**SILENT REVOLUTION: A MARGINALIZED LEARNER IN TRANSITION; COUNTER-NARRATIVES OF THE SELF**

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**by**

**MARION SMITH, JR.**

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**This dissertation has been**
**accepted for the faculty of**
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by

Marion Smith, Jr.

Abstract

This research study represents an oppositional voice, a counterstory, which challenges traditional narratives of schooling and learning. Formed as an intentionally "messy text" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Marcus, 2004), this dissertation is my response to a call to create work which breaks traditional boundaries of scholarship, casting an unflinching, unapologetic, critical eye on marginalization and systems of oppression in education. Using a critical race theory (CRT) perspective (Bell, 1992, 2004; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001) anchored with a phenomenological methodology (Husserl, 1970; van Manen, 1990), I deconstruct my experiences as an African American, marginalized learner navigating the educational pipeline.

This study is an attempt to "break away from long-held beliefs about the legitimacy of what I know" (Wall, 2006, p. 2) and to be confronted, challenged, moved, and changed by what I learn about who I am and what it means to be a marginalized learner within a variety of educational contexts. It is a highly personalized and retrospective account of the complexities, perspectives, interpretations and lived experiences of a marginalized learner with 22 years of daily experiences— K-12 school student, English teacher, and school administrator— in the same urban school district. I argue and present that exposing, discussing, and understanding an educational *lifeworld*— "the world as [we] immediately experience it" (Husserl, 1970)— can serve as a catalyst to commit to social justice with a

particular focus on informing educational practice and reconceptualizing urban school change efforts.

Key words: *counternarrative, critical race theory, lived experience, marginalized learner, phenomenology*

## Acknowledgements

My doctoral journey and degree is dedicated to those that came before me who started a journey, whatever it may have been, but were denied along the way. More specifically, I am indebted to my Black ancestors who had dogs sicced on them, high-power water hoses sprayed on them by law enforcement, and the doorways of schools blocked to them; those who were thrown in jail, lynched, and mistreated and marginalized in other ways, so that I could be here. I have benefited from their struggles and although I too have struggled, my hardships have been minor in comparison to theirs. This dissertation is also dedicated to those in my life who have repeatedly told me to "know my place."

Thank you Father God for helping me through my unwillingness to change. I now understand that for me "change" involves voluntarily removing myself from the people and environments that support me in remaining unhealthy. Thank you for teaching me this lesson. I just cannot tell it all!

To my momma, Mary Lee Smith, for instilling in me her silent power, strength, and resilience. Thank you for praying the power down and sending it to my soul.

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To my professional colleagues past and present. I honor and salute the progressive thinkers who challenge convention and one-dimensional thinking; I continue to pray for those who simply espouse rhetoric and who do not truly believe. You all know to which category you belong.

To my teachers inside and outside of the K-12 and college classrooms: I get it…The difference now is that I know how to articulate it.

I have been blessed and fortunate in life to meet people who may not be close in area, yet they have cemented their place in my heart. To each of you, I say "thank you!"

I cannot and will not take back what I have said, nor will I dwell on how others respond to my work. I cannot tell you how my transition ends, for it is a new beginning. I am who I have yet to become.

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# CHAPTER ONE

# INTRODUCTION

This dissertation, created as an intentionally "messy text[1]" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Marcus, 2004), is presented to push the limitations of educational research, practice, and policy. It is my response to a call to create work which breaks traditional boundaries of scholarship, casting an unflinching, unapologetic, critical eye on injustice. It argues for progressive educational practices and urban school change efforts, by presenting the experiential knowledge and lived experiences of a marginalized learner— a perspective that has been silenced in schools and muted in traditional educational research— to provide insights into multiple worlds and pave the way for educational equity in U.S. urban K-12 public schools.

Throughout this writing there are moments where I utilize the convention of italicized text to present my story— the way it was lived and experienced. These italicized writings range from journal entry excerpts and anecdotes to internal musings and my stream-of-consciousness.

## Who is Marion Smith, Jr., and Why is His Story Important?

***"****Nothing is more dangerous to a system that depends on misinformation than a voice that obeys its own dictates and has the courage to speak out."* [2]

[1] Texts that are aware of their own narrative subjectivity, that are sensitive to how reality is socially constructed, and that understand that writing is a way of framing reality. Messy texts are "many sited, intertextual, always open ended, and resistant to holism, but always committed to cultural criticism" (Marcus, 2004, p. 567).

[2] Quote from Jonathan Jackson, Jr. (1994) in Latner, T. (2005). *The quotable rebel.* ME: Common Courage Press.

*Figure 1*. Images of Marion Smith, Jr., at ages 5, 9, 13, and 29.

To meet me is to experience cognitive dissonance[3]. In my world of education, I am an anomaly.

History documents and presents a mainstream psyche that I, an African American[4] male from a working-class family, should have fallen from the educational pipeline during my high school years[5]. Throughout my life and education, I have been underserved, treated as inferior, viewed as a threat, compartmentalized, thwarted, lied to, manipulated, dismissed as a nonentity, bullied, laughed at, and admonished for speaking truth to power. Yet, I am still here taking the final steps toward my educational paradox: the very summit of that infamous pipeline. Scholars in the field use the educational pipeline metaphor to explain the process through which students move from primary to secondary to postsecondary levels of education (Huber, Huidor, Malagon, Sanchez, & Solórzano, 2006). This pipeline, however, does not function the same across racial/ethnic groups, as Schott Foundation (2008) explains:

> The educational pipeline functions well for some groups of students, allowing them to flow smoothly through various levels of education and yield a fairly proportionate number of high school and postsecondary graduates. The pipeline for African American students, however, does not work in this way… For example, out

[3] This is the feeling of uncomfortable tension which comes from holding two conflicting thoughts in the mind at the same time. The theory of cognitive dissonance proposes that people have a motivational drive to reduce dissonance by changing their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors, or by justifying or rationalizing them (Festinger, 1957).

[4] The term "African American" for the purpose of this study and for self-identification is used to represent how I "classify" myself racially and ethnically. In this writing, I use African American and Black interchangeably.

[5] Texeira, E. (2006, July 1). Black men quietly combating stereotypes. *Washington Post* .

> of every 100 African American public school elementary students in the United States, 40 will graduate from high school. From these high school graduates, 7 will graduate from college, 2 will receive a graduate degree… Among the African American students, males have the lowest attainment rate at every segment of the pipeline. (p. 2)

As of this writing, the most recent national data documenting high school graduation rates of Black male students are cause for alarm (see Figure 2). The educational inequities in graduation rates and achievement gaps impacting Black males are national and pervasive:

1. Nationwide, 47% of Black male students graduate from high school, as compared to 75% of their White male counterparts.
2. In Nevada, my immediate context as a Black male student, data reveal that only 40% of Black male students graduate, as compared to 50% of their cohorts. Additionally, Nevada was noted as being one of two states, the other being Florida, that graduated less than a third of their Black male students on schedule from high school (Schott Foundation, 2008).

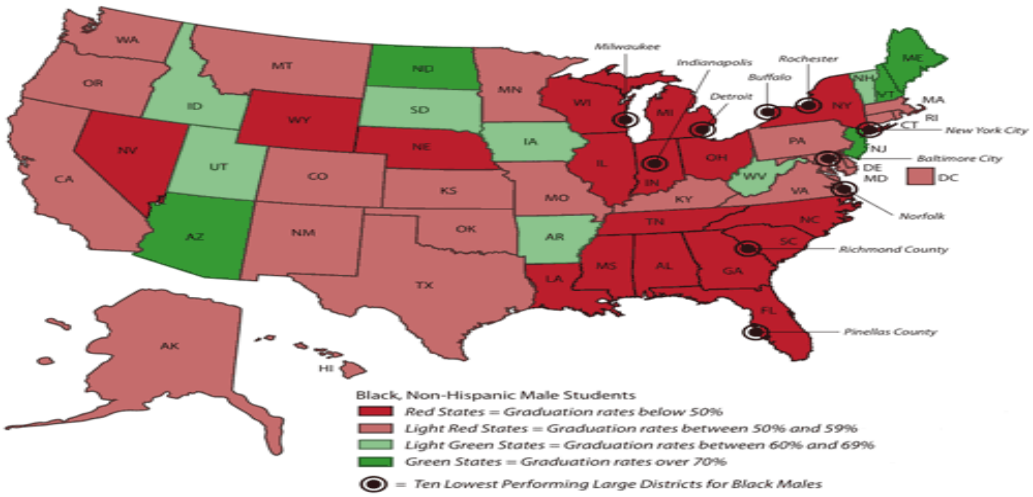



*Figure 2.* From State by state graduation rates for Black male students, by Schott Foundation, 2008, p. 4. Copyright 2008 by Schott Foundation. Reprinted with permission.

> Journal Entry, March 2007: *I am not your expectation; I am not your stereotype; I am not your demeaning and derogatory assumptions. I'm none of the archetypes presented as reality in literature and television for Black men: "Sambo," thug, drug dealer, athlete, mandingo; gangster, someone's "baby daddy," or a criminal; nor am I what society espouses as the Black male identity: dumb, deprived, dangerous, deviant and disturbed.*

Let me try to be as candid and as explicit as possible. I am the real deal: a serious threat to the status quo! I have changed lives (as an English educator in urban school secondary classrooms and as an urban school administrator); now I want to change the system. The system of which I speak, traditional K-12 urban public education in the United States, has a documented history of discounting African American, Latino/a, and poor White students. These students are underserved, under-resourced, and as a result have become educationally disadvantaged and marginalized by mainstream society. This research self-study is my attempt to "break away from long-held beliefs about the legitimacy of what I know" (Wall, 2006, p. 2) and to be confronted, challenged, moved, and changed by what I learn about who I am and what it means to be me, a marginalized learner, within the context of my educational system; and how my experiential knowledge may be used as a catalyst to inform educational practice and reconceptualize urban school change efforts.

## "Learning" in Las Vegas

I argue that with only two traditional accredited major institutions of higher learning in the state of Nevada— Sierra Nevada College in Incline Village and the University of Nevada, which has campuses in Las Vegas and Reno— education and the pursuit of academic knowledge has been pushed to the periphery. The hotel and casino industry, a multibillion-dollar enterprise, contributes limited funding to the local school

district; therefore, the Clark County School District (CCSD), the 5th largest school district in the nation and fastest growing, is currently ranked 45th out of 50 in the nation for per-pupil spending for K-12 schooling (Chung, 2005). It is of note to mention that during the 2005-2006 school year, Nevada ranked 47th in the nation in per-pupil spending.

There is a consensus in Las Vegas that a high school education and networking abilities will suffice in obtaining a job that will enable you to live a life of comfort in the lucrative fields of hospitality and tourism, as evidenced by the Census 2000 report on the level of education attained by adults 25 and older. Only 5.5% of the Las Vegas adult population have attended at least one year of post-secondary education or have earned an undergraduate degree (Social Science Data Analysis Network, 2000).

Whether you call it "Sin City" or by its self-proclaimed name, “The Entertainment Capital of the World,” Las Vegas, Nevada, with its reputation of artificial beauty, sex, glamour, and 24-hour nightlife is where I was born, raised, and currently reside. The city’s tolerance for various forms of adult entertainment earned it the title of Sin City; in contrast, Las Vegas has the highest number of churches per capita of any major U.S. city (Lizer, 2006). To me, this is irony personified. Las Vegas is an internationally renowned major resort city for gambling, shopping, and fine dining and is known around the world for the happenings on one street: The Strip. The Las Vegas Strip is an approximately 3.8-mile stretch of road. According to Chung (2005), many of the world’s largest hotel, casino, and resort properties in the world are located on the world-famous Strip. The real Las Vegas, one filled with schools, churches, residential homes, and the mundane realities and chores of everyday life are experienced, once you venture one block from the Las Vegas Strip.

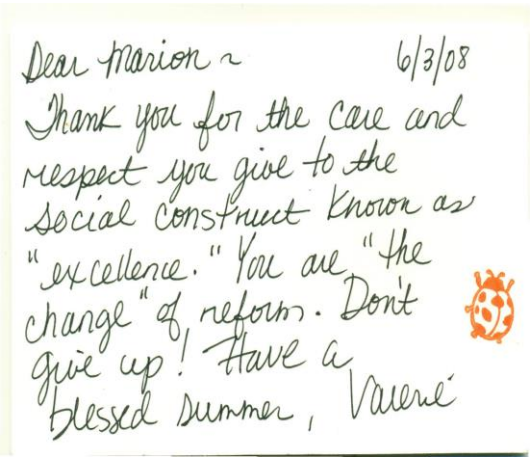
Despite its notorious reputation for sex and adult nightlife, the majority of residents of Las Vegas, as a whole and the state of Nevada, are conservative as evidenced by voting patterns and religious data. As noted previously, Las Vegas is documented as having the most churches and places of worship, per capita, in the nation (Chung, 2005). The largest religious denominations by percentage of members in 2008, the last time data were collected, was Roman Catholic 27%, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints/Mormon 23%, and Southern Baptist 20%. From religion to politics, due to heavy growth in the southern portion of the state, there is a noticeable divide between governmental structures of northern and southern Nevada. As commented by Ellis (2004), the North has long maintained a conservative control of key positions in state government, even while the population of Southern Nevada is larger than the rest of the state combined. "Clark and Washoe counties— homes to Las Vegas and Reno, respectively— have long dominated the state's politics; they cast 87 percent of Nevada's vote" (Frank, 2000, p. 354).

Las Vegas (Spanish for "the meadows"), Nevada is centrally located in the southwest quadrant of the United States and is the most populous city in the state of Nevada. The United States Census Bureau 2010 estimates place the population of Las Vegas, Nevada at 2.2 million people. Mountains surround this urban community, with no other large cities nearby. The city of Las Vegas, its suburbs, and metropolitan regions include North Las Vegas, Henderson, Boulder City, Sunrise Manor, Spring Valley, Mesquite, and a host of unincorporated communities. With an estimated 30 million visitors each year, the resident population increases by an estimated 35% each year. Las Vegas residents are comprised of the following: 70% Caucasian, 20% Hispanic or Latino, 5%

Black or African American, 3% Asian or Pacific Islander, and 2% Native American or non-classified (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).

As a youth, I attended a variety of schools from grades kindergarten to 12th in the CCSD. These schools ranged from those declared Title I[6] to a national, award-winning performing arts magnet school. By the time I reached elementary school in the late 1980s, the neighborhood schools' demographic consisted of over 80% African American and Latino. I attended my neighborhood school for one year, as a result of reverse busing[7]. Significant formal education resources were unavailable; and when they were, they were inadequate. This situation is not unique to the schools I attended; researchers have come to similar conclusions in their investigations inside overcrowded, under-resourced schools where students of color are the majority (Carroll, Krop, Arkenas, Morrison, & Flanagan, 2005; Kozol, 1991; Oakes, Mendoza, & Silver, 2004).

**Marion: The Professional**




[6] Title I was enacted in 1965 with the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act with its intent to relieve the impact of poverty by providing schools with extra funding to be used to meet state and academic-based standards with consideration to individual school needs.

[7] Inner-city students attended a sixth-grade center in their own neighborhood after being bused across town for 5 years during their elementary schooling years.

*Figure 3.* Image of Marion Smith, Jr., in the classroom with students (2005) and a postcard note written to me by a teacher colleague (2008).

It was with a deep-rooted understanding and profound commitment to disenfranchised and marginalized learners, like me, that I chose to pursue and obtain a Bachelor of Science degree in Secondary Education- English and a Master of Arts degree in Educational Administration and Supervision. My professional career has undergone a number of phases: I taught English, grades 6-12, for 7 years in the CCSD. For 4 years I served as a charter faculty member and the Advancement Via Individual Determination[8] (AVID) curriculum specialist and assistant coordinator at a comprehensive high school that attempted to implement the *Breaking Ranks II* model for school restructuring. In addition, I completed the CCSD administrative leadership program and internship in December 2006. In 2008, I was selected and participated in the national New Leaders for New Schools "Finalist Selection Day" for aspiring urban school leaders. Two years later, I reapplied for that same program; I did not advance past the initial telephone interview.

As of this writing, I serve as the sole dean of students at Renaissance[9], a Title 1 middle school in North Las Vegas, Nevada, with approximately 1,000 students of which

[8] The mission of AVID is to "ensure that ALL students, and most especially the least served students who are in the middle will succeed in rigorous curriculum; will complete rigorous college preparatory path; will enter mainstream activities of the school; will increase their enrollment in four-year colleges; and will become educated and responsible participants and leaders in a democratic society" (AVID Press, 2005, p. iii).

[9] Renaissance is the pseudonym given to the school in which I serve as an administrator. Renaissance is an urban secondary school located in a predominately Chicano/a neighborhood (inhabited by Mexican and Mexican Americans) in North Las Vegas, Nevada. According to the school's historical documents written by the charter staff, the mission of the school is to "creat[e]a safe and positive environment where individuals make dreams a reality through academic achievement and positive citizenship." Opening its doors in 1952, Renaissance is one of the oldest schools in CCSD and utilizes no school buses for transportation of general education students; therefore, defining it as a true "community" school: a school in which students and parents, live, work, and conduct business in the neighborhood. There are 61 women and 24 men employed directly at the school. The average length of consecutive employment at the school site is 3.5 years. At the time of the research study, the personnel statistics and demographics of the school employees, include 3 administrators (1 Black male— me), 53 licensed teachers (1 Black female who was a former elementary school administrator), and 29 specialists (1 Black female counselor and 1 Black female head custodian) and support staff (2 Black female secretaries and 1 Black female campus monitor) of which 76.7% are White, 10.5% are Hispanic/Latino, 9.4% are Black/African American, 2.3% are Asian/Pacific Islander, and 1.1% are noted as nonclassified.

95% are Hispanic and African American. Seventy percent of the students qualify for free and reduced lunch and 38% have limited English proficiency (see Appendix A for school demographic summary report). In this position, I oversee the development, implementation, communication, and management of school culture and discipline practices. As an instructional leader, I directly supervise, manage, evaluate, and develop more than 20+ teachers and support staff. This role has afforded me many opportunities to engage in conversations with individuals with diverse philosophies and personalities. On a daily basis, I make tough decisions and take calculated risks in the face of ambiguity. Making solid judgments anchored in what is best for the school and students is an essential part of my job.

I argue that the magnitude, scope, and responsibilities of this position are unrealistic for a single person to accomplish, yet one person is required to do it. Professionals placed in this school setting as the dean of students are set up to fail. There are schools within the CCSD where there are three deans and a school demographic that warrants less administration; however, following a system based on student enrollment versus student and community need, the CCSD allocates school administration solely on numbers of students enrolled at the school. As the first and final person who must address and deal with everything and all of the above related to student attendance, behavior, conduct, and discipline, I equate my daily realities in this position to swimming in an Olympic-sized pool that has been filled with hot, scalding molasses— I have been mandated to compete in a swimming competition against the world's best swimmers who have the luxury of swimming in a "regular" pool. I am told that I must accomplish this task in world record time with these four words of encouragement, "Don't fuck it up!" I am not

the most optimistic, light-spirited person there is; therefore, dealing with the negativity that is inherent as the sole discipline administrator every minute of my professional life for the past 2 years, while serving as an instructional leader responsible for the never-ending paperwork and documentation of 20+ teachers and support staff employees, has taken a toll on my mental and physical well-being.

I argue that a typical day in my life as the dean of students is one that has resulted in no dean, in the past decade, completing a full year of employment or returning for a second year at Renaissance; I am an anomaly in this aspect— I have completed 2 years serving in this capacity, despite historic trends. I received no support or guidance from my administrative "team" because in their words, "You looked like you had it all together." By creating and implementing programs, initiatives, and protocols anchored in responding to the unmet needs of students versus reacting to behaviors, and despite a lack of support from my colleagues as a new school administrator, I began to turn around the culture of Renaissance while establishing a positive school climate.

> Journal Entry, November 2008: *I have come to understand that it is complicated trying to live up to expectations for which there are no applicable paradigms, while being challenged and confronted daily by those with two-faces. I know better, but I continue anyway in this traditional system alongside the soul scrappers and overseer.*

I decreased discipline-related incidents and issues by 45-50 percent (see Appendix B for a count of discipline events in the dean's office for the 2008-2009 school year). While this may be viewed as a major accomplishment during my inaugural year, the quantity of a few discipline-related issues that I addressed make me look back in wonder: 683 truancy notices/citations, 1,887 discipline referrals addressed and processed, 723

required parent conferences held, 424 suspension conferences held, and 101 alternative educational placement meetings held and comprehensive folders processed.

As of this writing, CCSD budget cuts have resulted in a reduction in force (RIF) to employees across all bargaining groups. I was informed via e-mail, during the start of Spring Break vacation, that due to my seniority as an administrator (2 years) that I had been RIF. However, due to my licensed teaching seniority, I would be re-assigned to a vacant licensed teaching position for the next school year. Should I return to the school district, I was assigned to teach English at Renaissance— the school where I served as an administrator for the last two years.

