witness to it and victim of it.

Author

Richard J. (Rick) Meyer is a professor at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque, NM. He has published articles, chapters, and books on literacy and the politics of literacy; he works with children, teachers, and families to consider ways to support learners in becoming active in the democratic process. Rick has just completed a three-year term as department chair and is glad to be engaging with teachers and children again.

RESISTANCE!

“Where there is power, there is resistance.”
- Michel Foucault



Photo Credit (above): Richard J. Meyer. Selma Bridge Crossing Jubilee March, March 2015.



Photo Credit (above): Burque Media Productions. Albuquerque Women's March, January 2017.

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Book Review

Seeds of Freedom: Liberating Education in Guatemala

by Clark Taylor. (2014). Paradigm: Boulder, CO. 229 pp.
ISBN- 9781612052472 1612052479.

Magdalena Vázquez Dathe

University of New Mexico

With a central theme of emancipatory education, *Seeds of Freedom: Liberating Education in Guatemala* by Clark Taylor (2014) delivers a powerful historical narrative that reaffirms the value of an education for liberation. The remarkable story of Santa Maria Tzejá, a remote village in northern Guatemala, demonstrates how social activism and a liberating education contributed to the socio-economic development and empowerment of this indigenous community. Through extensive interviews with students, families, community leaders, and teachers, Taylor describes a story that has been unfolding for over twenty-five years.

Taylor, a scholar-activist from the University of Massachusetts at Boston and a Protestant pastor, provides a snapshot description of Santa Maria's humble foundation and the near subhuman conditions in which it was established. Determined Mayan workers were being exploited in the plantations *finca* system; yet, with assistance from church representatives, these men and women took on the extreme hardship of forming a cooperative settlement in the Guatemalan jungle. Despite the surrounding violence of civil unrest and guerilla warfare, the founders envisioned a community dedicated to the well-being of all members and steeped in an education for freedom.

After initiating contact with community members through his church in Massachusetts, Taylor became recognized as an ally to the village, thus able to build trust with residents. Likewise, the author was familiar with the political and social context within the village. Taylor's accounts begin in 1998, when an initial cohort of twelve students from the village gained access to university studies. Intrigued by the village's self-sustained practices and deep beliefs in education as the practice of freedom, Taylor tracks the students' academic development and community involvement, as well as their eventual emergence as local and national leaders and social justice activists.

Through local partnerships, church organizational networks, and affiliations with international allies, Santa Maria's settlers sought to build social platforms for community development, including college scholarships for twelve students. Felipa, Juvencio, and Edwin were among the twelve students (eight men and four women) who launched their journey to higher education against all odds. Taylor highlights the stories of how these three remarkable students and their families were forced to flee Guatemala due to the outbreak of civil war. Seeking refuge in Mexico, they were schooled in makeshift classrooms run by non-licensed teachers. The students credit their academic success to the encouragement of Santa Maria's members who were not only concerned about students' mastery of the subject matter, but were also firm in their conviction that the youth become political advocates for Santa Maria's people.

In spite of Guatemala's history of oppression toward the Mayan people as well as the pervasive views of indigenous groups as unschooled and unskilled workers, the village of Santa Maria instilled in their youth a thirst for education. Taylor connects Santa Maria's emancipatory pedagogies with those of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. Making a distinction between schooling that resembles "depository-like-knowledge" versus

education for freedom, a Freirean vision of education—whether intentionally or unintentionally—guided villagers’ quest for an education that prepared youth to advocate for their full-range of human and civic rights.

In *Seeds of Freedom*, readers cannot help but be impressed by the young teachers’ and parents’ persistence in realizing their goals both in Guatemala and later as refugees in Mexico. As the young teachers reorganized to train other teacher-volunteers in refugee camps, they emphasized the political dimension of social reality in order to help learners better understand the oppressive structures they encountered daily. These ongoing efforts proved to be successful twelve years later when the refugees returned to Santa Maria; however, they soon faced a new challenge. The villagers who stayed behind in Santa Maria had been taught by credentialed teachers who adhered to state educational mandates, which included the prohibition of public discussion about the country’s social problems. While the child refugees in Mexico were guided to critically question their social-political conditions, the students who remained in Santa Maria had been taught to conform. Notwithstanding their contrasting educational experiences, a desire for rebuilding their community alongside shared views of education for liberation allowed the two separated populations to reconcile differences by situating education as the driving force to re-envision collective goals. In the subsequent years, reunified efforts allowed a more established Santa Maria to see youth complete degrees in secondary and post-secondary education. Their achievement is extraordinary, considering the small indigenous village consisted of only 1300 members, and by 2010, 250 residents were high school graduates, and 72 had continued on to university-level studies.

Taylor’s narrative invites the reader to question education in global contexts. What can other countries learn from the lessons of Santa Maria? How is it possible that a small rural village can cultivate social consciousness in education while most pedagogical models continue to be aligned with corporate interests? Why does an education that promotes oppressive values continue to be supported? Why is it so hard to foster an education that teaches children and youth to be critical of the world? How does non-inclusive education prepare students to not only become more engaged in the community, but also empowered to know their rights and analyze their place in society? Perhaps, as Taylor suggests, teaching that is grounded in critical perspectives will continue to be labeled as “subversive” as long as economic power structures dictate a nation’s educational agenda.

Even though Taylor does not expand upon the methodologies encompassing his research, his accounts are no less valuable. Moreover, his acknowledgement of his own privilege throughout his involvement in the project only makes his story more real. Taylor’s strong narrative skills and compassionate voice communicates a genuine understanding of the issues Santa Maria villagers faced. Through unflinching commitment, collective action, and deep understanding of pedagogical practices, Santa Maria’s vision for the future became a reality; not even the ordeals of war could compromise their ideals. Today, as a new generation of community members guides the path for Santa Maria’s future, *Seeds of Freedom* bears witness to the fact that an education for liberation is possible.

Author

Magdalena Vázquez Dathe is a third-year Ph.D. student in Educational Thought and Sociocultural Studies in the Language, Literacy, and Sociocultural Studies department at the University of New Mexico. Her scholarly interests include critical models in education and pedagogies of transformation in formal and informal teaching and learning settings.

INTERSECTIONS

CRITICAL ISSUES IN EDUCATION

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