> Journal Entry, March 2010: *Really? Why would I teach at a school where as an administrator I was disrespected on a daily basis by fellow administrators because they disliked— no hated my very essence? I am happy and blessed to still have a job, but I'll resign from the district if I am required to work as a teacher at Renaissance. I simply shout out loud, "NO MA'AM!"*

After receiving notice of my RIF, and in a progressive effort to move beyond the confines of my current professional environment, I initiated communication with individuals that have worked with me in professional and/or educational settings and provided them with a copy of my resume and cover letter to share with those in their network(s). If I do return to the CCSD for the 2010-2011 school year, it will be as an English teacher at a comprehensive high school where I was recruited by a friend, a teacher, and an administrator who worked with me at another CCSD school years before. In addition, I have actively submitted my resume and applications to a myriad of organizations throughout the country. With openings in my area of professional interest, K-12 urban education, this has resulted in me participating in numerous telephone screens, interviews, and final selection day interviews. As of this writing, a move beyond my

current professional environment has yet to materialize, yet my interest remains in administration and leadership positions in K-12 or higher education where my qualifications, insights, and experiences are valued and respected. I argue that with my professional experiences as an urban secondary school administrator, college-prep program coordinator, curriculum specialist, teacher-trainer, lead teacher, and secondary English teacher, I know that my deep-practitioner roots, and doctoral-level scholarship, are of value to the “right” educational community.

I embrace an internalized "pedagogy of confidence" (Jackson, 2001) --a framework that is rooted in a belief in students’ potential for high academic achievement and in my own abilities to support all students. I maintain the highest expectations for all students and steadfastly refuse to make excuses for them, for the school, or for myself. Instead of trying to justify and rationalize why students "can't learn," I simply do a better job understanding complicated problems and designing innovative and practical solutions. I do not blame students or back pedal when I miss the mark. I pedal harder because I have come to realize that there are no absolute 100% solutions. Rather, there are a series of 1% solutions that add up to success.

The statistics have spoken and for marginalized learners, specifically Black males, the future looks bleak if we continue down the road predetermined for us. By earning my doctorate degree in Educational Leadership and Change from Fielding Graduate University and embracing all that encompasses this journey, I make an argument that I will possess the empirical and theoretical knowledge to lift words from the page and to put them into effective and efficient operation to inform educational practices serving marginalized learners, and in the process reconceptualize urban school change efforts.

## Flashback: My Foundation

No writing about lived experiences can be told without linking self to the others involved in one's life (Ellis, 2008). My writing is framed against the backdrop of those in my life with which I was involved. I frame the information shared from my own point of view "as I understood" things to be (Ellis, 2004, p. 22) and how I experienced them. My openness to sharing my lived experiences is intended to convey the full extent of my journey as a marginalized learner.

My life began with my parents; therefore, I begin by sharing a brief synopsis about them. My mother (see Figure 4), whom I call momma, was born in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and is one of 13 children— including a twin sister— born to her mother and father. A child of the 1950s living in the Jim Crow South, my momma was a witness to the harsh and even deadly realities of racial discrimination, the fight for civil rights, and segregation. With a ninth- grade education, my momma moved to Las Vegas, Nevada with members of her family in the 1970s. In Vegas she worked for 25 years in the hotel and casino industry as a maid. Able to retire, she still works full-time in the same industry as a casino porter.

My momma- 1976

My momma- 2006

*Figure 4:* Images of my momma at ages 29 and 59.

Before I discuss my father (see Figure 5), I must note that he was present in our home, but he rarely spoke to me or to my momma at length. We all inhabited the same home yet as I got older our sporadic conversations became nonexistent. This was the norm until my second year of college when my parents separated and divorced after 18 years of marriage.

My father was born in Bay St. Louis, Mississippi in the early 1940s. As a teen he excelled in football (a polar opposite of my artistic background), earning him the nickname "Big Red" for his muscular physique and sun-kissed complexion. He graduated from high school and went on to serve in the Armed Forces. After his time in the army, he moved to Las Vegas, Nevada, where he would meet and marry my momma. He retired from the hotel and casino industry after working as a pantry chef for 25 years. He has since remarried and lives somewhere in Las Vegas; the last time I saw him was in early 2008 at a wedding of a relative.

My father- 1960

My father- circa 1996

*Figure 5.* Images of my father at ages 17 and 53.

Traditional education was never a topic of discussion in my household. By no means do I present this information to state that my parents are void of intellect; however, to this day, the academic arena and the educational pipeline remain cryptic to them. Sadly, however unsurprisingly, this reality created an educational atmosphere where college was rarely discussed or even encouraged. I cannot recall one conversation with my parents in which they stressed the importance of going to college.

**I said, "Who do you think you are?"**

"Funk

For T.M.

I cling to the funk
want to keep the kitchen in my hair,
suck neckbones 'til they pop,
talk shit with my friends,
eat Alaga syrup and granny's biscuits
with my fingers…
stand around in my yard sayin' mothafucka this and muthafucka that
laughin' at shit that's funny just because you jivin',
dip in somebody's business
and play the dozens for about an hour,
find somebody who remembers the "signifyin' monkey,"
go dancin' shakin' my booty and sweatin' until my feet hurt,
and I smell like cheap wine, listen to
B.B. King, Miles, the Funkadelic, and the Temptin' Temptations,
singin' all the words off-key, forget
about everything else 'cept how good it is to be
black." (Weems, 1996, p. 21)

Like this poem written by Weems (1996) inspired by Toni Morrison, who in her book *The Bluest Eye* (1970) describes "funk" as something that Black folks who do not want to be Black and/or over assimilate, try to get rid of— I embrace my Blackness, this funk which threatens and challenges institutionalized racism and systems of oppression.

Education has been an integral part of my life. I have spent 25 of my 30 years of life as a marginalized learner in K-12, post-secondary, and professional educational settings. Despite this, some may question the validity of a perspective on being a marginalized learner, coming from a young man with complex narratives of the purpose, possibilities and disappointments of schooling. Since I am such a man, I understand. The history of learning and the epistemology of schooling, both among the teacher and the student learner, continue to be a topic of national debate today. The very question of what is knowledge and how learning is measured in traditional K-12 education has been taken from the trivial to the tragic. As I write this, I am operating from a dichotomous lived experience with K-12 education— as a researcher with a scholar-practitioner lens and as a subject who has been mired in the daily realities of urban education.

Serving all of my professional career in K-12 urban education, I ask myself serious questions, a few of those being: "Who am I?" and "What is happening because of Marion, and what is happening because of race, intimidation, or even my sexual orientation?" "Will I ever know?" I've had a variety of positions in academia, but I have rarely been certain about whether the trials and tribulations that I've experienced were of my own making. In other words, I question whether my experiences are just part of my personality traits, similar to the experiences of other people of color in education, or, more specifically similar to the experiences of other Black men with a background, either as a student or professional, in urban education.

And so the questions remain as I ponder my experiences in urban education and in life: "Am I doing the right thing?" "What am I trying to prove?" "Can I stop being so antagonistic?" And most probing, "Do I belong in academia?" In the time between

approval of my original dissertation proposal and IRB with Fielding Graduate University, and my two failed attempts to have my research approved by the CCSD research review committee, I had more intimate experiences with the inner workings of structural inequality, marginalized learning, and racism. Read on… I have more to say about this later!

I understand the fluidity and functionality of race in the United States. Perry (2005) argues that there is no legitimate physiological or capacity difference between the races. However, I argue that there are profound sociological differences, especially for Black males.

These sociological differences will not stand between me and my desired goals; I simply will not allow it! I will not be discouraged simply because others are afraid of quality, excellence, and intellect. I do not apologize for being who I am or what I am. I do not apologize for going against the status quo, for being raised in a working-class family, for being "young, gifted and Black,"[10] or for standing firm in my convictions and beliefs without apologies, defenses, or regret. My education (inside and outside the walls of academia), and the methods in which I respond to my marginalized learning, is the foundation for all I have achieved. Education and the pursuit of knowledge is the foundation for everything and has enabled me to understand that the greatest poverty in the world is not physical but mental. As articulated by Biko (nd), "The most potent weapon of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed."

"Being Black and male in the United States promises a shorter and less fruitful life" (Perry, 2005, pp. 7-8). Research data and statistics have addressed this phenomenon at

[10] "To Be Young, Gifted and Black" is a song by Nina Simone with lyrics by Weldon Irvine. It was written in memory of Simone's late friend Lorraine Hansberry, award-winning playwright of *A Raisin in the Sun*.

various perspectives from the trivial to the tragic. My dissertation study is not about the ongoing process of the marginalization of African American people by others. While this is a documented reality and continues today, researchers, media, and everyday people have covered White supremacy at length. I will not! My study has enabled me to relay information in an authentic way where theory takes meaning through experiential knowledge and my lived experiences with it. I was the project and added my voice to the multiple conversations and practices which struggle against the notion that learning means the regurgitation and absorption of the status quo without asking probing questions and critical thinking.

## Statement of the Problem

This research study is my attempt to address the following problem: How does a marginalized learner, specifically an African American male in K-12 urban education, create the circumstances and the opportunities to be educated? Lipman (1998) posits, "The failure of American schools to educate African American students is not a fault in the system; it is the system" (p. 24). The problem is that marginalized learners, specifically Black males, are in trouble in U.S. urban public schools with respect to academic achievement, ideological perceptions of intellect, and systemic practices associated with their academic potential (Perry, 2005; Noguera 2008; Thompson, 2007). With respect to access and achievement, data consistently indicate that African American learners constitute a dominant segment of the public urban K-12 schooling population that is distinguished by disadvantages and hardships (Blanchett, Mumford, & Beachum, 2005; Karp, 2003; Snipes, Doolittle, & Herlihy, 2002). African American learners are more likely than other groups in U.S. schooling systems to be punished (typically through some

form of exclusion), labeled, and categorized for special education (often without a documented disability), and to experience academic failure (Schott Foundation, 2004, 2008). On most measures of academic performance, African American learners are overrepresented in the negative categories (for example, enrollment in remedial programs and the number of learners suspended or expelled) and underrepresented in the positive categories (honors and Advanced Placement courses, gifted and talented programs).

The educational inequities in graduation rates and achievement gaps impacting African American learners are national and pervasive (Thompson, 2007). Too many African American learners attend K-12 schools that are overcrowded, underfunded, and woefully inadequate in terms of the quality of education they provide. For all of these reasons, these learners continue to have limited success in using education as a vehicle to fulfill collective dreams and aspirations (Garcia, 2001; Meier & Stewart, 1991). These learners, who have become marginalized by a traditional K-12 education system, are educationally disadvantaged and have been failed by a systemic practice.

There is something amiss in the U.S. public education system. Overcrowding, limited access to resources, unqualified faculty, antiquated teaching practices, and dilapidated facilities have become the norm in the urban educational sector. The educational structure developed over a hundred years ago does not address or was not intended to address the changing economies, technologies, demographics, and cultural realities that currently exist in the 21st century. Additionally, from funding practices (Epstein, 2006; Parker, Deyhle, & Villenas, 1999) and classroom pedagogical practices (Christensen & Karp, 2003; Oakes, 1985; Thompson, 2007) to the teaching force (Epstein, 2006; Spring, 2005; Thompson, 2007) and systemic policies that govern urban secondary

schools (Noguera, 2008; National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2004), there remains a prominent inequity and chasm in the U.S. urban educational system.

Moreover, 50+ years after the landmark decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), which at the time was viewed as *the* solution to the "separate but equal" doctrine in the U.S., there remains far too many individuals, minorities, and specifically African American learners, placed "at-risk" by school and educator practices, policies, and settings that are based on a sorting paradigm that perpetuates inequity that ignores and invalidates the lived and schooling experiences of those they claim to want to serve.

There is a consistent history that documents that perceptions of academic achievement and potential of African American learners is negative (Perry, 2005). Socialized into accepting this framework, African American learners in public urban schools are systemically relegated to a cycle of intellectual poverty and low expectations based not only on their zip code, but on the internal and external mental models embodied as a result of lived experiences, perspectives, and perceptions of individuals involved in their schooling and academic pursuits (Garcia, 2001; Meier & Stewart, 1991).

## Purpose of the Study

"The division between the personal and the scientific self falsely presumes that it is possible to write a text that does not bear traces of the author" (Denzin, 1997, p. 218).

Racism is so personal

if it was a caress
the stench would block
the nose of the world
and everybody would die

One billion pages printed
to support the myth
leak death over the fingertips

of scientific bullshit artists
working themselves into sweats
to meet the emancipation deadline

White power men wear their
Black face under judical robes
making up new games with constantly
changing rules written in invisible ink
Injustice is so personal that the woman
with the bandage over her eyes keeps
trying to take a nose dive

Way back in time today
the little white lies is a giant
wearing huge shit covered shoes
looking for a beanstalk
to fall down

Truth is so personal
every time it doesn't make sense
I sleep a little easier.
(Thalia Lopez, poem shared through personal communication, May 10, 2006)

Epistemologically, this study takes a critical race theory stance within a phenomenological framework-- both outlined and explained in detail in the "Research Methodology" section of the dissertation. I chose phenomenology as the philosophical foundation for exploring the essence of being a marginalized learner. Phenomenology is "the first method of knowledge" (Moustakas, 1994) because it "involves a return to experience in order to obtain comprehensive descriptions that provide the basis for reflective structural analysis that portrays the essences of the experience" (p. 13).

My study represents a narrative of the self. It is a highly personalized and retrospective account of the complexities, perspectives, interpretations and lived experiences of me, a marginalized learner, with 20+ years of daily experiences, as an urban school student, teacher, and school administrator, in the fifth largest school district in the

nation.[11]At the center of this dissertation study is how understanding and presenting my educational *lifeworld*— "the world as [I] immediately experience it" (Husserl, 1970)— may serve as a leverage point to inform educational practice in K-12 urban public school settings and reconceptualizing school change efforts.

It is imperative to underscore that the stories are my own, the stories of my understandings and perceptions regarding my schooling experience and those of my peers. This study is composed of data that make up my educational experiences as a working-class, Black, marginalized learner who traveled through the traditional educational system. I argue within these pages that if schools are serious about successfully educating marginalized learners, specifically those with brown or Black skin in urban environments, a text such as this one could increase the likelihood leading to marginalized learner "success"— that is success measured by traditional standards: a college degree and a 9 to 5 career (Huber, Huidor, Malagon, Sanchez, Solorzano, 2006). In this case, I represent difference at every facet of the educational pipeline. As a result, I bear witness to the experiences of those schooled in urban educational institutions.

Through an insider's vantage point, I present and document my lived experiences, perceptions, and mental models, as an African American learner with three distinct worldviews— K-12 student, secondary school teacher, and secondary school administrator in the same school district— to develop a personalized and distinctive "voice of color thesis" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000) about being a marginalized learner and how my positionality provides a context in which to understand and frame my current and future personal and professional practices.

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[11] The Clark County School District (CCSD) located in Las Vegas, Nevada, employs over 38, 000 employees and is the fifth largest school district in the United States with over 300,000 K-12 students enrolled during the 2008-2009 school year. The ethnic distribution of students is 40.5% Hispanic, 35.5% White, 14% African American, 9.4% Asian, and .8% Native American. CCSD operates 347 schools with a $2.246 billion general operating fund budget (CCSD fast facts, 2008).

To capture the essence, depth, and verisimilitude of my journey along the educational pipeline, I have created an intentionally "messy document" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Marcus, 2004) comprised of poetry, dialogue, anecdotes, excerpts from literature, lyrics, pictures, and other cited works that flow in and out of the sections in a phenomenological attempt to "uncover and describe the structures, the internal meaning structures, of lived experience" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 10). This study will serve as an anchor upon which I will (de)construct the essence of being a marginalized learner.

Delgado and Stefancic (2001) introduced the notion of a "voice-of-color thesis," which asserts why the experiences and narratives of people of color have inherent value. "Coexisting in somewhat uneasy tension with antiessentialism, the voice-of-color thesis holds that because of their different histories and experiences, African American, Indian, Asian, and Latino/a writers and thinkers may be able to communicate to their white counterparts matters that whites are unlikely to know" (p. 55).

In addition, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) argued, "the voice of people of color is required for a complete analysis of the educational system… Without authentic voices of people of color it is doubtful that we can say or know anything useful about education in their communities" (p. 58). The "voice" component of phenomenology provides a way to communicate my experiences and realities as a marginalized learner, a progressive step on the road to equity and justice for those in urban school communities. The use of my voice in the form of counterstoryelling, as defined within the framework of critical race theory (CRT), enabled me to humanize quantitative data and to recognize silenced voices in qualitative data.

Counterstorytelling is fundamental to constructing, revealing, and sharing truths and realities, which are often omitted from traditional educational research (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001). In this research study *counterstorytelling* is defined as a method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told. One purpose of the counterstory is to redirect the dominant gaze, "to make it see from a new point of view what has been there all along" (Taylor, Gillborn, & Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 8).

For the purpose of this research study, the phrase "public urban school" will be defined as a public school teaching any combination of students enrolled in grades K-12 with a 50% or higher African American student population. In addition, "marginalized learner" will refer to people with African American, Chicana/Chicano, and/or Latina/Latino ancestry. Two points of consideration: 1. Each of these terms has a political dimension that this research study will not discuss. 2. Data from this study will be anchored in the context of an African American "marginalized learner."

It is my belief that by sharing my unique and evocative stories of experience that contribute to a collective understanding of an educational context, I will provide a lens in which to reflect on what could be different for marginalized learners in the context of K-12 education because of what I have experienced. This study and its presentation challenges traditional research in an effort to restore the voices of those silenced in schools and muted in educational research. In addition, it is my desire to inspire students, educators, and school administrators to challenge the status quo as they speak truth to power while fighting for school change efforts in the form of reconceptualization and reinvention of K-12 urban public schools.

## 1…2…3 Strikes I'm Out!

### Probing Questions Emerge

My Institutional Review Board (IRB) application to conduct my research was approved by Fielding Graduate University in late July 2009. To conduct my original proposed research, one with a focus to "anchor school reform efforts in the context of race by presenting and documenting the urban schooling experiences and perspectives of Black and Latino/a students, teachers, parents, and school leaders to present a counter-narrative that challenges the status quo and key assumptions located within mainstream education discourse about urban school reform efforts and the possibilities of educational practice in secondary public urban education" (part of my research request to the CCSD), I needed approval from the setting in which I wanted to conduct the study. Therefore, I submitted a research request application to the CCSD in September 2009. My research application was denied. In the rejection letter it stated, "Because your application has merit, we would like to extend to you the opportunity to revise and resubmit your application. The committee would review your application a second time" (see Appendix C). A few committee comments (see Appendix D) struck a chord with me:

1. "How can you study race when you only look at Blacks and Latinos."
2. "I believe the research question needs to be revised to be about the perceptions of Black/Latino students, educators and parents of school reform."
3. "I don't think this project will help…"
4. "Interview questions are leading, i.e. 'How do schools foster inequality?' It assumes schools foster inequality, when perhaps they could help alleviate inequality."

After my initial frustration and disappointment at being denied by "scholars," sarcasm intended, in the CCSD with little experience or knowledge of my research methodology as evidenced by their documented written personal biases of my critical race theory focused study, I communicated with Dr. Norman Harris, my dissertation chair, and other progressive thinkers with whom I worked in the past, and devised a plan of action to revise and modify my application. I submitted my revised research application in November 2009. I made a wealth of changes and concessions to the application. I addressed all of the comments provided by the research review committee. I even changed the study title to be less aggressive (eliminating the critical race theory moniker that screamed, "Black man doing research about Blackness"). I made changes; however, I stood my ground on a few points of disagreement and provided a rationale explaining why I chose not to adapt some of the personal beliefs the research committee imposed on my proposed research.

Waiting over two months with no response regarding my resubmitted research application, I sent an email (rewritten below) to the CCSD Research Review Committee:

*Colleagues:*

*Today marks 2 months since I re-submitted my research application to conduct doctoral research in the Clark County School District (CCSD).*

*The purpose for this message is to inquire about the status of my research application re-submitted to your department on November 17, 2009.*

*Previously, I sent an e-mail communication to XXX on 11/30/2009 to ask whether my research application, which to my understanding has a CCSD sponsor, was to be reviewed by the full committee. Based on my readings of documents from your department, if a research study has a CCSD sponsor then "it will not have to be reviewed by the Research Review Committee for possible approval." In early December 2009, the exact date not documented, I spoke with XXX via telephone. XXX stated that he decides whether an application is sent for full review and that my CCSD sponsored research application was sent to the committee. I was informed by XXX that I would hear back from the committee*

*before the winter break holiday. With no communication from your department by winter break, I sent a follow-up e-mail message to XXX on 1/7/2010 to inquire about the status of my application. To date, I have received no response or follow-up regarding my submitted application.*

*This message has been sent to all who received my research application to enable all parties to be included in the dialog. In addition, this message has been Cc'd to my dissertation committee to keep them informed.*

*Your prompt attention and response to this matter is appreciated, so that I may move forward to complete my doctoral dissertation, with or without the CCSD.*

*With respect,*

*- Marion*

As I expected, I was contacted the following day via a short and candid email. The decision: denial! I received a second letter denying me the right to conduct my research (see Appendix E). Comments from the research committee were prefaced with "it is unclear whether this will yield findings that can translate into action for the District. It may contribute to a body of knowledge, but I'm not sure it will directly benefit the District." The committee's latest comments beg the question as to what are the "benefits" of research? I struggled to understand the CCSD's defined "benefits" because no one ever explained to me what constitutes a benefit.

After receiving the second denial letter from the CCSD, I devised a new plan of action and submitted a draft for my new dissertation proposal to my dissertation committee within one week. This level of push-back from the CCSD research committee, coupled with my experiences as a marginalized learner in the same district for 20+ years (articulated later in this writing), served as a catalyst for my epiphany while listening to the vocals of Cosper (2000):

For all the things you said I'd never do

For all the things you said that were untrue
For all the times you made me feel alone
Said I'd never make it on my own

Things are lookin' up for me now
It seems like Karma's making its rounds
It's my turn now, won't be held down, no
Karma's gonna visit you too
You gotta pay for the things you put me through
I hope you do, I hope you do, yeah. Yeah

For all the times you said, "I got your back"
For all the times you stabbed me
For all the times you tried to hurt my pride
For all the pain I held down deep inside

Needed to make me weak to help you feel stronger
I know ya'll bitches think I'm somewhere dyin' inside
Oh yeah, poor Kina, she went home
She couldn't take it no longer
But I'm right here
I'm right here
I'm right here

I turned up the volume on the stereo and belted out the chorus as a personal re-affirmation:

I hope your Hell is filled with magazines
And on every page you see a big picture of me
And under every picture a caption should read
Not bad for a [boy] from the gutter like me

(Cosper, K. (2000). Girl from the gutter. From the album entitled *Kina*. Anik Music/Peer Music.)

After being denied by the CCSD for a second time to conduct my research: I sent an email response (rewritten below) to my dissertation committee on January 19, 2010:

> *Dr. Epstein,*
>
> *I appreciate your follow-up and suggestions. Based on my experiences, and two attempts in the form of submitted applications to move my research project forward*

*in the CCSD, I will not address the latest set of suggestions made by the CCSD research committee; therefore, I will not be submitting another CCSD research application. I will move on in another direction to complete my dissertation. This process of research approval from the CCSD began in September 2009. It is not agreement that is essential but clarity. Now that I have a definitive answer to my research proposal re-submission, it is time for me to move on.*

*I will step back and use a critical lens to reconnect with the ideologies, touchstones values and perspectives that guided my IRB application that was approved by Fielding Graduate University in July 2009. I will remain true to my overall theoretical framework and research without apologies or regret.*

*Dr. Harris,*

*I will be in contact with you via e-mail to schedule a time for us to talk. I have a story to tell. Now may be an appropriate time to write my narrative that documents my voice and my urban schooling experiences in the CCSD from three distinct perspectives: student, English teacher, and school administrator. I am starting to realize that once I begin to think outside of the system that "defines" me, I am able to articulate probing questions that challenge convention and help shape my understanding about the world and my place in it. In the end, I look forward to the successful completion of my doctoral dissertation and to participate in the graduation ceremony at National Session in July 2010. Thank you for your continued advocacy and support!*

*With respect,*

*- Marion*

As a result of my experiences with the CCSD research committee, what I view as structural inequality and institutionalized racism (disguised as politically correct rhetoric), my dissertation took a different pathway— one not envisioned or anticipated at the start of my dissertation journey. I faced a number of systemic challenges getting my research approved by the CCSD. This led me to reconceptualize my thinking to develop a phenomenological study to document and embrace experiential knowledge to examine experiences of my own learning along the educational pipeline to address the following probing research questions that support the core questions of my study:

1. What is it like being a marginalized learner?
2. In what ways has being a marginalized K-12 student, secondary English teacher, and secondary school administrator in the same school district, shaped my psyche and understanding of my place in a traditional educational system?
3. How have my insights, ways of thinking, and/or experiences (my experiential knowledge) informed my educational practice and belief of school change efforts?

In addition, I created and answered questions from three different lifeworlds— K-12 student, English teacher, and school administrator— to serve as a starting point in my new dissertation approach (see Appendix F).

## Finding a Place: My Life in Context

Journal Entry, April 2008: *I am Black. I am male. I am a student. I am poor. I am forgotten. I am White. I am a female. I am a teacher. I am rich. I am power.*

I acknowledge that I am a Black man limited by my own hybrid (Gilroy, 1993) cultural and academic experiences which have left me with more questions than answers regarding urban education and the act of learning in this setting, and biased in favor of my lived experiences and other ways of being, doing, and knowing. As an “other” I, like my contemporaries, choose to carve out a space on the margin as a form of resistance to the status quo.

It could be argued that the problems confronting Black males are so pervasive and common place that they have been normalized. As a result, I continue to defy the North American, media version of what a Black man "should be." What I am "expected" to be is

a faulty societal belief deeply rooted in ignorance-- an image I continue to battle daily. Noguera (2008) presents a cogent perspective:

> Although they comprise a relatively small portion of the American population (less than 6 percent), Black males occupy a large space within the American psyche and imagination. Throughout much of American history, Black males have served as the ultimate "other." In literature and film, they have been depicted as villains, con men, and feebleminded buffoons. Indeed, the image of the Black man has sometimes been used to symbolize the very embodiment of violence (Apple, 1995). Most often, Black men have been regarded as individuals who should be feared because of their uncontrolled and unrefined masculinity. And their very presence, particularly when they are encountered in groups, has been regarded as a menace to innocents (particularly white women) and a potential danger to the social order. They are a threat that must be policed, controlled, and contained. (p. xi)

Despite these seemingly universal beliefs and assumptions, I remain focused on self-definition. I simply cannot allow the perceptions of others to define who I am or what I am permitted to accomplish based on the color of my skin or my perceived intellect. I will not be discouraged or give up simply because others are afraid of and intimidated by someone who challenges convention. I was a secondary English educator, college-prep program curriculum specialist, and teacher-trainer in a schooling system dominated by an 85% White teaching and school leadership force. I earned a graduate degree at the age of 25, I am a doctoral candidate and will complete my doctoral studies at the age of 31, and I am currently a school administrator in a school district where those that look like me in leadership roles represent less than 3% of the total 1,400 licensed administrators (CCSD School Improvement Plan, 2008-2009). There is an inherent problem here, but what or who should be held accountable?

"The problem in urban schools is the White, educated adult. Period" (Valerie Bugni, personal communication, March 10, 2007). This bold statement was articulated by a former work colleague, a White sociologist and current secondary English and secondary

teacher. Educators like Valerie, who persist against the odds and challenge the status quo practices of urban education, are made to believe and to fool ourselves into believing, that our public education system is broken due to out dated curricula, lack of funding, over crowded classrooms, too many immigrants, bad parenting skills, unmotivated students, "gang bangers," apathetic teachers, non-competitive salaries, an economic crisis, a changing society, or federal mandates on education (Lee, 1999). These realities are noted and do contribute to the conditions of urban schools today; however, cemented through my lived experiences, I have come to better understand and articulate my essential truth and agree with Bugni that the decay of our educational system's condition is hidden under a sensuously woven red carpet that welcomes the privileged White adult to school each day.

If you are reading this and you are finding yourself offended or taken aback by this assertion that has become more crystallized through my personal and professional experiences as a marginalized learner— my lived realities as a public urban school teacher and administrator, and through reflective conversations and progressive pedagogical practices— this writing is for you: You are the problem! However, if you are reading this and find yourself agreeing with the assertion, you are either not a White person, or you are a White person who has done some serious self-reflection and reading about racism, inequality, power, prestige, equity, education, and socio-economic privilege.

Many well-intentioned teachers and school administrators say, "I don't see color, I only see children." What message does this statement send to me and others that look like me? Is there something wrong with being a different shade or hue of brown? Should it not be noticed, honored, and validated in the curriculum and daily school practices? Why must I and others who are not part of the dominate culture be silenced in schools?

This research study is a gut check and attempts to present how my experiences and positionality, as a marginalized urban learner in the same school district for 20+ years, have shaped the ways in which I process and understand my professional and personal practices and how thoughts about my future work are framed. I live in the future because I work with children everyday. Each day, I am confronted with a painful reality: Our children are in tremendous trouble! Sharing this belief, Perry (2005), founder and principal of an inner-city magnet middle school and high school, states,

> By [middle school] it becomes painfully clear that some of our [kids] ain't gonna make it. A dull gaze covers their eyes. Their tendency to consistently do dumb things is so inculcated that there is little hope for them. They are beaten. These kids are caught up in the undertow of a system that they did not create but that has positioned them for self-destruction. They have lost hope for a future, so they live life in pieces. (p. 35)

With this knowledge and my positionality as a marginalized learner, inside and outside of CCSD classrooms, I have come to a profound conclusion: I make the argument that if a person, especially an educator, does not see color, more specifically race and ethnicity, and validate its history, significance, and relevance, then he or she does not truly see the learners that s/he encounters on a daily basis. People made invisible in this way become marginalized in society and socialized into an inability of seeing themselves worthy of notice. With this, I am reminded of the lead character in Ralph Ellison's iconic novel *Invisible Man.* The main character, a Black man, who remains unnamed, is so marginal and dismissed by the dominant society that he is figuratively and literally unseen:

> I am an invisible man. No, I am not a spook like those who haunted Edgar Allan Poe; nor am I one of your Hollywood-movie ectoplasms. I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids— and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, understand simply because people refuse to see me. (Ellison, 1952, p. 3)

To be a Black male in the United States is to be a marginalized "other" (Sardar & Van Loon, 2005). With this understanding, I agree with Delpit (1995) who challenges educators to reexamine how they refer to dealing with "other people's children." I believe that it is about me, about all people involved in urban education, creating clarity among progressive thinkers to address the needs of our marginalized learners.

Recently, I have called into question structural inequality and racism, and spoke truth *to* power *about* power. As a result, I have been perceived as an "angry Black man," discounted, and labeled as a threat to the established social order.

> Journal Entry, December 2009: *The morning after 150+ of my students and those from the neighboring high school, located one block away, were involved in a fight and mob scene that involved CCSD police, the school administrative team (myself included), North Las Vegas police in the park located next to the school where I work, my principal made a morning announcement to the school community and held an impromptu administrative meeting with the assistant principal and me. While looking directly at me the entire meeting and questioning my whereabouts during the incident, and why I did not follow the groups of students (and place myself in additional danger), I was informed that, "As an administrator it is our responsibility to go towards the action." When I countered this statement by asking where was she during the other fights and issues of this magnitude when I was in the midst of danger, there was silence. As she began to shake, as she raised her voice, she questioned, "Do you think you did the right thing?" I responded with, "I did what was needed and I was where I needed to be." Not satisfied with my response, she repeated the question. I stated, "I will not answer this question because you already know what you want me to say and I'm not going to honor that." In response, she confronted me by yelling as she sat next to me, "You WILL answer the question." At that moment, I wanted to say, "Bitch, who are you talking to like that?" but instead I simply wanted to end the back and forth confrontational dialog. I stated, "I am attempting to have a rational conversation with you, but you are the one yelling and telling me what I WILL do. My opinion is not needed because you already know what you want me to say, so whatever you think, go with that. Are we done now because I have parent meetings and other things to do regarding students?"*

Moreover, when I discuss African American people's impact on the conditions of our own community, I take a risk of being labeled a traitor, conservative, or even accused

of wanting to be White. Whatever I am called, I simply want to be part of a solution that begins with being honest. There are moments when I face great opposition in my profession; however, Perry (2005) encapsulates my personal and professional belief as I begin anew with this research study: "A regular Black man falls down, but will never stay down. Rise up brothers. Stand tall. Man up because nobody is coming to save us" (p. 146).

## Significance of the Study

African American learners in urban schooling environments are among the most reported about, yet least understood targets of educational policy today. Bernstein (2000) suggests that to make better social policy, policymakers need more accurate, sensitive maps of their policy targets. One way to address this need is to elicit previously silenced voices and share their stories.

This research study represents both a methodological contribution, and from the data collected, a new set of data that could inform school practice and reconceptualize change efforts beyond the confines of this study. I argue that the value of this research to the educational community is that the sharing of such counter-narratives is instrumental in the building of social networks, the negotiation of conflict within schools, and the formation of empowering identities of marginalized learners, specifically African Americans, in public urban education. Such story exchange may offer insights into marginalized learners' multiple worlds and pave the way for improved urban school practices. This research recognizes, as Williams (1991) states, "the simple matter of color of one's skin so profoundly affects the way one is treated, so radically shapes what one is allowed to think and feel about society, that the decision to generalize from this division is valid" (p. 256).

Additionally, this research study will provide a vehicle in which to understand beliefs, perceptions, and practices related to urban schooling and the learning of a research participant with three different, yet relevant critical lenses in which to view, present, and understand the dynamics of urban schooling environments encountered by a marginalized learner.

Understanding a connection between race, ethnicity, learning, and lived experiences has been a core issue in education and educational psychology, and there is a large body of research, spanning many different traditions, that has struggled to make sense of this intersection in ways that have often positioned underachievement or minority learners as the problem and has sought to both explain its genesis and offer possible solutions. Thus far, research on race, ethnicity, learning, and lived experiences has revealed significant factors affecting school achievement and has articulated details of how ethnicity, learning, and lived experiences intersect in daily school life for African American learners. However, while this body of research offers significant and important findings, it has failed to utilize and/or provide an overarching conceptual framework within which to make sense of and organize findings that approach the problem from varying levels of analysis (Bruner, 1991).

It is noteworthy to state past research and reform initiatives, programs, and strategies that address and examine the psyche and belief orientations of marginalized learners in public urban school communities (NASSP, 2004; Perry, 2005; Thompson, 2007). Solutions offered to address and confront urban school experiences of marginalized learners in public urban schools are plentiful and contested by scholars and researchers alike (NLNS Urban Excellence Framework, 2008). Schools of thought have varied

perspectives as to what is needed to address what traditional research has identified as the unmet needs of marginalized learners in public urban schools. The varied ways of approaching this issue illustrate the pervasive nature of the problem. The noble efforts and intentions of scholar-practitioners and urban schooling communities to address the issues experienced by marginalized learners in public urban schools do not go unnoticed. Data from national, regional, and state organizations illustrate an increased sense of urgency to understand how this research may prove valuable to student academic achievement. However, Thompson (2007) posits that in order to holistically address the issue of academic achievement of marginalized learners, at a systemic level, researchers must include an examination of the beliefs, experiences, and perspectives of those learners in question who are involved in the daily realities of urban schooling.

Learning is fundamentally contextual; as a result, scholar-practitioners argue that there are extra social, emotional, cognitive, and political competencies required of African American learners, precisely because they are African American, if they are to be able to commit themselves over time to perform at high academic levels in schools (Perry, Steele & Hilliard, 2003).Understanding and examining this psyche may be integral to providing additional perspectives in which to understand the plight of a marginalized learner in public urban schools.

A prevailing assumption among K-12 educators is that the task of academic achievement and learning by African Americans, as a group, is the same as other groups. Specifically, traditional research studies conducted by non-ethnic minorities argue that methods used to educate African American learners are the same (or should be the same) for any population. Indeed there are generalizable competencies required of and embedded

in cognitive and behavioral tasks learners are asked to perform in schools; however, researchers of culturally-relevant pedagogy have produced a body of literature supported with empirical evidence that posits that academic achievement and potential of African American learners are a result of perceptions and schooling experiences where instructional practices operate from a different underlying belief orientation and utilize a non-traditional pedagogy (Christensen & Karp, 2003; Delpit, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1991, 1998, 2005; Neito, 1999, 2001; Noguera & Wing, 2006; Thompson, 2007).

In the early 1900s, both W.E.B. DuBois (1903/1994) and Carter G. Woodson (1933/1990) presented cogent arguments for "considering race as a central construct for understanding lived [and schooling] experiences" (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 50). Their respective works on the sense of "double consciousness" and the "mis-education of the Negro" experienced by African Americans are significant examples of how their examinations of the relationships between race, perceptions, and lived-realities made significant contributions to a collective understanding of race and education (learning of Blacks) in U.S. society. In recent years, Gloria Anzaldua (2003) presented research on the "mestiza consciousness"-- a dichotomy of identity internalized by Hispanics -- to further examine how perceptions, experiences, and mental models shape the realities of people marginalized by mainstream society. In the spirit of their works and that of scholars who have built upon the framework laid by Woodson, DuBois, and Anzaldua, this research study uses counterstorytelling, as defined within critical race methodology, as an analytical and interpretive framework to develop a personalized and distinctive "voice of color thesis" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001) about being a marginalized learner and how this has

provided a context in which to understand my position in a traditional K-12 education system, thus shaping my current and future personal and professional practices.

In documenting the voice of a marginalized learner from three distinct perspectives— K-12 student, teacher, and school administrator in the same school district— this research study will honor and tell a story that has been silenced in traditional research and muted in schools. My narrative, "counter" stories, will be presented to expose, analyze, and challenge the status quo and "offer a way to understand the experience of a person of color along the educational pipeline" (Solórzano & Ornelas, 2000, p. 215) to inform educational practice and reconceptualize urban school change efforts.

When a marginalized learner of color generates his or her own discourse on schooling, rather than passively receive official discourse from the school, he/she begins to take charge of his/her participation in education on his/her own terms. According to Delgado (1998), when people share stories with one another, they expand the base knowledge and support on which power rests. Researchers assert the fundamentally American nature of people taking charge of their own education (Norman Harris, personal communication, July 28, 2009). Honoring the narratives from marginalized voices involved in urban schooling can be instrumental in attempting to make meaning of the experiences people of color face in schools. A few compelling stories, framed in a sociological context, may do more to move policymakers than voluminous statistical reports. As a result, this research study will honor and respond to an African American voice and treat the counter-stories as learning resources to bring disparate worlds-- life

experiences and school experiences-- together, to understand the aspirations, frustrations, and perspectives of a marginalized learner in public urban schools.

Lastly, the CCSD has an enrollment of over 300,000 K-12 students of which 54% are marginalized learners (CCSD Fast Facts, 2008-2009). Understanding the links between ethnicity, lived and schooling experiences, and academic achievement, using a conceptual framework that approaches the issue from varying levels of analysis, may result in improved academic results for the targeted population as well as inform schooling practices district-wide. This research study is timely in light of increased calls of district and national initiatives to address closing the academic achievement gap of ethnic subgroups. Learning to listen to these stories and figuring how to make them matter in the educational system is potentially valuable in support of the stated CCSD mission: “All students have the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values necessary to achieve academically, prosper economically, and participate in democracy” (CCSD Website, 2009).

# CHAPTER TWO

# REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The problem addressed in this study is how does a marginalized learner, specifically an African American male in K-12 urban education, create the circumstances and the opportunities to be educated? In order to address the problem and the probing research questions[12] associated with the stated problem, I wanted to discover how my examination of literature could yield a transformative power. My literature review consisted of the examination of three areas: (a) epistemologies of learning, (b) personal narratives, and (c) K-12 schooling in the United States.

At the core of my dissertation is the concept of being a marginalized learner. In order to discover more about learning and how underlying theories of learning shape existing practices, I sought literature to familiarize myself with understanding the phenomenon. In addition, I believe it is imperative to familiarize myself with literature about educational experiences of marginalized learners, specifically African American men. I read texts and narratives in literature, focusing specifically on their journey along the educational pipeline. I then searched the literature to examine historical perspectives of schooling and school change and reform efforts in K-12 education.

## Epistemologies of Learning

"Updating the epistemology of [learning]," argued Biesta (2004), "requires a fundamental rethink of the purpose of schooling and the ways in which we view

12 What is it like being a marginalized learner? In what ways has being a marginalized K-12 student, secondary English teacher, and secondary school administrator in the same school district, shaped my psyche and understanding of my place in a traditional educational system? How have my insights, ways of thinking and/or experiences (my experiential knowledge) informed my educational practice and understanding of urban school change efforts?

learning" (p. 35). Learning styles are commonly applied in public education settings as an effective framework for recognizing and accommodating individual differences. At the center of my study is learning that stems from personal, lived experience. As a result, I embrace the experiential learning theory (ELT) of Kolb (1999). ELT draws on research by Dewey and Piaget, among others, to identify two major dimensions of learning: perception and processing. Each dimension has two extremes: Perception ranges from concrete experience to abstract conceptualization, and processing ranges from reflective observation to active experimentation. These two dimensions form a four-quadrant field for mapping an individual's learning style. (See Appendix G for a schematic representation of Kolb's model).

What happens during the learning phase and how one learns is at the center, literally and figuratively, of making sense of my lived experiences as a marginalized learner and how these experiences have shaped my personal and professional life. The idea of school as an institution of knowledge has been around at least since the Greeks and has persisted in U.S. culture despite epistemological changes that have taken place along the educational pipeline (Spring, 2005). It has been argued that the notion of learning should be modified to accommodate different understanding of knowledge and knowing (Wall, 2006). I would like to argue that this idea does not imply that current schooling and learning can be updated to accommodate current epistemological trends. Instead, like Ellis (2004), current epistemological trends "bring into question the logic guiding the whole idea of schooling [and learning], and hence any epistemological updates that are applied to modern day schooling practices do not get at the root of the problem" (p. 44).

> Journal Entry, February 1993:*"That's not quite the right answer, Marion," the teacher responded. "But you asked what I thought and how I processed the information," I responded. "Yes, but that wasn't what I was thinking," came the final response from the teacher before moving on with the lesson. This became the norm in my classroom learning experiences.*

To begin to understand how learning is viewed and how this view of what constitutes knowledge and knowing has shaped my educational experiences and practices in traditional educational settings, specifically urban schools, a variety of learning epistemologies were examined and the overarching elements are presented in Table 1 (below) to frame core epistemologies of learning.

Table 1

*Views of Learning*

| View of Learning | Key Beliefs | Seminal Scholars | Practical Implications in Schools | Criticism/ Limitations |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **BEHAVIORISM** | * Learning is defined by the outward expression of new behavior<br><br>* Focuses solely on observable behaviors<br><br>* A biological basis for learning<br><br>* Learning is context-independent<br><br>* Classical and Operant Conditioning | B.F. Skinner (Pigeon Box)<br><br>Ivan Pavlov (Pavlov's Dog) | * Rewards and punishments<br><br>*Responsibility for student learning rests with the teacher<br><br>* Lecture-based, highly structured | * Does not account for process taking place in the mind that cannot be observed<br><br>* Advocates for passive student learning in a teacher-centered environment<br><br>* One size fits all approach<br><br>* Knowledge itself is given and absolute<br><br>* Programmed instruction and teacher-proofing |
| **COGNITIVISM** | * The learner is viewed as an information processor (like a computer)<br><br>* Knowledge is stored cognitively as symbols | Jean Piaget<br><br>Jerome Bruner | * Inquiry-based projects<br><br>* Opportunities for the testing of hypotheses<br><br>* Curiosity encouraged<br><br>* Staged scaffolding of learning | * Similar to Behaviorism, knowledge itself is given and absolute<br><br>* Input-Process-Output model of learning is mechanistic and deterministic |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | * Learning is the process of connecting symbols in a meaningful and memorable way<br><br>* Studies focused on the mental processes that facilitate symbol connection | | | * Does not account for individuality<br><br>* Limited emphasis on affective characteristics |
| **SOCIAL LEARNING THEORY** | * Grew from Cognitivism<br><br>* Learning takes place through observation and sensorial experiences<br><br>* Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery | A. Bandura (1973) | * Collaborative learning and group work<br><br>* Modeling responses and expectations<br><br>* Opportunities to observe experts in action | * Does not take into account individuality, context, and experiences as mediating factors<br><br>* Suggests students learn best passive receivers of sensory stimuli, as opposed to being active learners<br><br>* Emotions and motivation not considered relevant or connected to learning |
| **SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVISM** | * Reality is constructed through human activity; members of a society together invent the properties of the world<br><br>* Framed around metacognition<br><br>* Knowledge is actively constructed<br>* Learning is:<br>- a search for meaning by the learner<br>- contextualized<br>- an inherently social activity<br>- dialogic and recursive<br>- the responsibility of the learner | Lev Vygotsky<br><br>- social learning<br><br>- zone of proximal development | * Journaling<br><br>* Experiential activities<br><br>* Personal focus<br><br>* Collaborative and cooperative learning | * Suggests that knowledge is neither given or absolute<br><br>* Viewed as less rigorous than traditional approaches to instruction<br><br>* Does not fit well with traditional age grouping and rigid terms/semester of schooling timelines |
| | * All people are born with eight intelligences: | Howard Gardner (1983) | * Delivery of instruction via multiple mediums | * Lack of quantifiable evidence that |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCES** | 1. verbal-linguistic<br>2. visual-spatial<br>3. logical-mathematical<br>4. kinesthetic<br>5. musical<br>6. naturalist<br>7. interpersonal<br>8. intrapersonal<br><br>* Enables learners to leverage their strengths and purposefully target and develop their weaknesses | | * Student-centered classroom<br><br>* Authentic assessment<br><br>* Self-directed learning | actual multiple intelligences exist<br><br>* Lack of evidence that the use of multiple intelligences as a curricular and methodological approach has any discernable impact on learning<br><br>* Suggestive of a departure from core curricula and standards |
| **BRAIN-BASED LEARNING** | * Grew from studies of Neuroscience and Constructivism<br><br>* 12 governing principles:<br><br>1. brain is a parallel processor<br>2. whole body learning<br>3. a search for meaning<br>4. patterning<br>5. emotions are critical<br>6. processing of parts and wholes<br>7. focused attention and peripheral perception<br>8. conscious and unconscious processes<br>9. several types of memory<br>10. embedded learning sticks<br>11. challenge and threat<br>12. every brain is unique | D. Souza, N. Caine & G. Caine, E. Jenson (1980s) | * Opportunities for differentiated in instruction and group learning<br><br>* Regular environmental changes<br><br>* Multi-sensory environment<br><br>* Opportunities for self-expression and making personal connections to content<br><br>* Community-based learning | * Research conducted by those removed from traditional education, neuroscientists and not teachers and educational researchers<br><br>* Lack of understanding of the brain itself makes brain-based learning questionable<br><br>* Individual principles have been scientifically questioned |

The information above has been condensed, synthesized and summarized from (Baum, 2005; Gardner, 2000; Joyce, Weil, & Calhoun, 2009; Kim, 2005; Laliberte 2005; Ormrod, 1999; Skinner, 1938).

*Whose Knowledge is True? Learning: The Remix*

A current need to update traditional epistemologies of learning originates from a general trend of viewing knowledge from a static, passive, or representational view. Biesta and Osberg (2007) argue that any challenge to traditional views of learning and knowledge challenges the very ideas of traditional education itself, not just the way schools are organized. This view holds that knowledge and learning is an accurate representation of a pre-existing reality. This binary, or representational understanding, is what Taylor (1995) calls "modern representational epistemology" (p. 5) which he sums up as an understanding that true knowledge is a "correct representation of an independent reality" (p. 3). In other terms, true knowledge is supposed to accurately signify something that is present and based upon a consensus.

Initially, learning was viewed as explicitly representational. It presented life in simplified form through carefully ordered representations of the world rather than experiencing the world itself. This view of learning was problematic as articulated by Calmore (1992) because the representations had no basis of reality in the experience of the learner. A solution to this was an attempt to bring real life and lived experiences into the school— to present life directly rather than representing it. It was argued that one could learn by presenting and examining life from a philosophical understanding versus presenting life directly through lived experiences. This proved problematic because real life cannot be transferred into a school lesson to present life. Next, a belief was to place the learner directly into the world— to learn from the world itself, rather than in schools. This third approach, however, is problematic as it means that the learner may only learn about the world from a micro worldview, the

immediate environment in which they are immersed, rather than experiencing and learning from a macro worldview.

Theories and pedagogies of learning, at one level, provide different answers to the question of how an individual obtains knowledge and how an individual engages in the act of learning. “There is an underlying assumption that there is a world out there which can have accurate knowledge” (Taylor, 1995, p. 10). It is at this fundamental level that Biesta (2004) posits that there is a need to update the epistemology of learning. “Learning and knowledge is not a reflection of a static world but emerges from our engagement with the world” (p. 40). This becomes visible once marginalized learners think about the relationship between the world, self, and the knowledge of the world. A by product of this new epistemology relates to my research study because of the possible implications for using experiential knowledge and lived experiences to inform my reconceptualization of urban school change efforts informing educational practices for marginalized learners.

## Narratives of the Self

During the search for literature in this genre, I was disappointed to find that much of what was written in the form of narratives about educational experiences was highly abstract and lacking specificity as it related to learning experiences of marginalized people. Nevertheless, my desire to uncover literature that presented personal narratives of African Americans and their learning experiences was able to bear fruit as I delved deeper into slave narratives and other African American narratives that presented a philosophy of learning from the vantage point of the marginalized.

Out of African Americans' collective experience with learning and education, and all that implies, they have developed a philosophy of learning that has been passed on with oral and written narratives (Perry et al., 2003). These narratives were not simply a vehicle to pass down information, but they also had a discursive function. "They were central to the identity formation of African Americans as intellectually capable people" (Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2003, p. 21).

To ground my understanding of lived experiences of marginalized learners, and to get a sense of the content and power of an African American philosophy of learning, I did a close reading of 10 African American narratives to make palpable the feelings, meanings, and the significance African Americans have attached to schooling and the act of learning— "to make visible [an] indigenous philosophy of [learning] and education" (Perry et al., 2003, p. 12). These narratives enabled me to understand how philosophies of learning found expression in the real lives of people, or at least in their retrospective recollections of memory. Of the 10 narratives that I read, I have chosen 2 that I feel encapsulate the experiences of African Americans during slavery and in the 20th century. While I could have chosen other narratives, as there are a myriad in which one can find the same messages, the pair I selected struck a chord with me as a marginalized learner. As a budding phenomenologist, I am aware that one's own experiences are also the possible experience of others; therefore, these narratives stand out as touchstones for me.

In all the narratives, academic achievement, doing well in school, and pursuing learning is accomplished in the face of considerable constraints: impoverished condition of the school, the absence of a local high school, laws that

made it a crime to teach slaves to read and write, or a teacher's or school's ideology of African American intellectual inferiority. "These constraints were tied to the social identity and the political location of African American as African Americans" (Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2003, p. 51). As noted by Perry et al. (2003),

> The pursuit of education as described in [Black] narratives is not casual. It is seen and presented as intense, persistent, and supported and fueled by an explicit and continually articulated belief system. This explicit, and continually articulated belief system functions as a counternarrative, one that stands in opposition to the dominant society's notions about the intellectual capacity of African Americans, the role of learning in their lives, the meaning and purpose of school, and the power of their intellect. (p. 49)

*Slave Narratives*

"Law and custom made it a crime for enslaved men and women to learn or teach others to read and write" (Perry et al., 2003, p. 13). And yet, slave narratives uniformly recount the intensity of the slaves' and ex-slaves' desire to learn, the barriers they encountered in becoming literate, and what they were willing to endure to obtain knowledge. According to Delpit (1995), for the slaves, learning anchored in literacy, was more than a symbol of freedom; it *was* freedom. "To be able to read and write was an intrinsic good, as well as a mighty weapon in the slave's struggle for freedom" (p. 54). While reading and the act of learning was an individual achievement, I argue that for slaves, and the marginalized learners of today, literacy and the act of learning affirmed not only an individual freedom but also the freedom of a people.

*Frederick Douglass*

Perry et al. (2003) and Delpit and Dowdy (2002) contend that *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* can be viewed as a representative slave narrative

text, one that captures with clarity and power the meaning of learning and literacy for African Americans. Frederick Douglass had the good fortune of having a mistress, Mrs. Auld, who began the process of teaching him to read and write. It is described in the narrative that when Mrs. Auld's husband found her teaching Douglass to read, he demanded that she stop immediately, citing that "education will spoil a nigger, make him unfit to be a slave, make him discontent, unhappy and unmanageable" (Douglass, 1968, p. 78). These reasons shaped the meaning that Douglas and other African Americans, past and present, attached to literacy, learning, writing, and education. As a former English teacher, I equate this with the current-day school curricula which may be viewed as a culturally specific artifact designed to maintain a White supremacist masterscript (Taylor, Gillborn, & Ladson-Billings, 2009).

Out of Douglass's lived experiences, out of his interactions with his mistress and master, springs forth his philosophy of learning. Presented by Foner and Branham (1998) few individuals articulate with vivid clarity the historic African American philosophy or learning and schooling. Consider the words of Douglass:

> From that moment, I understood the pathway from slavery to freedom. It was just what I wanted, and I got it at a time when I least expected. Whilst I was saddened by the thought of losing the aid of my kind mistress, I was gladdened by the invaluable instruction which, by merest accident, I had gained from my master. Though conscious of the difficulty of learning without a teacher, I set out with high hope and a fixed purpose, at whatever cost of trouble, to learn how to read. The decided manner with which he spoke, and strove to impress his wife with the evil consequences of giving me instruction served to convince me that he was deeply sensible of the truths he was uttering. It gave me the best assurance that I might rely with the utmost confidence on the results which, he said, would flow from teaching me to read. What he most feared, that I most desired. What he most loved, that I most hated. That which to him was a great evil, to be carefully shunned, was to me a great good, to be diligently sought, and the argument which he so warmly waged, against my learning to read, only seemed to inspired me with a desire and determination to learn. (Douglass, 1968, pp. 47-48)

Douglass created opportunities, openings, when there appeared to be none. Described as a "long and tedious effort," Douglass demonstrated the same determination and persistence in learning to write as he had in learning to read. He envisioned the possibility of writing himself a pass to escape to freedom.

In reflecting on his experiences with teaching other slaves to read and write, after being moved to a smaller plantation, Douglass articulated that he saw education as tied to the liberation and racial uplift of his people: "I taught them because it was the delight of my soul to be doing something that looked like bettering the condition of my race" (p. 88). Douglass would eventually escape from slavery, become active in the antislavery movement, and write three narratives of his life as an enslaved African. His narratives, like other slave narratives, became a vehicle for exposing the inhumanity of the system of slavery and arguing for its abolition. "Perhaps most important, they allow him to assert himself as a literate and literary person, as a human and as a free man" (Perry et al., 2003, p. 17).

## The Narrative of the Present

A philosophy of African American learning in traditional K-12 education systems of oppression finds its genesis and expression not only in slave narratives but in other narratives written from emancipation to the present. Essed (1991) presents an argument, that I support, in which she posits that there is perhaps no contemporary narrative that captures the African American experience as a marginalized learner as poignantly as *The Autobiography of Malcolm X.*

*Malcolm X*

*The Autobiography of Malcolm X* "captures with great poignancy the recurring ways that the dilemma of achievement is manifested in contemporary society" (Perry et al., 2003, p. 19). As presented by Crouch (1993), Malcolm's narratives ask and answer questions that contemporary educators of African American students avoid but must confront if they are to understand the psyche of marginalized learners: 1. Why become literate in contemporary America? 2. Why should African American learners take school and learning seriously if they cannot predict when and under what circumstances their intellect or intellectual work is to be taken seriously? 3. Why should African American learners commit themselves to doing intellectual work if, because of the color of their skin, this work is undervalued, evaluated differently from that of Whites, or ignored? 4. Why work hard at school, or at anything else for that matter, if these activities are marginalized by the dominant culture?

According to Anderson (1988) this narrative addresses these questions and provides an answer, the answer that has become embedded in African Americans' collective consciousness and narrative tradition: "Read and write yourself into freedom! Read and write to assert your identity as a human! Read and write yourself into history! Read and write as an act of resistance, as a political act, for racial uplift, so you can lead your people well into the struggle for liberation!"(Anderson, 1988; Cornelius, 1991; Davis & Gates, 1990; Fairclough, 2001).

In his narrative, Malcolm recounted how an early experience with his teacher shaped his view of the society in which he lived and how he came to understand how

he was perceived by Whites. In listening to Malcolm respond to an inquiry about his career goals, Malcolm's teacher, a White man responded, "Malcolm, one of life's needs is for us to be realistic. Don't misunderstand me now, we are here like you, you know that… But you have to be realistic being a nigger" (Crouch, 1993, p. 34). Upon retrospection, Malcolm recounted, "I realized that whatever I wasn't, I was smarter than nearly all of those white kids. But apparently I was not intelligent enough in their eyes to become whatever I wanted to be" (p. 44).

It is important to note that even though Malcolm was separated from his family at an earlier point in his life his mother passed on to him the importance of literacy and reading. As a schoolboy, Malcolm was not able to offer a meaningful answer to the dilemma of achievement, as an adult, while in prison "he would offer what might be considered one of the most compelling answers contained in a contemporary narrative to the question 'why literacy?' (Perry et al., 2003, p. 21). Becoming literate, for Malcolm, was a way to claim one's humanity, to equip oneself with a weapon to be used in the struggle for freedom. "To be literate also included what you could do with your knowledge— with words— whether you could use words to motivate people to action, persuade people of the truth or your assertion , or inspire others to become literate" (p. 22).

*"Had he chosen to abandon his spiritual journey, to retreat into a reclusive life, Malcolm might be alive today" (hooks, 1995, p. 87).*

Malcolm 10

What would he say?
eye bigger than sky
a puzzle shaking out confetti
reading graffiti
popcorn butter video games

unfinished sentences

abstract-land

would Malcolm be surprised
to see his X on a cap
to hear a young brother answer
the question with 10?

(Weems, 2001)

My lived-experiences as a marginalized learner, like those stories I have read, make me feel like "I'm still trapped in the palace of lies, where I'm clothed in illusion and fed confusion with a spoon" (Ai, 1993, p. 34).

## K-12 Schooling in the United States:

## An Interpretive and Historical Perspective

*Imagine that upon your arrival at an airline ticket counter, you are told that only 65 percent of the flights to your intended destination actually even arrive. The remainder crash en route. And, if you are a child of color, or poor, you are required to fly on special, poorly maintained planes—of which only 35 percent make it. Sounds crazy, right? But this is exactly the deal that, as a nation, we are serving up daily to millions of children in thousands of our public schools.* (Whittle, 2005, p. ii)

To fully comprehend the necessity and urgency for effective school change efforts in relation to urban education in the United States today, one must have an understanding and knowledge of how the very historical structure of formal schooling in the United States replicates the societal inequities that began during colonial times (Gorski, 2007). As documented in research studies, public schools in the United States serve as great sorting machines through which inequality and privilege are reproduced (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Carnoy & Levin, 1985; Katznelson & Weir, 1985).

Three different, often competing and clearly contradictory, conceptions of the purpose of schools have shaped present thinking about the issues confronting those who would attempt to change and improve them: (a) sorting, (b) socializing, and (c) social control. More specifically, the genesis of schooling in the United States served three primary functions:

1. To promote republican/Protestant morality by teaching the values and norms that are regarded as central to civil society and the social order;
2. To select, sort, and standardize learners according to their ability to fit into the urban factory system based on various measures of their academic ability and place them on trajectories that influence the economic roles and occupations they will assume as adults; and
3. To serve social reform purposes as well as political, economic, and cultural ends as institutions of social control (Apple, 1995; Casella, 2001; Oakes, 1985; Schlechty, 1990).

This section will address how these differing conceptions of the purpose of schools translated into different visions of schools and how these differing visions have led to the confusing, cyclical, and internally contradictory structures that typify urban school change efforts in the United States today.

*One "Right" School Culture*

A major component of the history of the U.S. public school system is the attempt to ensure the domination of a Protestant Anglo-American culture in the United States (Spring, 2005). According to bell hooks (1994), in this "white supremacist capitalist patriarchy," the devotion [for people of color] to learn was a

counter-hegemonic act, thus a fundamental way to resist every strategy of colonization (p. 2). The cyclical nature of struggle, resistance, and change from colonial times is a constant phenomenon in U.S. history. The elimination of legal barriers, in the form of laws passed granting non-White North Americans access to formal education, has done little to improve the educational welfare of the larger majority of more marginalized people of color who continue to be mired by and within an historically oppressive system (Allen & Chung, 2000).

Both school equity and equality are now, as they have always been throughout the history of this nation, illusions. Transformations in K-12 urban education have merely changed the ways in which racism is manifested, structured, and sustained (Epstein, 2005). With a lens of understanding that documents power (who has it and who can obtain it) as an integral component in educational equity and equality, we can explore the development of European hegemony at its core with historical interpretations and perspectives of U.S. K-12 urban education.

History has shown that power and resources in the U.S. education system and North American society follow certain people: men with White skin (Bigelow et al., 2004). Cultural domination as a central theme in educational history is explored by Allen and Chung (2000) who argued that the experiences of marginalized groups in the United States, a country founded on racial slavery and racial conquest and domination, illustrates the primacy of skin color and racial identity as a basis for inequality. Persell (1978) presented a succinct and powerful overview of the United States' unique racial and ethnic reality that has been shaped by a history that included the enslavement of Africans, the conquest of Native Americans and Mexicans, the

exploitation of Asians and other non-White labor, and past and continuing racial/ethnic discrimination. As a result, the U.S. K-12 education system continues the enslavement practices that prevent oppressed minorities to transgress beyond structural limitations.

Inequality in education is manifested in various ways and does not stem from a single source (Sikes, 2003). Cultural domination in the form of claims of superiority and attempts at imposing the English culture on Native Americans in the 16th century provides the framework and foundation for understanding the structure of schooling in the United States. At its genesis, colonial schools were used to maintain the authority of the government and religion. People were taught to read and write so they could obey the laws of God and the state (Spring, 2005). Enacted in 1647, the Old Deluder Satan Law may be viewed as the original document used to explain the historical relevance in the modern day creation of school districts in the U.S.

As a result of the Old Deluder Satan Law, communities were required to establish and support schools and their curriculum. Social class stratification became evident in the form of grammar schools, in which the teaching of Latin and Greek was reserved for the leaders of society, and reading/writing schools, also known as petty schools, which utilized religious and moral-based authoritative instruction in the form of *The New England Primer*. This text became the most popular resource for primary instruction due to its promotion of the European agenda: religious indoctrination (Spring, 2005). The current day "tracking" system began with the first division of schooling types in the New England colonies. According to Rushing (2001), public schools became defenders of Anglo-American values with each new

wave of immigrants. The struggle over cultural domination in America began with the English invasion of North America and continues today in the debate of multiculturalism (Spring, 2005). Tracking helps create and legitimize a social hierarchy within a school based on perceived differences in student ability. In other words, in an effort to desegregate schools, the school became segregated at the classroom level.

Tracking has, to one degree or another, shaped learners' academic self-concept, especially for "low-tracked" learners; taking a critical look at this process will help them rethink their potential. Moving beyond the *confirming* (education used to maintain the already existing status of an individual) and *conferring* (education used to improve the social status of an individual) components of educational institutions is central to students' abilities to be granted or denied access to opportunities. Gorski (2007) added that not until education was viewed as a government function, as opposed to a family function, did organized systems of schooling appear.

> Journal Entry, March 2000, Reflecting on 1988: *My classmates and I were required to pass a state test. In terms of achievement, our school had one of the lowest academic achievement scores in the district. My teacher, a white woman from suburbia, who prepared us for the test, had low standards, assigned little useful work, and spent most of the class time talking about current events, showing movies, or providing us with worksheets. In spite of the limited test-prep curriculum offered in her class, all of us ended up passing the state test. Later, I learned why. One of my friends said that when she returned after class one day to retrieve a forgotten item, she'd actually seen the teacher erasing answers on the tests and replacing them with other ones. Instead of teaching us what we needed to know to pass the test, she cheated for us; at the same time, she cheated us out of valuable information that we needed to know. Was she too lazy to teach us the information that we needed to know in order to pass the test on our own, or did she believe that black kids from poor and working-class families didn't have the aptitude to learn? Today, I still don't know the answer to these questions.*

*Language*

How language is learned, taught, and spoken presents another example of how the history of U.S. K-12 urban education has created and sustained inequality in society. For example, poetess Adrienne Rich (1971) succinctly summarized the link between language and domination with a line from her poem, "The Burning of Paper Instead of Children," in which she wrote, "*This is the oppressor's language yet I need it to talk with you"* (p. 10). Reflecting upon Rich's words, hooks (1994) discussed that it is not the English language that hurts, but what the oppressors do with it, how they shape it to become a "territory that limits and defines," how they make it a weapon that can shame, humiliate, colonize (p. 168). Colonization, with its cycle of conquest, slavery, and death, rendered the language of those conquered meaningless with a colonizing European culture, where voices deemed foreign could not be spoken, were outlawed tongues, renegade speech (hooks, 1994; Zinn, 2005). Learning English, learning to speak the alien tongue, and ultimately understanding the politics and power of the world was one way enslaved and oppressed people began to reclaim their personal power within a context of domination (Christensen & Karp, 2003; hooks, 1994). How has this understanding of language affected my professional practice?

> Journal Entry, December 2005: *Four months after Hurricane Katrina ravished New Orleans, displaced students transferred into my classrooms. These students had noticeable Southern accents and used a vernacular unfamiliar to the native Las Vegan. Some of my students prejudged the new students openly mocking their dialect. This classroom moment provided the inspiration needed for me to work with another English teacher to develop a literature-based unit about dialect. It is important to teach students about the varying degrees of English dialects so that students begin to appreciate the richness of the English language. By teaching students about the positive and*

*the positive and negative social and cultural implications of our language's many dialects, students may begin to breakdown their own prejudicial thoughts whereby becoming more tolerant and accepting of the dialect differences found within their own English classroom. "The more we know about regional variation and change in the use of English, the more we will come to appreciate the striking individuality of each of the varieties which we call dialects, and the less we are likely to adopt demeaning stereotypes about people from others parts of the country, or of the world" (Crystal, 2003, p. 45).*

*The teaching unit titled "Dialects, Stereotypes, and Tolerance" was based on Robert MacNeil and William Cran's PBS documentary "Do You Speak American?" The unit was developed, written, and implemented by me and another progressive English teacher with funding provided through a grant received from the Junior League of Las Vegas. This collaborative unit consisted of fifteen, 85-minute lessons where students explore "texts" created by American Indian, Asian/Pacific Islander, Black/African American, Hispanic, and White authors. The "texts" include art, poetry, short stories, essays, novel excerpts, ethnographic videos, and songs. Students will learn the elements of dialect before exploring each dialect's social and cultural underpinnings. Cooperative learning activities, Socratic seminars, and individual web quests will keep students stimulated and actively engaged in peer-to-peer conversation and inquiry. Assessment methods include, but will not be limited to dialect maps, essay writing, portfolio development, and dialectical journaling. The unit begins at a macro level, moves to a micro level, and ends again at the macro level.*

***Goals and objectives of the curriculum project***

*The primary goal of this curriculum project is to create and sustain the process of eliminating "prejudicialness" in the classroom. To achieve this goal, students will read, analyze and interpret multicultural texts to do the following:*

- *Understand what conventions are typical of different styles of language used in both spoken and written form.*
- *Understand how people choose among various alternatives in their own language use.*
- *Learn the origins of grammatical and Standard English usage conventions.*
- *Identify some fundamental differences between spoken and written language.*
- *Examine variation in English as it relates to geographic regions and ethnic groups.*
- *Recognize some of the major differences between regional dialects.*
- *Understand that everyone speaks a dialect.*
- *Trace historical events that have shaped the current major regional dialects.*

- *Discuss current language change in terms of convergence and divergence of the major regional dialects.*
- *Understand the inaccuracies of language stereotypes in society and their implications.*
- *Understand the roots of African American English and the role it plays in American culture.*
- *Identify some of the linguistic features that characterize African American English and the patterns of their use.*
- *Understand the importance of tailoring speech and writing to a particular audience, purpose, or genre.*
- *Increase their understanding of the consequences of dialect prejudice.*
- *Understand the current language status of the Hispanic populations of America.*
- *Be able to characterize "Spanglish" and Chicano English.*
- *Understand some features of Chicano English.*
- *Develop an understanding of what personal style is, the factors that contribute to it, and how it shifts.*
- *Develop an understanding of the relationship between language and culture.*
- *Be able to recognize how different types of situations encourage the use of particular speech styles, and the benefits of abiding by or consequences for violating these norms.*
- *Unlearn the myths that bind us by reading the words in order to read the world in which we live*
- *Learn the meanings of the following words: dialect, ostracize, stereotype, lexicon, accent, syntax, tolerance, stigma, Standard English, language prestige, and prescriptivism. (*excerpt from Bugni, 2006*)*

*Controlling Ideology*

Knowledge is not neutral. It consists of political, social, and economic content; schools and their leaders create and set policies and practices congruent to their own ways of thinking and knowing. Schools as one form of ideological and epistemological management present another perspective in the history of U.S. K-12 schooling (Oakes & Lipton, 2006). Ideological management involves the creation and distribution of knowledge in a society.

> *When you're talking to White people they still want it to be their way. You can try to talk to them and give them examples, but they're headstrong, they think they know what's best for <u>everybody</u>, for <u>everybody's</u> children. They won't listen, White folks are going to do what they want to do anyway…So, I shut them out. I go back to my own little cubby, my classroom, and I try to teach*

> *the way I know will work, no matter what those folks say. And when I get Black kids, I just try to undo the damage they did… They don't really want to hear what you have to say. They wear blinders and earplugs. They only want to go on research they've read that other White people have written. It just doesn't make any sense to keep talking to them. (Delpit, 1988, pp. 280-281)*

According to Sardar and Van Loon (2005) ideological management refers to the effect of political and economic forces on the ideas disseminated to society. Origins of the current standards-based movement in U.S. public urban education can be traced to when curriculum theorists like Ellwood Cubberley, Noah Webster, Horace Mann, and others attempted to align school curricula to the needs and demands of the U.S. economy by developing a scientific approach to designing and planning curriculum (Farahmandpur & McLaren, 2006).The creation of a uniform common school system began with the standardization of curriculum and instruction. According to Spring (2005) the Pestalozzian method of instruction, which originated in Europe and upheld the ideal woman as mother and teacher, became the core U.S. school philosophy. "[This method] provided further justification for the subordinate role of women in teaching" (p. 135). At its inception, a hierarchy was established in the education system in which role expectations were the same as those in social situations.

The voices of powerful individuals and organizations representing the interests of administrators, policymakers, politicians, and academics made their voices loud and clear. As a result, standard-based curriculum and teaching emerged. According to Ravitch (1996), in the field of education, "standards" is a term which defines a cumulative body of knowledge and set of competencies that is the basis for quality education. They express what all pupils should know and be able to do, but do

not dictate pedagogy. School curricula continue to reflect not only the ideologies of the dominant social classes but their political views. Williams (2005) believed that in order to dismantle the educational policies and practices that sustain White supremacy, a reorganization of the "epistemic social order" is paramount. Questions such as, "What is knowledge?" "Whose knowledge is (de)valued?" "What is the purpose of knowing?" and "What are the responsibilities of knowing?" are central to removing the cloak of colonialism (p. 20).

Those who have access to the institutional means of power take an interest in shaping policies that limit or expand the access that others have to education and to positions of power (Bigelow et al., 2004). Within the context of political education, Spring (2005) reiterated that the "common" in "common school" meant the teaching of a common political creed. The combination of moral and political instruction meant that the student leaving the common school would share with fellow learners a set of moral and political beliefs; the result would be the creation of a society with a consensus of political and moral value. The utopian, idealistic view of the common school movement established the basic framework, from the 19th century to the present, for popular and official discussions about the goals and purposes of public schooling in the U.S.

A major strand of U.S. history has been the quest for democracy and equality (Spring, 2005). Violence and racism are a basic part of U.S. history and of those learners involved in North American urban schooling. "From colonial times to today, educators have preached equality of opportunity and good citizenship while engaging in acts of religious intolerance, racial segregation, cultural genocide, and

discrimination against immigrants and nonwhites" (Spring, 2005, p. 5). In the 1896 *Plessy* decision, the Supreme Court ruled that segregation did not create a badge of inferiority if segregated and "White" facilities were equal and the law was reasonable (Oakes, 1985). Fifty-six years later, with the 1954 U.S. Supreme Court *Brown* decision, school segregation was deemed unconstitutional and "inherently unequal." Evidence in the form of violent protests illustrated that most Anglo-Americans were not going to accept integrated education institutions after 300 years of segregated existence. The law ended legally sanctioned racism and segregation; however, "We had to make the journey and thus bear the responsibility of making [mandated] desegregation a reality" (hooks, 1994, p. 24).

Anglo-Americans refused to share the breadth of their knowledge and resources associated with obtaining information. They punished others for reading and for their attempts at literacy. Despite Anglo-Americans' attempts of cultural transformation programs aimed at the deculturalization of Native Americans, Asians, and Latino/Hispanics, history documents how marginalized people made attempts to combat blatant inequalities. Stated here are only two documented minority-led revolutions to present a sample: (a) Boston abolitionists and free-slaves organized the first comprehensive system of urban schools after the passage of the Massachusetts Education Act of 1789; and (b) the development of a written Cherokee language by Sequoyah to preserve the Cherokee culture amidst European missionary religious education (Spring, 2005). It would be remiss to not mention that later acts to obtain educational equity like school desegregation and civil rights legislation were not

products of a benign government but were the result of tremendous struggle and public demonstration (Allen & Chung, 2000).

Segregation means more than building a racial divide. It has resulted in unequal funding for schools and unequal educational opportunities nation and worldwide (Sikes, 2003). Critical pedagogue and equity advocate Breunig (2005) argued that minority communities' efforts to improve their schools are regularly defeated because they do not have enough political power to force changes in local politics, and neither the courts nor Congress nor any state government show genuine interest in strongly enforcing the equality requirements. History continues to reveal legislative educational initiatives (Goals 2000 and No Child Left Behind) that have become requirements for states to adopt and implement. These educational reforms are based on mandates from business and political authority figures that stress more testing for learners and teachers, stricter gate-keeping for prospective teachers, longer school days, more phonics, and less attention to multiculturalism (Epstein, 2005; Neito, 2003) while blatantly and continuously ignoring those closest to the issues being discussed: teachers, families, and learners themselves. In addition, the issues of race and class segregation, like marginalized people, are pushed to the periphery (hooks, 1994). At the national level, the common understanding was and still is to equalize outcomes within the existing structure of segregated schools in the form of administrative reforms from the top down (Orfield, 2003). Ellis Cose (1993) articulates my inner dialog in *The Rage of a Privileged Class*:

> I have done everything I was supposed to do. I have stayed out of trouble with the law, gone to the right schools, and worked myself nearly to death. *What more do they want?* Why in God's name won't they accept me as a full human being? Why am I pigeonholed in a "Black job"? Why am I constantly treated

> as if I were a drug addict, a thief, or a thug? Why am I still not allowed to aspire to the same things every white person in America takes as a birthright? Why, when I most want to be seen, am I suddenly rendered invisible? (p. 10)

*Capitalism and the Economy*

Geographic, economic isolation and rampant social deterioration have resulted in the proliferation of high rates of poverty that sustains and maintains an underground economy that begets more violence and suffering in marginalized schooling communities. Popular Hollywood movies like *Dangerous Minds*, *Boyz in the Hood*, *Freedom Writers*, and *Lean on Me* illuminate and even glamorize these struggles. It is disheartening and frustrating to see that after 20+ years in the same school district students are still forced to attend the same inadequate and significantly under-resourced and underserved schools that I attended.

Not only do these schools lack the proper resources such as updated textbooks, enough desks for students, adequately heated and cooled classrooms, faulty sewage drains, working water fountains, and clean bathrooms, they also lack caring, committed, and competent teachers. In this vein, the schools in which I have experienced perpetuate and exacerbate the issues facing marginalized learners. This phenomenon is documented at length in the literature on the links between schooling and inequality (Howard, 2008; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lynn & Parker, 2006). Kozol (1991) asserts,

> Terms such as attaint of blood are rarely used today, and, if they were, they would occasion public indignation; but the rigging of the game and the acceptance, which is nearly universal, or uneven playing fields reflect a dark unspoken sense that other people's children are less inherent value than our own. Now and then, in private, affluent suburbanites concede that certain aspects of the game may be a trifle rigged to their advantage. Sure, it's a bit unjust, they may concede, but that's reality and that's the way the game is played. (p. 177)

*"It is not impractical to consider seriously changing the rules of the game when the game is clearly killing you" (Peck as quoted in Gablik, 1991).*

Voices of a few marginalized students interviewed by Kozol:

*Fifth grade student: And I'd buy some curtains for my teacher. Kozol: Why curtains? Fifth grade student: It's like this…The school is dirty. There isn't any playground. There's a hole in the wall behind the principal's desk. What we need to do is first rebuild the school. Another color. Build a playground. Plant a lot of flowers. Paint the classrooms. Blue and white. Fix the hole in the principal's office. Buy doors for the toilet stalls in the girls' bathrooms. Fix the ceiling in this room. It looks like somebody went up and peed over our heads. Make it a beautiful clean building. Make it pretty. Way it is, I feel ashamed.*

*Tunisia: When people come and see our school… they don't say nothing, but I know what they are thinking.*

*Gregory: Those neighborhoods are different…they got a golf course there. Big houses. Better schools…You live in certain areas and things are different. (1991, pp. 181-2)*

The descriptions of the school that needs the blue curtains echoes what I've witnessed and experienced during my time in the CCSD as a student, teacher, and school administrator.

Ever since the U.S. Supreme Court declared in 1973 in *Rodriguez v. San Antonio* that education was not a fundamental right protected by the U.S. Constitution, equity advocates have fought a state-by-state battle against the institutionalized inequities of school finance systems which provide qualitatively different levels of education to learners from different class, race, and community backgrounds (Karp, 2003). In many ways the funding mechanisms that deliver drastically different experiences to learners in different classrooms mirror the inequality that exists all around us in the U.S. society.

Capitalism and economic issues serve as additional topics to be brought to the forefront when attempting to understand the history of U.S. K-12 urban education (Spring, 2005). With the founding of the 19th century common schools, grandiose claims of ending poverty, providing equality of opportunity for all, and the increase of national wealth became the new goal of North American public education under the belief of social Darwinism. Additionally, reflecting the initial concerns of Horace Mann and the beliefs of the 19th century common school reformers that education could reduce social class divisions and eliminate poverty, the federal government enlisted the schools and television in a "War on Poverty" during the 1960s.

According to Orfield (2003) the widely held belief during this time was that discrimination and poverty were the two basic problems preventing the use of the schools as a means of discovering and classifying talent for service to the national economy and national defense. Within this framework, articulated by Spring (2005), school integration and the elimination of poverty were necessary to ensure "unbiased development and selection of human talent" (p. 210). Different from vocational education, this form of career education involved the actual study of jobs and education fairs and career education courses offered in schools. Home economics instruction was introduced to women thus introducing women to the ideology of a consumer society. As the U.S. urban school was transformed into a major social agency through implementation of kindergarten programs, playgrounds, school nursing and health facilities, showering practices, and nutritional processed foods, segregation and cultural domination continued in education (Spring, 2005). Documented by Persell (1978), elites and educational leaders proposed agendas for

schools to expand the social agency to provide order, discipline, training, and control of future workers. Consequently, the school expanded its reach into the home and diet of North Americans as educators became concerned about the health and living conditions of children. The Americanization of immigrants reflected the continuing role of the school in creating an American culture.

Booker T. Washington's 1895 Atlanta Compromise speech and his focus on industrial education have been credited for the vocational education curriculum movement. At its core the industrial education curriculum of the past relates to the vocational educational curriculum of today in that it prepared learners for careers that were based in manual or practical activities, traditionally non-academic, and directly related to a specific trade, occupation, or vocation. Learners directly developed expertise in a particular field. In the history of U.S. schooling, Washington is most often associated with the establishment of segregated schools under a premise of traditional industrial education philosophies. To a certain extent, however, this statement oversimplifies his position of race, realities of African Americans in southern society, and their political strategies (hooks, 1994). In the words of Henry Allen Bullock, an industrial education curriculum advocate during Washington's time,

> The industrial curriculum to which Negro children were exposed, supposedly designed to meet their needs, reflected the life that accompanied their status at the time. They had always farmed. The curriculum aimed to make them better farmers. Negro women had a virtual monopoly on laundering, and Negro men had [worked] largely as mechanics. The industrial curriculum was designed to change this only so far that Negroes were trained to perform these services better. (Spring, 2005, p. 195)

Support from major educational conferences and private foundations made segregated industrial education, with its promise of cheap labor, a permanent fixture in southern states until the 1960s. Rushing (2001) stated that highly populated minority cities implemented vocational education curriculum in public schools to divert learners from the academic curriculum. Federal legislation, the Smith-Hughes Act of 1917, supported the differentiated curriculum as a means for making the U.S. more competitive in world markets. These policies appeared to expand access to education, but in reality the implementation of racial segregation and a differentiated curriculum functioned to limit educational access and opportunity (Gorski, 2007). As Oakes and Lipton (2006) concluded, vocational education and the early 20th century differentiated curriculum institutionalized a compromise between equality and inequality and contradicts attempts to change U.S. urban education today.

*Beyond "A Nation at Risk"*

Friedman (2009) writes, "Educationally, we are not a nation at risk. We are a nation in decline" (p. 10). However, ever since the 1983 publication of *A Nation at Risk*, ideologies, theories, and "Best Practices" have been created and implemented (by the dominant Anglo-American culture to maintain epistemological traditions and the status quo in self-serving attempts) to rescue public education, specifically urban education sectors (Farahmandpur & McLaren, 2006; Neito, 2003; Spring, 2005). Corporate and government leaders vilified schools for the declining ability of the United States to compete in the world economy.

The race for social positions was to be a function no longer of the marketplace but of the scientific selection process (Bigelow et al., 2004). The report put the U.S.

government, under the leadership of President Ronald Reagan, in an interesting political situation (Spring, 2005). On the one hand, blaming the public schools for international economic problems appealed to those members of the Republican constituency who were highly critical of the workings of the schools. On the other hand, the report could not call for federal intervention to aid schools because of Republican promises to decrease federal involvement in education. Noted by Gorski (2007), the Reagan administration did place the issue of schooling on a national political agenda by linking it to a national trade problem. The net effect of this action was to ensure that education would remain a national issue. Choice, privatization, charter schools, and multicultural education put the final nail in the coffin of the common school movement of decades past while continuing the debate of the purposes and approaches of urban education in the 21st century.

Additionally, "scientific" studies, such as *The Bell Curve* shifted the blame for failure from schools to learners, especially low-income and minority learners. Epstein (2005) stated that focusing on deficiencies of the victims rather than on the structure of economic and educational institutions has become the norm. This concept of equality of opportunity gave the expert and the school a major role in determining an individual's place in society. "In essence, scientific measurement, combined with a differentiated curriculum, was to develop human capital by objectively controlling the provision of equality of opportunity" (Gorski, 2007, p. 18). Spring (2005) added that no longer did learners receive an equal, or common, education; rather, they received different educations based on individual differences. As demonstrated by the history of U.S. education, the group or groups that control the schools (those in power: White

men and their colleagues) have a major influence in determining the outcomes of attempts to provide equality of opportunity and the direction of progress for schools.

The composition of the teaching and school leadership force in U.S. urban schools is an additional issue to take to task in order to grasp factors that have prevented or derailed previous attempts at effective urban school change efforts. Teacher selection is a case of institutional racism that began with the schoolmarm who remained the backbone of the educational system and served as a model of republican motherhood and a symbol of charity (Epstein, 2005; Spring, 2005).

> Journal Entry, March 2006:*"Why on earth would a Black male want to be an English teacher in the CCSD?" Throughout my learning experiences in the CCSD, as a K-12 student, teacher and school administrator, I felt and continue to feel isolated among the predominately White population. I can never forget how it feels to be the only one. The question that resounds in my mind is "Do I belong here?" The answer that I have come to accept, "No!"*
>
> *I have been accused of acting White simply because I am "articulate" and "well-spoken" and I am cognizant of being viewed as a sell-out for no longer living in my childhood community: one that turned its back on me long before today.*
>
> *I feel used by people with evil intentions and manipulative tendencies who point to my academic success and professional achievements to deny the existence of racism. High-achieving marginalized people are brought out and celebrated. Yet, society does not see the price until I am "allowed" to talk. Schwartz (2002) states, "That's because students of color who are the only ones, or one of a few, often become the representative for their race or ethnicity" (p. x).*
>
> *Society has a TV expectation of Black people; for example, that I have this swagger. That I'm all about jokes, flashy clothes, and hip hop. During my one year as an undergraduate student at Mesa State College in Grand Junction, Colorado, upon meeting my dorm roommate— a White teen from Greely, Colorado named Mike— for the first time as I moved my belongings into our shared space, he responded with candor, "Wow! You're the first Black person I have ever seen in person and you're not what I expected."*

Creating a stable, inexpensive teaching force was one step in the actualization of the common school movement. “The subservient status of women [and their desire to improve their status in society] was an important factor in creating and sustaining the hierarchical system of public education we have today” (Spring, 2005, p. 134). Teachers operate as agents to either perpetuate the institutional structures and those people who hold power within that structure, or to be critical of the institution and those who hold power as means to lessen oppression (Breunig, 2005).

Documented by *Rethinking Schools* editors Christensen and Karp (2003), 40% of the learners in public schools are from communities of color, while more than 90% of the teachers are White. The monolingual, singular approach to who teaches and what is taught presents a logically and racially skewed understanding of the nation in which we live-- a nation in which our schools will be the first major institutions to experience a non-White student majority (Orfield, 2003). Analyzing and interpreting the California Basic Educational Skills Test (CBEST), as a national indicator of teacher certification assessments, Epstein (2005) illustrated the maze that is the teacher selection and certification process that confronts prospective teachers of color which ultimately denies them access to the teaching field. As evidenced in the 1997 *Fair Test Examiner*, since its implementation in 1982, in total, 40,000 African Americans, Latinos, and Asians have been denied teaching credentials by the CBEST.

For better or worse, the White Anglo-Saxon Protestant tradition was for two centuries-- and in crucial respects still is-- the dominant influence on North American culture, society, and schooling (Breunig, 2005; hooks, 1994; Zinn, 2005). In its most simplistic definition, this form of globalization tends to maintain the well-known

patterns of Western economic and cultural imperialism. It promotes a dominant set of cultural practices and values-- one vision of how life is to be lived at the expense of all others (Sardar & Van Loon, 2005). The use of education as a form of globalization[13] is evident today in U.S. urban schools. Despite a century of public school reform efforts, or because of it, evidence from highlighted historical periods indicates that public schools play an integral role in sustaining and legitimizing the structure of inequality in North America (Rushing, 2001).

## Educational Equity in the U.S. Urban Public School: An Illusion

> Journal Entries, November 2009: *One lesson I have come to understand through my lived experiences in K-12 schooling environments is about school reform and the deception involved. The bottom line in school reform is that it is about politics. Everything is political! And in the latest school reform ventures and cyclical conversations, national conferences and research on best-practices, I am learning that the politics is often pretty dirty.*
>
> *As an administrator in an urban secondary school and a former English teacher in various urban secondary schools, I have participated in leadership meetings where influential people— policymakers, school district officials, other school administrators, and even teachers— don't really want to see the achievement gaps between and among ethnic groups and their White counterparts along the educational pipeline. As noted by Thompson (2007) many of these people actually benefit from the gaps.*
>
> *Related to what I have experienced about the role of dirty politics in impeding true school reform is the pressure on administration and other educators to accept ineffective programs and policies that are forced on them. This has created a large cadre of weak, status quo, cowardly, and unethical school leaders.*

Where is educational equity in U.S. urban secondary schools? In a search for possible solutions to the problems of educational inequity, U.S. history provides a list of abandoned laws, *de facto* regulations, and artifacts that focus exclusively on the

[13] Globalization: "The process that is transforming the world into the proverbial 'global village', rapidly shrinking distances, [and] compressing space and time" (Sardar & Van Loon, 2005, p. 161).

characteristics of the learners themselves (Delpit, 1988; Epstein, 2006; Oakes, 1985; Thompson, 2007). Oakes (1985) presented,

> We looked for sources of educational failure in their homes, their neighborhoods, their language, their culture, even in their genes. In all our searching we almost entirely overlooked the possibility that what happens within schools might contribute to unequal opportunities and outcomes. We neglected to examine the content and processes of schooling itself for ways they might contribute to school failure. (p. xvi)

School reform in urban schools often invokes a common rhetoric: "high standards for all," "all children can learn," "no child should be left behind." These high-minded sentiments resonate with all who care about schools and children. According to Karp (2003) rhetoric about school reform can hide the historic reality that schools have always had a dual character. On one side, public schools remain to be society's most important democratic institution. They are the product of decades of effort to give substance to the nation's promise of equal opportunity, self-improvement, and success through hard work and achievement. "Schools play a key role in the [U.S.] dreams of class mobility and generational progress, and their success or failure has a daily impact on the lives and prospects of millions of children and families" (p. 263).

On the opposite side, public schools historically have been instruments for reproducing class and race privilege as it exists in the larger society (Delpit, 1988; Epstein, 2006; Karp, 2003; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). The low academic performances of schools in poor areas, the inadequate facilities, the toleration of failure, and the disrespect for communities of color reflect the real relations of inequality and injustice that permeate our society. Christensen and Karp (2003) lamented,

> Through ideology, gate-keeping, various forms of stratification, and bureaucratic—often authoritarian—administration, schools function as a large sifting and labeling operation that re-creates and justifies existing distributions of wealth and power. In many ways, schools reproduce the very inequality that American mythology professes they are designed to overcome. (p. 264)

Sociologist and secondary English teacher Bugni added that this reproduction changes the young boy or young woman forever. Their essence of self and their hope for success are taken from them and buried deep within alternative institutions such as welfare, prisons, drug rehab centers, and justice courts (Valerie Bugni, personal communication, July 8, 2008).

*The Disappointment of Past School Reform Initiatives*

No three words in educational discourse today dominate educational policy conversation and dialogues more than *urban school reform* (Neito, 2003). All manners on how to rescue public education have been made and tried, as documented through research and history: charter schools, more testing for learners and for teachers, standards-based assessments, vouchers, more rigorous curriculum, science and math focus, smaller learning communities, more professional development, No Child Left Behind federal mandates, best practices, longer school days, professional learning communities, career academies, parent education, multicultural celebrations, breaking ranks strategies, and culturally relevant instruction are noted, just to name a few (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Epstein, 2006; Kolderie, 2004; NASSP, 2004; Neito, 2003; Oakes & Lipton, 2006; Thompson, 2007). The opening paragraphs of the 1983 *A Nation at Risk* report set the tone and served as a catalyst for a myriad of school improvement initiatives throughout the United States that came to be known collectively as the Excellence Movement:

> Our nation is at risk. Our once unchallenged preeminence in commerce, industry, science and technological innovation is being overtaken by competitors throughout the world…The educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a nation and as a people…If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war…We have, in effect, been committing an act of unthinking, unilateral educational disarmament. (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, p. 5)

More than 300 state and national task forces had investigated the condition of public education in North America within 2 years of the publication of the report (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). The United States Department of Education (1994) described the national response to *A Nation at Risk* as "nothing short of extraordinary" (p. 11), and Secretary of Education at the time, Terrell Bell, reported that the arduous work of reform was "already bearing fruit" (p. 8).

The Excellence Movement offered a consistent direction for reform; however, it was not a new direction. According to Sarason (1990), schools simply needed to do more. "Learners needed to earn more credits for graduation in courses that were more rigorous and required more homework" (p. 30). In addition, schools added more days to the school year and lengthened the school day. Schools tested learners more frequently and expected more of teachers both before offering employment and before extending tenure. "The reforms of the Excellence Movement simply called for an intensification of existing practices. They contained no new ideas" (DuFour & Eaker, 1998, p. 3).

The demise of the Excellence Movement prompted a new two-tier approach to school reform accompanied by the election of President George H.W. Bush in 1988. The first part of the initiative called for national educational goals and standards. In

1989, President Bush convened the nation's governors for a summit meeting on education. The result of the Bush summit was the identification of "Goals 2000"-- six national goals for education. The four cornerstones of "Goals 2000" were the creation of model schools, national standards, voluntary national achievement tests, and incentives for parental choice. In 1991, 2 years after the Bush summit, the National Center on Education and the Economy joined forces with the Learning Research and Development Center at the University of Pittsburg to design a national testing system. Then in 1994, Congress created the National Education Standards and Improvement Council to review and endorse state and national standards. Critics asserted that the standards movement represented a federal takeover of the schools and an attempt to "indoctrinate learners to the liberal agenda" (Chinn & Gollnick, 1998).

As the movement established to create national educational goals and standards advanced, a parallel movement attempted to allot individual schools more freedom to develop the best methods to achieve these goals. The failure of the Excellence Movement is noted by Vander Ark (2002):

> it represented a "top-down" attempt to mandate improvement. Early reform initiatives had tended toward standardization, increased reliance on rules and regulations, and detailed specifications of school practices at the expense of local autonomy. Impetus for the movement had come from elected officials and business. Control was centered in state legislatures. Practitioners had become mere pawns in the movement, and the vast majority of the reform efforts had simply been imposed on them. Ultimately, the paired concepts of establishing national goals seemed to offer a viable alternative to the failed Excellence Movement. National goals could address a national crisis, while job-site autonomy and individual empowerment seemed to be consistent with best practices in the private sector. (p. 6)

The new emphasis on site-based reform came to be known as the Restructuring Movement. Common features of comprehensive reform during this

movement were noted: site-based management with meaningful authority over staffing, program, and budget; shared decision making; staff teams with frequent, shared planning time and shared responsibility for student instruction; multi-year instructional or advisory groups; and heterogeneous grouping in core subjects (Newman, Marks, & Gamoran, 1995). The Restructuring Movement engendered considerable optimism as it grew to become synonymous with school reform in the late 1990s and the start of the 21st century. The term itself seemed to encompass more than mere innovation or improvement, suggesting instead "a comprehensive redesign and systemic transformation of the school" (DuFour & Eaker, 1998, p. 7). The simplistic, more-of-the-same approaches of previous reform efforts had apparently been replaced by a strategy based on a more realistic assumption and belief: Monumental changes were necessary if schools were to successfully respond to the enormous challenges before them. As Barth (1990) wrote, "The advent of the restructuring movement brought a sudden confidence that teachers and principals, with the help of parents and learners, can get their own schoolhouse in order" (p. 126).

In spite of a set of Utopia-laden ideals, the high hopes of the Restructuring Movement have yet to materialize. Studies of the movement's impact on school reform illustrate a focus on peripheral issues rather than systemic, infrastructure-based issues. A predictable pattern of school improvement emerged: focus on student discipline, parental involvement, and faculty morale (Noguera, 2008; Thompson, 2007). Certainly student discipline, parental involvement, and staff morale are important issues and should be a part of a school's comprehensive improvement

efforts; however, it is imperative that these initiatives consider what happens in the heart of the school's enterprise-- the classroom. "Unfortunately, restructuring seems to have left learners virtually untouched by the reforms that swirl around, but not within, their classrooms" (Sarason, 1990, p. 39). As a result, the Restructuring Movement, like the Excellence Movement before it, was unable to make a real difference in the ability of U.S. schools to meet the challenges they face.

The inability of previous school reform efforts served as the catalyst for the current federal government education initiative: No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). The political agenda that had begun in the 1970s for control of educational practices and institutions through standardization and school choice returned. The testing requirements of NCLB conformed to the goal of producing workers to compete in a global economy that was first expressed in the 1983 report *A Nation at Risk* and in previous educational plans of presidential administrations (Spring, 2005). Simplistically, the legislation mandates a schedule, target population, and reporting procedures for high-stakes testing and academic standards. Every other year a sample of fourth and eighth graders in each state are required to take national tests administered by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).

As documented by Thompson (2007), the national debate continues over NCLB; however, the feelings of those directly affected by the myriad of mandated tests-- learners-- can be articulated with the words of one high school student who participated in one of her research studies: "It don't make no sense to give us all these tests" (p. 45). As a result of public accountability in the form of published achievement reports (Adequate Yearly Progress), school choice emerged as an option,

allowing parents in schools that did not show improvement within 2 years the choice of sending their children to another public school. A concern that became a reality in executing this part of the plan was the lack of space in other public schools to accommodate learners from failing schools.

Educational policy and politics caused by NCLB's pressure on educators and learners to raise test scores and accountability has led some officials to resort to extreme measures. For-profit, private companies such as Edison Schools, Inc., Public Strategies Group, Inc., Chancellor Beacon Academies, Mosaic Education, Inc., National Heritage Academies, and Education Services, Inc., the first for-profit private firm under contract to run a public school, have been hired by many school districts to help meet the requirements established by NCLB. These businesses help school districts align their curriculum to state standards while providing teachers with research-based and/or specifically created company classroom management and technology training. History documents the rise and predictable fall, in the form of bankruptcy, of private companies attempting to run public schools. Privatization, while presented in rhetoric extolling the ability of the marketplace to unleash creativity and innovation, at the core is a way for profit-seeking companies to get their hands on " a bigger share of the $350 billion-a-year K-12 education industry" (Miner, 2003, p. 177). In the end, power and money-- who gets more and who gets less-- remain an essential priority of the privatization struggle. Educational improvement has been reduced to a sideshow.

More aggressive efforts to meet NCLB mandates have materialized in larger school districts in the nation. For example, in June 2004, officials of the Chicago

Public Schools (CPS), the third largest school district in the nation serving over 400, 000 K-12 learners, announced that low-performing schools would be closed or down-sized and 100 new schools would be created utilizing the National Teacher Academy model. “If the latest CPS reform is successful, by [the end of] 2010, one-third of the city’s schools will be charter schools, one-third will be controlled by the CPS, and one-third will be run independently by business and religious groups” (Thompson, 2007, p. 3). Yet another component of urban school reform has been the development of charter schools. Part of the Choice Movement, charter schools and the previously mentioned reform efforts, fight to improve a better place within the educational system for selected individuals versus improving the entire system for all learners.

CNN reported in a special town hall meeting, “Fixing America’s Schools,” that as of early 2010, nearly 3,000 charter schools have opened throughout the nation (CNN Report, 2010). In addition, Epstein (2006) identified four “unchanging and generally unmentioned realities about U.S. education” (p. 4) that place reform and ideas about urban school improvement within a reality-based, sociopolitical context that should serve as a guide to impact all other conversations about urban school reinvention: (a) America is a capitalist country; (b) the American education system is situated upon a structure of tests and a sorting paradigm from a European ideology of intelligence; (c) democracy is limited; and most significantly, (d) there is no single public American education system. These four concepts will be explained in further detail in the dissertation to provide a context in which to view these ideologies as they connect to the research study.

A review of related and relevant literature addressing urban secondary educational reform efforts and rethinking schools confirms that past efforts to improve and/or transform schools have not had the anticipated results for a number of reasons: the complexity of the task, misplaced focus and ineffective strategies, lack of clarity on the intended results, failure to persist, and a lack of understanding of the change process (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Perry, 2005). As a former veteran urban school principal summarized her experiences to me, "Everything has changed, but nothing is different" (Sylvia Tegano, personal communication, January 4, 2008). In addition, too many school reform efforts fail to address or confront the racial, class, gender, language, and sexual identity biases woven into the U.S. social fabric. Noguera (2008) argued that the problems and issues confronting urban schools are typically manifestations of larger societal problems related to social inequality, racism, and the deterioration of urban areas.

Today, in the U.S. secondary public educational system, learners of color, specifically African American and Latino/a, are more segregated than ever before (Bell, 1983; Fried, 2005; Fruchter, 2007; Noguera, 2008; Perry et al., 2003; Thompson, 2007). Diversity is growing rapidly in the nation's suburban sector, which is becoming the center of U.S. life and politics. Yet, U.S. public schools remain largely segregated and are becoming more so (Schott, 2008). Segregation by race relates to segregation by poverty and to many forms of educational inequality for African American marginalized learners. "Race matters strongly and segregation is a failed educational policy" (Christensen & Karp, 2003, p. 164). The basic message is that, a half century after the Supreme Court struck down "separate but equal" schools,

segregation still produces deeply unequal education experiences for learners of color, and that even where integrated schools have better opportunities, this does not ensure equal access to those opportunities (Orfield, 2003). This fact has resulted in challenges, limitations, and miscalculations of desegregation policies that present a manipulated view of educational equity.

> Journal Entry, November 2009: *If and whenever I mention race, racism, and/or ways to address structural inequality the same thing happens: most people become visibly upset or uncomfortable. They clearly want me to shut up, and their body language, facial expressions, and sometimes even their comments suggest that I'm acting in a politically unacceptable and incorrect manner.*
>
> *I have been reprimanded and told to "know my place" while being informed that it's not acceptable to speak boldly and directly to a fellow administrator and/or a supervisor. I struggle daily to be noticed, understood, taken seriously and respected by those who fear a Black male who does not fit into their box. Marion, it is time to get off of this wheel of no motion.*

According to Bell (2004), "the statistics on resegregation painfully underscore the fact that many African American and Hispanic children are enrolled in schools as separate and probably more unequal than those their parents and grandparents attended under the era of 'separate but equal' " (p. 114). Grant (1993) argued that the *Brown* decision failed to substantively improve the education of African American learners because it represented a restrictive view of equality. By focusing strictly on the process of physical desegregation, the *Brown* court neglected other strategies with the potential to achieve truly equitable educational outcomes for all learners. In a reflection essay on desegregation, Mizell (2004) presented her perspective: "Can 'separate but equal' schools really work? We don't know: We've never really had them. Does integration work? Haven't had much experience with that, either" (p. 6).

After establishing an understanding of how the past has shaped the present state of urban secondary schools, attention turns to why the schools of today must change. The intent of this research study is to present an alternative perspective(s) to reconceptualize (rethink) and reinvent (redesign) the possibilities for the U.S. urban secondary school. A critical race methodological approach anchored in a CRT methodological framework will be used to articulate, examine, and analyze experiences and perspectives from learners, parents, school personnel, teachers, and scholar-practitioners in the U.S. urban secondary educational community. This research study enables me to examine my experiences along the educational pipeline to explore interconnections between and among various stratification initiatives in society, and articulate how these initiatives either create and sustain, or prevent and destroy, effective and efficient urban school change efforts.

# CHAPTER THREE

# RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

*My own life experiences are immediately accessible to me in a way that no one else's are. In drawing up personal descriptions of lived-experiences, the phenomenologist knows that one's own experiences are also the possible experiences of others. (van Manen, 1990, p. 54)*

## *Qualitative Research*

Qualitative research is "based on a belief in multiple realities" (Harrison, 2002, p. 35). As stated earlier in Chapter 1, my qualitative research study represents a narrative of the self. My qualitative research study explores my lived experiences in K-12 education as a marginalized learner in a natural setting where my experiences were the data and I was the instrument of data collection. My work is "pragmatic, interpretive, and grounded in lived experiences" and was conducted by me; someone who "[is] intrigued with the complexity of social interactions as expressed in daily life and with the meanings…attribute[d] to these interactions" (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 2).

There is no hypothesis to be tested in this study; there is only a problem to be explored. The problem: How does a marginalized learner, specifically an African American male in K-12 urban education, create the circumstances and the opportunities to be educated? Qualitative research was selected for this study to present a highly personalized and retrospective account of the complexities, perspectives, interpretations, and lived experiences of a marginalized learner with 22 years of daily experiences — K-12 urban school student, English teacher, and school administrator, in the same school district. As noted earlier, underlying this study is

how exposing, discussing, and understanding an educational *lifeworld*— "the world as [we] immediately experience it" (Husserl, 1970)— may serve as a leverage point for those interested in informing educational practices and reconceptualizing urban school change efforts.

As Glesne (1999) explained, "To understand the nature of constructed realities, qualitative researchers interact and talk with participants about their perceptions" (p. 5). These perceptions are in large part products of individual construction and interpretation; therefore, they cannot be measured or analyzed quantitatively, which is why the qualitative paradigm is most appropriate for this particular research study.

My study underscores learning in urban schools to understand the conditions that impact marginalized learners, specifically me, an African American male along the educational pipeline. While my lived experiences serve as the sole source of data, they are not presented to represent all voices to be heard and acknowledged when addressing issues of lived experiences of marginalized learners in U.S. urban schools. My stories contribute to a national mosaic of silenced voices clamoring to be heard. I contend that my voice and those of other marginalized learners involved in the daily realities of urban schooling are imperative to further understand how to improve schools if people are willing to listen. Montecinos (1995) asserted that the ideology of racism creates, maintains, and justifies the use of a "master narrative" in storytelling. It is within the context of racism that "monovocal" stories about the low educational achievement and attainment of marginalized learners of color are told. To offset this one-dimensional, monovocal approach, through my narrative, I present alternative

views to the status quo stories on the subject of lived experiences of a marginalized learner in urban schools.

*Narrative Inquiry*

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) explained, “People by nature lead storied lives, whereas narrative researchers describe such lives, collect and tell stories of them, and write narratives of experience” (p. 131). Drawing from my personal experiences presented as collected stories, I write a narrative with an intent to present shared experiences of marginalized learning in urban education. My experiences became the story and I was the storyteller, telling and interpreting the meaning of my collective experiences. Furthermore, my interpretations will become part of the narrative inquiry. Harrison (2002) explained, “The very act of storytelling is an act of evaluation. In order to look at the episode in our lives, we move from an experience to a reflection upon the experience— a story” (p. 86).

Recent interest in personal narratives emerged as part of the postmodern turn in educational research and the rise of critical ethnography, multicultural scholarship, and feminist theory, as well as qualitative research methods generally (see, e.g., Bloom, 1998; Burdell & Swadener, 1999). Narrative research challenges the assumptions of dominant discourse, concerning itself with highlighting marginalized voices, multiple voices within narratives, and reflexive relationships between the researcher and the researched.

Many scholars turn to narrative to study the power relations and oppositional voice. The narratives of marginalized groups, as embodiments of experiential knowledge, are central to the educational research of lived experiences (Delgado,

1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002a). The growing literature on narrative research has sparked a new awareness of people in schools as storied beings and in personal narratives as windows into a grand narrative of schooling (Burdell & Swadener, 1999; Clandinin & Connelly, 2004; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman, 2002).

*Phenomenology*

*Philosophers, as things now stand, are all too fond of offering criticism from on high instead of studying and understanding things from within. (Husserl, 1970, p. 2)*

At its core, phenomenology is the study of lived experience. "Phenomenology is the study of the *lifeworld*— the world as we immediately experience it pre-reflectively rather than as we conceptualize, categorize, or reflect on it" (Husserl, 1970; van Manen 1990). First, it should be understood that phenomenology is "an umbrella term encompassing both a philosophy and a range of research methods" (Finlay, 2009, p. 474). Edmund Husserl, noted as the "father of phenomenology," introduced phenomenology as an interpretive epistemology that perceives phenomena in its pure essence without pre-conceived rationalizing, or empirical reasoning (Husserl, 1970). Stated in the most simplistic terms, Moustakas (1994) posits that the aim of phenomenological research is to capture subjective, insider meanings and what the lived experience feels like.

Phenomenology aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences. Phenomenological research is based on an interpretive epistemology or ways of knowing. Interpretive epistemology has its ontological roots, the science of exploring how we come to exist and be, in social

constructivism[14]. As a result, reality is viewed as socially constructed and does not exist independently of the mind of the actors involved in the social world (Greene, 1988). Seminal works and scholars who have contributed to the interpretive study of knowledge through phenomenology are Martin Heidegger (1968), Edmund Husserl (1970), Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962), and Alfred Schutz (1972). Thompson, Henley, and Pollio (2006) explained the phenomenological focus of research as follows:

> The research focus is on experience as described from a first-person view, where researchers seek to apprehend a pattern as it emerges. The research strategy is holistic and seeks to relate descriptions of specific experiences to each other and to the overall context of the lifeworld. The research goal is to give a thematic experience of experience. (p. 137)

Rather than trying to confirm or disprove existing theories, the aim of phenomenological research is to develop "bottom-up" interpretive theories that are inextricably "grounded" in the lived world (van Manen, 1990). From a phenomenological point of view, to do research is always to question the way we experience the world, to want to know the world in which we live as human beings. My phenomenological account aims to describe an experience— being a marginalized learner along the educational pipeline— in all its density and richness. In the process, it is my intent to "blur the boundaries between art and science…Phenomenology, not unlike poetry, involves the voice in an original singing of the world" (van Manen, 1990, p. 13). As a result, my story will provide rich descriptions through creative media such as poetry, anecdotes, music lyrics, excerpts from literature, and through the use of metaphor.

[14] Social constructivism: a sociological theory that posits that groups construct knowledge for one another, collaboratively creating a small culture of shared artifacts with shared meanings (Corden, 2001).

> Journal Entry, May 2009: *In order to disrupt forms of knowledge that render my identity inconsequential, I have been situated by society and at times by myself at the margins of the educational pipeline. Here, in the margins, is a space where my lived experiences intertwined with my truth, are soaked directly into traditional academic settings and serious texts, such as this dissertation. My study acknowledges and validates my presence as well as draws attention to my marginal position inside the educational pipeline.*

I occupy a liminal space. Hurtado (1989) refers to this space as the ability to "inhabit multiple selves without feeling incoherence" (p. 45). I am convinced that in this space, I have an open mind about possibilities for change. In addition, the justification to theorize such narratives serves to further emphasize the complex relationships between the personal and the professional as it pertains, in this case, to the formation of ideologies and practices connected to being a marginalized learner along the educational pipeline.

## Living a Theory

How I chose to think and write about my lived experiences along the educational pipeline as an educational researcher is worthy of note. I began with critical race theory (CRT) as a perspective and then used phenomenology as a methodology because it enabled me the interpretive flexibility to tell my story. Together they profoundly encompass what is deeply rooted in how I experience and think about the world. Marrying these two approaches with my narrative writing has illuminated my truth and enabled me to relay my information in an authentic way. My perspective is critical race theory. That perspective is best applied as a congruent perspective of racial and personal history. Existing methodological approaches constrict that application, so I have chosen a phenomenological approach because it does not restrict expression based on a set of pre-determined guidelines. The nature

of the problem I am dealing via my phenomenological approach is one best told through first-person narratives.

Given the above information, I use my autobiographical experiences as valid phenomenological research to contribute to existing knowledge around the issues of lived experiences of marginalized students, teachers, and administrators in urban schools being used as a catalyst to inform educational practice. I experience tenets of CRT through the telling of my lived experiences as a marginalized learner. Articulated throughout my dissertation are the ways in which diverse educational institutions have shaped and influenced my ideological perspectives regarding race, identity, and professional practice.

At the center of my dissertation is a perspective that I argue has been marginalized. This perspective is derived from my *lifeworld* and lived experiences in urban schools in the same school district spanning a time period of 22 years. My stories provide a retrospective understanding, in particular, of a plight of marginalized learning in urban schools (Fernandez, 2002; Garcia, 2001; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002b).

Within this framework, Delgado and Stefancic (2000) introduced the notion of a "voice-of-color thesis," which asserts why my experiences and narratives have inherent value. "Coexisting in somewhat uneasy tension with antiessentialism, the voice-of-color thesis holds that because of their different histories and experiences, African American… writers and thinkers may be able to communicate to their white counterparts matters that whites are unlikely to know" (Parker et al., 1999).

In addition, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) argue, "the voice of people of color is required for a complete analysis of the educational system… Without authentic voices of people of color it is doubtful that we can say or know anything useful about education in their communities" (p. 58). The "voice" component provides a way to communicate my experiences and realities as a marginalized learner, a progressive step on the road to equity and justice for those in urban school communities. The use of counterstoryelling, as defined within the framework of critical race theory, enabled me to make sense of my experiences as a Black male learner in a predominately non-Black environment. As a result, I began the process of humanizing quantitative data and recognizing silenced voices in qualitative data.

## Taking a Critical Stance:

## A Critical Race Theory Lens

*The simple matter of the color of one's skin profoundly affects the way one is treated, so radically shapes what one is allowed to think and feel about this society, that the decision to generalize from this division is valid. (Williams, 1991, p. 256).*

I wish to build on the work of seminal critical race theorists Bell (1983) who make claims of the liberatory and empowering effects of storytelling. Theorists who practice from this context rationalize the margins as a place for counterstorytelling, and justify the role of critical race theory that views

> race, gender, or class marginality as important social location and processes, with many positive strengths, and as a rich source of information used to empower or transform those at the social margins… the margins can and should be viewed as both sites of oppression and sites of resistance, empowerment, and transformation. (Bell, 1983, p. 215)

Critical Race Theory (CRT) emerged in education literature in 1995. Developed in the legal arena in the mid-1970s, CRT was designed in response to the

frustration of legal scholars grappling with the slow pace of racial reform in society. CRT, they argued, provided a framework for examining the systemic inequalities in the deliverance of justice, and the social structures that perpetuate hegemony (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

In crafting a response to Kozol's *Savage Inequalities* (1991), two scholars, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), set out to co-opt the legal framework, searching for a dynamic construct that would allow for and facilitate the explanation of inequalities plaguing public education. Their intent was to broaden the boundaries of education research literature to include arguments from law and social sciences. Building on their work, other scholars began to essentialize CRT so that the five tenets emerged: (a) counterstorytelling, (b) the critique of liberalism, (c) Whiteness as property, (d) interest-convergence, and (e) the permanence of racism, which are defined in Table 2 (below) (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004).

Table 2
*Basic Tenets of Critical Race Theory (CRT)*

| CRT Tenet | Definition |
|---|---|
| ***Counterstorytelling*** | ***A method of telling a story that aims to cast doubt on the validity of accepted premises or myths especially ones held by the majority (Matsuda, 1995).*** |
| Critique of liberalism | Critique of three basic notions embraced by liberal legal ideology: (a) colorblindness, (b) neutrality of the law, and (c) incremental change (Crenshaw, 1988). |
| Whiteness as property | Due to the history of race and racism in the U.S. and the role U.S. jurisprudence has played in reifying conceptions of race, the notion of Whiteness can be viewed as a property that is a right rather than a physical object (Harris, 1995). |

| | |
|---|---|
| Interest convergence | Significant progress for African Americans is achieved only when the goals of African Americans are consistent with the needs of Whites (Bell, 2004). |
| Permanence of racism | Racism, both conscious and unconscious, is a permanent component of American life; holds race to exist at the very nexus of American life (Bell, 1992). |

These five tenets are essential to understand how I take a CRT perspective on my lived experiences as a marginalized learner. In their presentation of these five tenets, DeCuir and Dixson (2004) noted that since the introduction of CRT to the field of education in 1995 by Ladson-Billings and Tate, educational researchers have focused on the counterstorytelling and the permanence of racism, and have encouraged the engagement of all five CRT tenets, which they believe could prove beneficial and instructive to education research.

All five tenets of CRT have been named; however, my research study utilizes and emphasizes counterstorytelling. The use of counterstorytelling provides a laser-like focus on my lived experiences within CRT. I use counterstorytelling, as defined within CRT, to present and document my experiences as a marginalized learner. I understand that future research taking a critical race theory perspective should scrutinize and analyze data within each of the tenets of CRT for a holistic and systemic view of how CRT may be used as a tool for presenting educational research from a different and necessary perspective.

*Counterstorytelling*

Because my dissertation focuses on using my stories and lived experiences as a marginalized learner to serve as a catalyst in which to possibly inform educational practice and reconceptualize urban school change efforts, I am drawn to the construct

of CRT for its power to illuminate the unseen forces of race politics and how those affect schooling practices. One powerful tool introduced by CRT is the use of counterstorytelling. Simply stated, the counterstory is a method of telling the stories of people whose stories often go untold. My lived experiences as a K-12 student, secondary English teacher, and secondary school administrator, located in underserved communities in the same school district, fit this description. I depended on the counterstory to provide a mechanism to voice the stories of my marginalized learning. This allowed the stories to become a tool for presenting, exposing, and challenging dominant discourse (Solorzano & Bernal, 2001). Storytelling has a rich and prolific tradition in African American, Latino/a, and Native American communities (Bell, 1983, 2004). Denzin (1997) reminds us that "oppressed groups have known instinctively that stories are an essential tool to their own survival and liberation" (p. 2436).

I am accustomed to the rhetoric and descriptions that are promoted about the urban schooling environment and all that it encompasses. I have described some of these throughout my dissertation in early sections. But there is more to say. The urban setting, including its schools cannot and should not be "essentialized" to its shortcomings or deficiencies. There are people who live rich storied lives within the communities that are so often relegated to their woes. My stories are a tale to counteract the majority perceptions. Counterstorytelling has enabled me to speak a more complex truth about urban schooling and my learning.

The standpoints and perspectives of African American marginalized learners impacted by the "white architects of public education" are important for informing

essential educational leadership and policy issues, particularly as they intersect with discussions on race and effective urban school change efforts. Delgado and Stefancic (2001) explained, "minority status…brings with it a presumed competence to speak about race and racism" (p. 9). Therefore, the application of CRT in education research serves as "an important tool for dismantling prevailing notions of educational fairness and neutrality in educational policy, practice, and research" (Villenas, Deyhle, & Parker, 1999, p. 33). Counterstorytelling, combined with CRT's emphasis on historical and legal context is fundamental to constructing, revealing, and sharing these truths and realities, which are missing from traditional educational research (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000, 2001).

*Critique of Liberalism*

Another key feature of CRT is its dissatisfaction with liberalism's conceptualization of the United States' problems of race and racism (2000, 2001). This critique of the liberal framework challenges the notions of the color-blind constitution, meritocracy, and the neutrality of constitutional law. In Supreme Court Justice John Harlan's dissent in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), he stated,

> The white race deems itself to be the dominant race in this country. And so it is, in prestige, in achievement, in education, in wealth, and in power…But in view of the constitution, in the eye of the law, there is in this country no superior, dominant ruling class of citizens. There is no caste. Our constitution is color-blind, and neither knows nor tolerates classes among citizens. In respect of civil rights, all citizens are equal before the law. The humblest is the peer of the most powerful. (163 U.S. 537)

Although this conception of a color-blind constitution may be a desired goal, notions of colorblindness, as well as neutrality of the law, are liberal ideological concepts that fail to acknowledge and consider the pervasiveness of American racism

and its role in perpetuating and recreating systems of oppression and subordination along the color line (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). As such, CRT scholars believe that "aggressive, color-conscious efforts" are needed to make true systemic change and alleviate the inequalities caused by racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000, p. 22).

Freedom
is an old joke
they tell at the Comedy Club
on amateur night
and everybody laughs
until the lights go out
and they can't see the person
sitting next to them. (Weems, 2001, p. 42)

*Whiteness as Property*

In her article, "Whiteness as Property," legal scholar Harris (1995) examined the connections between race and property in the U.S. and how this intertwined relationship has evolved from "historical forms of domination" to replicate "subordination in the present." Harris explained that in James Madison's view, property "embraces every thing to which a man may attach a value and have a right," in which Madison was referring to all of a person's legal rights. She further expounded,

> Whiteness defined the legal status of a person as slave or free. White identity conferred tangible and economically valuable benefits, and it was jealously guarded as a valued possession, allowed only to those who met a strict standard of proof. Whiteness—the right to white identity as embraced by the law—is property if by "property" one means all of a person's legal rights. (p. 280)

One of these privileges and benefits of Whiteness is the absolute right to exclude (Bell, 1992; Dixson & Rousseau, 2006). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) outlined the manifestation of this property function of Whiteness in education:

> In schooling, the absolute right to exclude was demonstrated initially by denying African Americans access to schooling altogether. Later, it was demonstrated by the creation and maintenance of separate schools. More recently it has been demonstrated by white flight and the growing insistence on vouchers, public funding of private schools, and schools of choice. Within schools, absolute right to exclude is demonstrated by resegregation via tracking. (p. 60)

The notion of Whiteness as a property right reinforces the idea that White is better or that "White is Right." According to Delgado and Stefancic (2001) most Whites do not see themselves as having a race, but being, simply, people. They do not believe that they think and reason from a White viewpoint, but from a universally valid one—"the truth"—what everyone thinks and believes. This normativity of Whiteness possesses the "ability to seem perspectiveless, or transparent," while all other "non-White" groups are "defined in terms of or in opposition to Whiteness—that which they are not" (pp. 78, 80).

In retelling a story of her Black grandmother (who because of her fair skin and straight hair was able to "pass" as being White in society) who lived and worked in Chicago during the 1930s, Fanon articulated,

> Becoming white meant gaining access to a whole set of public and private privileges that materially and permanently guaranteed basic subsistence needs and, therefore, survival. Becoming white increased the possibility of controlling critical aspects of one's life rather than being the object of others' domination. My grandmother's story illustrates the valorization of whiteness as treasured property in a society structured on racial caste. In ways so embedded that it is rarely apparent, the set of assumptions, privileges, and benefits that accompany the status of being white have become a valuable

> asset that whites sought to protect and that those who passed sought to attain--by fraud if necessary. Whites have come to expect and rely on these benefits, and over time these expectations have been affirmed, legitimated, and protected by the law. Even though the law is neither uniform nor explicit in all instances, in protecting settled expectations based on white privilege, American law has recognized a property interest in whiteness that, although unacknowledged, now forms the background against which legal disputes are framed, argued, and adjudicated. (1991, p. 15)

In his revolutionary work, *The Miseducation of the Negro*, Woodson (1933/1990) suggested,

> The same educational process which inspires and stimulates the oppressor with the thought that he is everything and has accomplished everything worthwhile, depresses and crushes at the same time the spark of genius in the Negro by making him feel that his race does not amount to much and never will measure up to the standards of other people. (p. xiii)

In examining the role of Whiteness as property, and its normativity as the standard by which all other ethnic groups are measured, it is important to acknowledge the powerful role of Whiteness, both historically and in the present. That examination must include how Whiteness as a property right works to perpetuate systemic discrimination and subordination within our educational institutions. As Harris (1995) explained,

> Whiteness as property has carried and produced a heavy legacy…It has blinded society to the systems of domination that work against so many by retaining an unvarying focus on vestiges of systemic racialized privilege which subordinates those perceived as a particularized few—the Others. It has thwarted not only conceptions of racial justice but also conceptions of property which embrace more equitable possibilities. (p. 290)

Unfortunately, barriers to these equitable possibilities are also created and sustained by what CRT scholars describe as the principle of interest convergence.

*Interest Convergence*

Pioneered by Derrick Bell, *interest convergence* is the concept that "the majority group tolerates advances for racial justice only when it suits its interest to do so" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 149). Bell (2004) identified the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision as a classic example of interest convergence at work. In his book, *Silent Covenants: Brown v. Board of Education and the Unfulfilled Hopes for Racial Reform*, he questioned the motivation behind *Brown* and described it not as a manifestation of the nation's desire to provide equal educational opportunities for African American learners, but an anticommunist, foreign policy decision that was essential to improving America's image as a nation that purported the virtues of freedom, equality, and democracy for all citizens. Despite what may be perceived intent behind the *Brown* decision, the slow going "deliberate speed" by which the process of desegregation took place, when it did take place, was also limited by attempts to resegregate children within the desegregated schools. As Bell (2004) indicated,

> Faced with the necessity of complying with school desegregation plans, school officials adopted plans that merged interest-convergence components with the willingness to sacrifice the interests of African American parents and children by, in effect, maintaining important aspects of segregation within racially balanced schools. (pp. 123-4)

*Permanence of Racism*

"Racism is a permanent component of American life" (Bell, 1992, p. 13).

An Agony, As Now

I am inside someone
who hates me. I look
out from his eyes. Smell
what fouled tunes come in
to his breath. Love his
wretched women.

Slits in the metal, for sun. Where
my eyes sit turning, at the cool air
the glance of light, or hard flesh
rubbed against me, a woman, a man,
without shadow, or voice, or meaning.

This is the enclosure (flesh,
where innocence is a weapon).
An abstraction. Touch. Not mine.
Or yours, if you are the soul I had
and abandoned when I was blind and had
my enemies carry me as a dead man
if he is beautiful, or pitied).

It can be pain. (As now, as all his
flesh hurts me.) It can be that. Or
pain. As when she ran from me into
that forest.

Or pain, the mind
silver spiraled whirled against the
sun, higher than even old men thought
God would be. Or pain. And the other. The
Yes. (Inside his books, his fingers. They
are withered yellow flowers and were never
beautiful.) The yes. You will, lost soul, say
beauty. Beauty, practiced, as the tree. The
slow river. A white sun in its wet sentences.
Or, the cold men in their gale. Ecstasy, Flesh
or soul. The yes. (Their robes blown. Their bowls
empty. They chant at my heels, not at yours.) Flesh
or soul, as corrupt. Where the answer moves too quickly.
Where the God is a self, after all.)

Cold air blown through narrow blind eyes. Flesh,
white hot meal. Glows as the day with its sun.
It is a human love. I live inside. A bony skeleton
you recognize as words or simple feeling.

But it has no feeling. As the metal, is hot, it is not,
given to love.

It burns the thing
inside it. And that thing
screams.

(Baraka as cited in Vangelist, 1995, p. 60)

Note: I interpret the metal Baraka speaks of in the poem above as institutionalized racism.

Some critics of CRT argue that this pessimistic view of race relations in the United States limits CRT's ability to offer viable solutions in solving race-related issues. Countering critics, CRT scholars argue that "racism is a means by which society allocates privilege and status" and that "racial hierarchies determine who gets tangible benefits, including the best jobs, the best schools, and invitations to parties in people's homes"; therefore, it is at the core of all systems in the United States (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p.17). Thus, the ideology of racial permanence in the U.S. asserts the discourse of racism should not be limited to "blatant acts of hate" or "broad generalizations about another group based on the color of their skin" (Lopez, 2003, pp. 69-70), but rather the ways in which racism is systemically connected to the "distribution of jobs, power, prestige, and wealth" (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995, p. xiv).

> Journal Entry, October 2008: *Danger: Educated Black Male! I enter the room and what they see is a young, black male and their preconceived ideas as to who and what I am and/or should be. "May I help you?" he asked. Yes, I'm here for the meeting. With a look of discontent and annoyance at my mere presence, he said, "This meeting is for administrators only!" I respond, "Yes, I know," as I walked to the front of the room and took a seat. On school campuses and in my K-12 schooling environments, racial barriers and impediments are commonplace, daily reality for me. This racism is situated in particular places and at particular times as it is practiced by numerous white students, faculty, staff members, and administrators. Today, as in the past, racial discrimination involves erecting physical, legal, and social barriers to make certain places, situations and positions inaccessible to, or difficult for me. In the process of developing strategies to cope with racial barriers, I have been injured psychologically and socially, and forced to waste much energy and time. How can I aspire to and work toward excellence when it has been presented to me that it is unclear whether or when evaluations of my work can*

> *or should be taken seriously? I am torn between how and if I can invest in and engage my full personhood, with all of my cultural formations, in my work, in my school, in my professional life if those I encounter are both attracted to and repulsed by who and what I represent: a challenge to their stereotypes.*

## Data Collection and Analysis

### *My Data*

My main sources of data were (a) 15-20 years of personal journal writings and personal reflections; (b) excerpts from literature and music that provide a context for my lived experiences; (c) documents and artifacts from teaching and school administration positions including personal and professional memos, statement briefs, letters, student work, lesson plans, 10 years of daily schedule calendar/planner information, event programs, articles relating to urban school issues, professional development and workshop presentation materials I created, personal and professional employee appraisal reports, budget documents, and conversations with current and past educators with whom I worked.

In addition, I observed my professional environment during instructional activities and attended formal school meetings and informal activities. I spent a total of 120 hours involved in observing the daily happenings at my current work environment. Artifacts were collected to enrich the portrait of my lived experiences. These artifacts include samples of student work, teacher work, school and district literature, and comprehensive education plans.

A non-academic goal of my self-study is for my writing to be co-owned, co-interpreted, and co-performed by each person who interacts with my work. With this foundation, data collection tools vary in narrative research and autobiographical

studies. To ensure proper validity Clandinin and Connelly (2004) articulated four criteria upon which my data collection was based:

1. Provide clear and detailed description of how we collect data and make explicit what counts as data in our work.
2. Provide clear and detailed descriptions of how we constructed the representation from our data. What specifics about the data led us to make this assumption?
3. Extend triangulation beyond multiple sources of data to include explorations of multiple ways to represent the same self-study.
4. Provide evidence that the research changed or evolved the educator and summarize its value to the profession. (pp. 27-28)

The criteria set forth by Clandinin and Connelly (2004) facilitate the underpinnings of my own documentation and data collection in my research study. Data for this research study have been with me since I began keeping a journal documenting personal, schooling, and lived experiences, starting in grade 6.

*Data Analysis*

To reiterate yet again, my research study is qualitative. As in other qualitative research studies with small samples, findings in this research study are meant to support or negate a pre-existing theoretical framework (analytic generalizability) rather than be generalized to populations (Yin, 1993).

To answer my research questions, I borrowed from the work of Strauss and Corbin (1990) who outlined a concept called *theoretical sensitivity*:

> a personal quality of the researcher. It indicates an awareness of the subtleties of meaning of data. One can come to the research situation with varying degrees of sensitivity depending upon previous reading and experience with or relevant to the data. They can also be developed further during the research process. Theoretical sensitivity refers to the attribute of having insight, the ability to give meaning to data, the capacity to understand, and capability to separate the pertinent from that which isn't. (pp. 41-42)

Using *theoretical sensitivity*, I used my lived experiences as a marginalized learner to create counterstories from (a) the data gathered from the research process itself, (b) the existing literature on the topic, (c) my own professional experiences, and (d) my own personal experiences. These stories stem from experiential knowledge and my own lived experiences.

Taylor, Gillborn, and Ladson-Billings (2005, 2009) posit that counter-stories serve at least four functions:

1. They can build community among those at the margins of society by putting a human and familiar face to educational theory and practice;
2. They can challenge the perceived wisdom of those at society's center by providing a context to understand and transform established belief systems;
3. They can open new windows into the reality of those at the margins of society by showing possibilities beyond the ones they live and demonstrating that they are not alone in their position; and
4. They can teach others that by combining elements from both the story and the current reality, one can construct another world that is richer than either the story or the reality alone. (p. 142)

**“Rage”**

I am appalled by the way K-12 urban public schools marginalize learners. The majority of the African American learners I have experienced over the past 22 years in the same urban school district, have stories to tell that may inform educational practice and serve as a catalyst to reconceptualize school change efforts, yet these stories have been silenced and muted. My research study is further prompted by my own mis-education and marginalized experiences along the educational pipeline.

Radical changes, and embracing experiential knowledge (wisdom) is needed to disrupt the institutionalized racist foundation of public schooling which has a watershed effect on all aspects of the lives of the students attending these schools. According to Weems (2001) included in this biased foundation is the unstated, erroneous notion that “other peoples children” (Delpit, 1995) are not worth as much as White children, that intelligence can be measured through testing, that White U.S. culture, and so-called standard North American English is superior. I add my experiential knowledge, lived experiences and avant-garde voice to the multiple conversations and practices which struggle against the notion that learning is relegated to the absorption of regurgitated blocks of knowledge.

“Reshaping an enterprise enrolling 50 million [learners] and employing 2.5 million teachers is easier said than done” (Harvey & Rainey, 2006, p. 260). In all school change efforts and progressive pedagogical practices there are periods of chaos and confusion combined with times when grave mistakes are made. “If we fear mistakes, doing things wrongly, constantly evaluating ourselves, we will never make [schools] a culturally diverse place where scholars and the curricula address every

dimension of that difference" (hooks, 1994, p. 33). During the process of writing this dissertation, through my research, readings, and conversations, I became strengthened in my cause: to empower marginalized learners in K-12 public urban education rise up in righteous indignation and shout, "Enough!" We must remain both patient and vigilant; embrace struggle and sacrifice; and celebrate diversity, welcome dissent, and rejoice in collective dedication to truth in order to reconceptualize school change efforts and to inform educational practice to meet the needs of those made invisible: marginalized learners.

Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night

Do not go gentle into that good night,
Old age should burn and rage at close of day;
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Though wise men at their end know dark is right,
Because their words had forked no lightning they
Do not go gentle into that good night.

Good men, the last wave by, crying how bright
Their frail deeds might have danced in a green bay,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Wild men who caught and sang the sun in flight,
And learn, too late, they grieved it on its way,
Do not go gentle into that good night.

Grave men, near death, who see with blinding sight
Blind eyes could blaze like meteors and be gay,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

And you, my father, there on the sad height,
Curse, bless me now with your fierce tears, I pray.
Do not go gentle into that good night.
Rage, rage against the dying of the light. (Thomas, 1951)

Although located in different geographical settings and different cultural and socio-economic communities throughout the United States, Thompson (2007) notes that public urban schools share three commonalities:

1. They have a high percentage of minority students;
2. They have a high percentage of low income students; and
3. They tend to be located in neighborhoods where most middle and upper-class Whites do not and would never live.

Public urban schools in the United States are the "backwater of public education, and their continued failure blends in easily with the panorama of pathologies afflicting the inner city and its residents" (Noguera, 2008, p. 229). Given the importance of what is at stake in our efforts to address needs of marginalized learners silenced in public urban schools, this research provides a methodological approach that may aid in presenting a different perspective-- a leverage point-- in which to assist those involved in urban schooling to reframe their own thinking to confront the realities of urban schooling to adjust their professional and personal practices and policies, thus addressing the needs of marginalized learners and validating their voices in traditional educational discourse.

"The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change" (Lorde, Second Sex Conference as cited in Lorde, 1985). Individuals involved in public urban education must go beyond meaningless generalizations about change efforts and to identify, describe, and classify the new models appearing, so the country may mobilize itself to get about the serious job of

embracing lived experiences as a framework to understand what is needed to promote quality education and quality schools for all of those learners pushed to the margins. This research study is my effort, one method, to do just that.

# CHAPTER FOUR

## ASSIMILATE…IMITATE…REBEL

### Education is My Life

How does a marginalized learner, specifically an African American male in K-12 urban education, create the circumstances and the opportunities to be educated? This question, the problem under study in my dissertation, is at the core of my thinking throughout this dissertation journey and the telling of my stories. I have spent much of my life in classrooms: first as a K-12 student, next as a college undergraduate, then as a master's student, and later as a doctoral student. I spent 6 years teaching English to secondary students in predominantly minority secondary schools. And since 2008, I've worked as the dean of students in a low-income, predominately Hispanic secondary school. I take time now to honor the purpose of my stories by aligning my dissertation study with Nelson's (2000) perspective on the mission of writing. Provided verbatim, and it its entirety, is the mission statement of a writing course created by Nelson entitled "A Writing Curriculum."

### A Writing Curriculum

> Tell me a story— a small story, a true story (or as true as you can tell it)— a story from your life. Tell me of a time when you were hurt— or afraid— or tell me of a time when you lost something— your keys, your heart, your mind, your mother or your father, your way in the world— tell me about a small joy you had today. Tell me a story— and your telling it will change you— and your telling it to me will change me— and such stories will move us both a little closer to the light. Tell me a story— and then tell me another— and I will tell you mine— and we will sit in a circle and listen carefully to each other. And then we will write thank-you notes to each other for the gifts given in these stories. And then we will do it again, anew. And we will continue doing this until everything begins to become properly precious until we stop killing each other and destroying the earth, until we care for it all so much that we ache, until we and the world are changed. (Nelson, 2000, p. 12)

I would be remiss to not articulate that at times I feel alone in my thinking, actions, perspectives, and experiences. My writing and the contents of this research study are intimately personal; this study is about one person: Marion. Sometimes I think to myself, "This isn't going to help anyone. This is going to be yet another Black person talking about and sharing his experiences with oppression, racism, and discrimination; same story, different cast." According to Lee (1999):

> One of the most frustrating challenges people face is putting their experiences into words others can understand and accept as real. This challenge is made more difficult since few experiences affect exclusively one group or another. This makes it easy for people to dismiss what they hear. (pp. 12-13)

In speaking with those in my life who bear witness to my lived experiences, I am reminded of those who have written their truths before me. My story will aid someone as well as contribute to the body of educational discourse. My lived experiences as a marginalized learner have encouraged me to speak my truth with candor and honesty.

## Marion's Educational Experiences

My Black neighborhood and Black identity is where it begins and ends. In reflecting on my educational experiences, through examination of my guiding research questions, I realized that I didn't maximize my potential during my schooling experiences, because I educated myself. I was raised with strict, loving parents. As a child, I learned through daily experiences inside traditional educational settings that because I am Black, less would be expected of me by my teachers; however, in spite of that reality, I internalized a ferocious work ethic to accomplish and achieve.

*My Neighborhood*

Life in Las Vegas during my elementary school years was fun, I guess. I lived on a street full of working, lower-middle-class Black families. Ms. Elsie, my babysitter, lived two houses to the left, next to Ralph, a known drug dealer and user. Ralph was a "friend" of my father's. Next door to the left of my house was an abandoned home, which over time, became a hotbed for the homeless and druggies to frequent. To the right lived the Marshalls'. The Marshalls' were a couple with five kids, all of whom I didn't care too much for, nor did they care too much for me. In all of my years living on this street, I never saw Mr. Marshall, but I always heard him. Everyday he would yell out orders and demands through the window from his bedroom that faced the street. Adding flavor and character to my neighborhood was Ms. Fletcher, an elderly woman with too many dogs to count and who was seen only once a month in her yard; and Ms. Cherry and her family who lived in a home that would make those on the television show "Hoarders" envious.

There were quite a few interesting characters on my neighborhood street. I remember one afternoon as me and my momma and I were sitting at the table eating when we fell to the floor because there was a man with a shotgun running down the street chasing a kid. We hit the floor because the man was actually firing the gun. This event was one of the strangest; however, not wildest happenings on the street of my childhood.

My childhood house in Las Vegas was on Michale Avenue. A maroon and white, three-bedroom, modest home with a big yard (front and back) filled with six bushes and two large palm trees in the front, and a large fig tree and grapevines in the

backyard. Over time, my house became like the home described in a vignette in the novella *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros (1984)[15]— windows covered with black bars, walls and the very foundation cracking and falling apart. Although I didn't know it at the time, my upbringing in the house on Michale Avenue was the last time that I knew what it was like to be "one of many," as opposed to being the "only one."

In working-class and poor neighborhoods, specifically Black neighborhoods, there are societal entrapments that aren't usually found in upper-echelon neighborhoods. Pawn shops, liquor stores and churches on every corner, and beauty shops are common business in Black communities. In addition, Asian-owned corner markets are numerous. The market near my home was called McNeil's Quick Check and was stereotypical (we had no 7 Eleven or AM/PM markets in my neighborhood, nor did we have a neighborhood grocery store). As a customer, I remember being treated like a criminal by the Asian store owners. They wanted only my money and would follow me around the store and back to the cash register to make certain that I didn't steal anything. This air of suspicion was the norm for me and it reminded me of a trip to visit my mother's side of the family in Louisiana.

The White store owners in Louisiana (a state that elected a former Grand Wizard of the Klux Klux Klan, David Duke, to its house of representatives in 1990; Duke unsuccessfully ran for governor of Louisiana, and earned over 38% of the total votes) would call Blacks "boy" or "gal." Growing up in Las Vegas, I wasn't familiar with what I view as this condescending tone or being addressed in such a

[15] Excerpt from vignette in *The House on Mango Street*: "I knew then that I had to have a house. A real house. One I could point to. But this isn't it. The house on Mango Street isn't it. For the time being, Mama says. Temporary, says Papa. But I know how those things go" (Cisneros, 1984, p. 5).

disrespectful way. “What you want boy?” huffed the bigoted store owner, from whom, by the way, I did not ask for any help. I responded, in my clear, enunciated voice emphasized, in the key of smarty informant, “My name is not boy and no I do not need any help from you, thank you.” Needless to say, the store owner’s face turned bright red and he began to roar something awful at me. The lack of freedom in my Las Vegas neighborhood markets reminded me of the oppressive ways of parts of the south, in particular Louisiana. It also reminds me of the internal questions that remain today:

> Journal Entry, April 2001: *How do I commit myself to achieve, to work hard over time in school, If I cannot predict (in school or outside of it) when or under what circumstances this hard work will be acknowledged or recognized? How do I commit myself to do intellectual work when African American intellectual inferiority is so much a part of the taken-for-granted notions of the mainstream society that individuals in and out of school routinely register doubts about my intellectual competence? How can I aspire to and work toward excellence when it is unclear whether or when evaluations of my work can or should be taken seriously? How can I invest in and engage my full personhood, in my class, my work, my school and my life if people are both attracted to and repulsed by these cultural formations? How can I commit myself to work hard over time if I know that , no matter what I accomplish, these accomplishments are not likely to change how I am viewed by the larger society, or alter my marginalized position in society?*

## K-12 Schooling

Note: My parents made sure I could count to 20, print my full name, read, and had memorized my address and home telephone number before I started school.

*Kindergarten*

*Figure 6.* Image of Marion Smith, Jr., and kindergarten teacher (Ms. Harris) after the graduation ceremony, May 1985.

Ms. Harris, my Black kindergarten teacher (light-skinned like me, my momma, and dad-- up until then, I had not seen another Black person of this hue, who was not bi-racial) loved us and I looked forward to going to school. After kindergarten, teachers that looked like me or Ms. Harris were not present in my life, excluding a short stint with my first grade teacher, a Black female (whom I can not remember at all), a Black male band teacher in sixth grade, and another Black male band teacher during my high school experience. This was my limited exposure to and first-hand experiences with Black teachers during my K-12 schooling.

*Music and Three Memorable Teachers*

I choose to focus on the positive experiences during my elementary years. While attending R.E. Tobler Elementary School, during grades 2-5, I was always the "only one" in my class, but I did not pay much attention. One of my favorite experiences is when I found my calling as a budding musician. I learned to play the recorder; I believe this served as a catalyst to my musicianship as a saxophonist during my secondary and post-secondary experiences in school. I also participated in the school choir.

Mrs. Kadlub was the Donna Reed of second grade. Standing 4 feet 11 inches, she was loving, kind, and encouraging. I could tell she loved children. To this day, I still have memories of her helping me remove gum out of my afro, after it had been placed there by students who were upset with me, for reasons that I never found out. Mrs. Kadlub is now an elementary school principal in the CCSD. I have not seen her since second grade.

*Before the gum incident:*

*After the gum incident:*

*Figure 7*: Images of Marion Smith, Jr., at the beginning and end of the 1985-1986 school year.

I remember Mr. Larson, my third-grade teacher and first male teacher, being like a Greek-god. He was a tall, statuesque, youthfully attractive White man. Mr.

Larson played four square with us during recess, allowed us to watch educational programming like “Where in the World is Carmen San Diego?” and “Square One” biweekly during class time. In addition, he introduced me to complex multiplication through creative math games, cursive handwriting, and to the joys of what schooling could offer when learners are in the presence of a creative and innovative teacher.

Mrs. Crenshaw was my fifth-grade teacher. She was a diva! She was fashionable, fierce, intelligent, strict, and someone who demanded and expected excellence of herself and her students. My love for reading began in this class. Each day after lunch and after my bi-weekly duty as a safety patrol monitor (complete with bright orange sash and badge), I ran back to class to catch the 30 minute reading time. As we lounged on the floor with pillows or on the couch in the reading corner of the room, Mrs. Crenshaw read aloud to the class as we followed along in our texts or simply listened. It was during this time that I was exposed to and fascinated with *The Chronicles of Narnia* series and the novel *Where the Red Fern Grows*. I remember crying during recess, after we completed the novel, because of its tragic ending.

*Middle School Minutia*

After elementary school, I attended three different secondary schools during each level of my schooling from grades 6-8: C.V.T. Gilbert, a sixth-grade center, located in my own neighborhood (for the first and only time in my K-12 experience was I able to walk to school while the White students for a change were bused); Brinley Junior High School with a “bad” (whatever that meant) reputation in the CCSD; and Swainston Middle School, a new middle school during its first year of operation.

My attendance at these schools was pivotal because it was the first time in my educational experiences that I was racially "one of many" Black students instead of the "only one" Black student at school and/or in the class. I was eager to not stick out and wanted to associate with other kids who were just like me. But that desire was not to be realized. In these schools, I found myself in another vortex of alienation. The Black kids at my school, who also lived in my neighborhood or surrounding community, really didn't like me. I was a band geek (carrying my tenor saxophone everywhere and stressing about where I would sit on the bus each day because no one saved a place for me or wanted to sit next to me), I enrolled in accelerated classes and did not hang out with my neighborhood peers while at school. They didn't like my clothes, they said that "I talked too White" and as I grappled with my sexual identity, they felt a need to make comments while calling me a "faggot!" under their breath. I never acknowledged any of this publicly, but in private it ate away at me mentally and emotionally. By the time I entered sixth grade, I already knew I was a same-gender-loving male. However, I never expressed or stated it aloud to anyone. To this day, I do not advertise my sexuality because this is one small part of who I am; it does not define me. Because of these viewed differences that I presented, I appeared to be the "smart one," and that didn't go over well at all. Once again, I was "the only one."

*Say What? A Memorable Middle School Moment*

A childhood lesson about being viewed as inferior or void of intelligence by my teachers proved to be a true statement in much, if not all, of my K-12 educational experiences. Never was it so blatant than in my math class at Brinley Junior High

School. My teacher wouldn't answer my questions in class, and I didn't understand the assignments or activities. When I would ask questions, she would act like I was bothering her or that she had to scurry off somewhere else. If she did stay, she would restate notes verbatim in attempts to "help" me.

I recall a specific time when I went home to complain to my parents after I received an unsatisfactory report in the mail documenting my math grade as an F; my momma and father requested a parent/teacher conference. When my parents communicated that they were perplexed as to how I received all A's and B's in my other classes, including science which required a lot of math, my teacher told my parents, "Studies show that Blacks don't have a propensity for math and that it was understandable that I just couldn't do the problems because I was not capable." My parents were taken aback and it was then, as I sat in the room in complete silence, that I made a silent vow to myself to what I now know is my ability to "assimilate, imitate, and rebel," as required, to play the game of school.

The next time I took a math exam, I received a B. My teacher was so shocked at my score that she accused me of cheating, even though I took the exam in the front row, while sitting directly in front of her. She made me stay after class and take a different exam. I got an A on that one. My secret: I realized that the teacher was not going to teach me, so I took initiative to leverage my resources and work closely with an advanced math student after school during self-defined tutorials.

This experience cemented an understanding that my parents had told me about performance. What I took away from this experience with my math teacher was this: I would have to work harder than White students (and White people outside of the

educational arena) to demonstrate that I am just as intelligent as them. I thought that it was a silly notion that, even though I was as smart, or even smarter than other students, I would have to work harder than they did in order to prove that my intellect even existed or should be acknowledged. I performed for others by working harder. I did receive good grades in school and I overly exerted myself. I had no doubt in my mind that I was intelligent. That realization should be all that mattered, but it was not.

*10th Grade*

The only "hard" class I took was taught by Ms. Lehman. She was a short, White teacher who was infamous on campus for her no-nonsense attitude and strict, business-like demeanor, and for failing students. Ms. Lehman introduced me to Greek mythology. I remember reading *Antigone*[16] and internalizing the story. I earned my first C on an English paper in her class. I'd always made easy A's. I thrived in this class because I challenged Ms. Lehman and worked to defy the odds of success in the class. This class challenged me to excel and to maximize my potential. My final grade of a B was the first academic grade that I earned that I was truly proud of. This feeling emerged once again while attending the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV), while enrolled in two undergraduate courses, Principles of Modern Grammar and History of the English Language, where my final grade was a C; I never learned so much and worked so hard to earn an academic grade.

*Middle School as a Professional*

[16] Written circa 442 BC, *Antigone* is the subject of a popular Greek tragedy written by Sophocles in which the main character of the same name challenges the system (gods versus mortals) and risks persecution, in an attempt to secure a respectable burial for her brother and to maintain family honor, even though her brother betrayed the state and was deemed a traitor.

During my second year as an English teacher, I transferred to Cram Middle School[17]. At the time, Cram was in its third year of operation and was the largest middle school, per student enrollment, in the state of Nevada serving over 2,200 students. My experiences in the short 180 days that I was employed at this school cement yet another understanding of my "place" as a marginalized learner.

Communications to me via e-mail or over the school PA system consisted of the following on a regular basis: "Mr. Smith please stop by the front office." "Mr. Smith you have a call on line one" (from a "concerned" parent). "Mr. Smith, I need to talk with you, before you leave campus today" (from a member of the administrative team). I was confronted by parents and the school administration, specifically the principal and assistant principal, weekly about my high expectations and refusal to compromise my integrity in working with the sixth grade students in my classroom. The barrage of inquiries were endless and frequent: "Why are you teaching it this way?" "Parents are concerned that you are too hard on students." "Why are these students required to write a research paper?" "How do you explain this?"

After 4 months on the job, it became clear to me: Cram Middle School is run and empowered by misinformed parents who listen to their children with total disregard to documented facts, paperwork, and other methods of communication. Parents dictate the reactionary decisions made by administrators. Their issues, concerns, problems, and questions over my classroom teaching practices, management style, procedures, and expectations dominated the daily conversations of Cram administrative work.

[17] Brian and Teri Cram Middle School is named after a former CCSD superintendent. Serving grades 6 through 8, Cram Middle School is located in an upper middle class, master-planned community called Aliante in Northwest Las Vegas, Nevada.

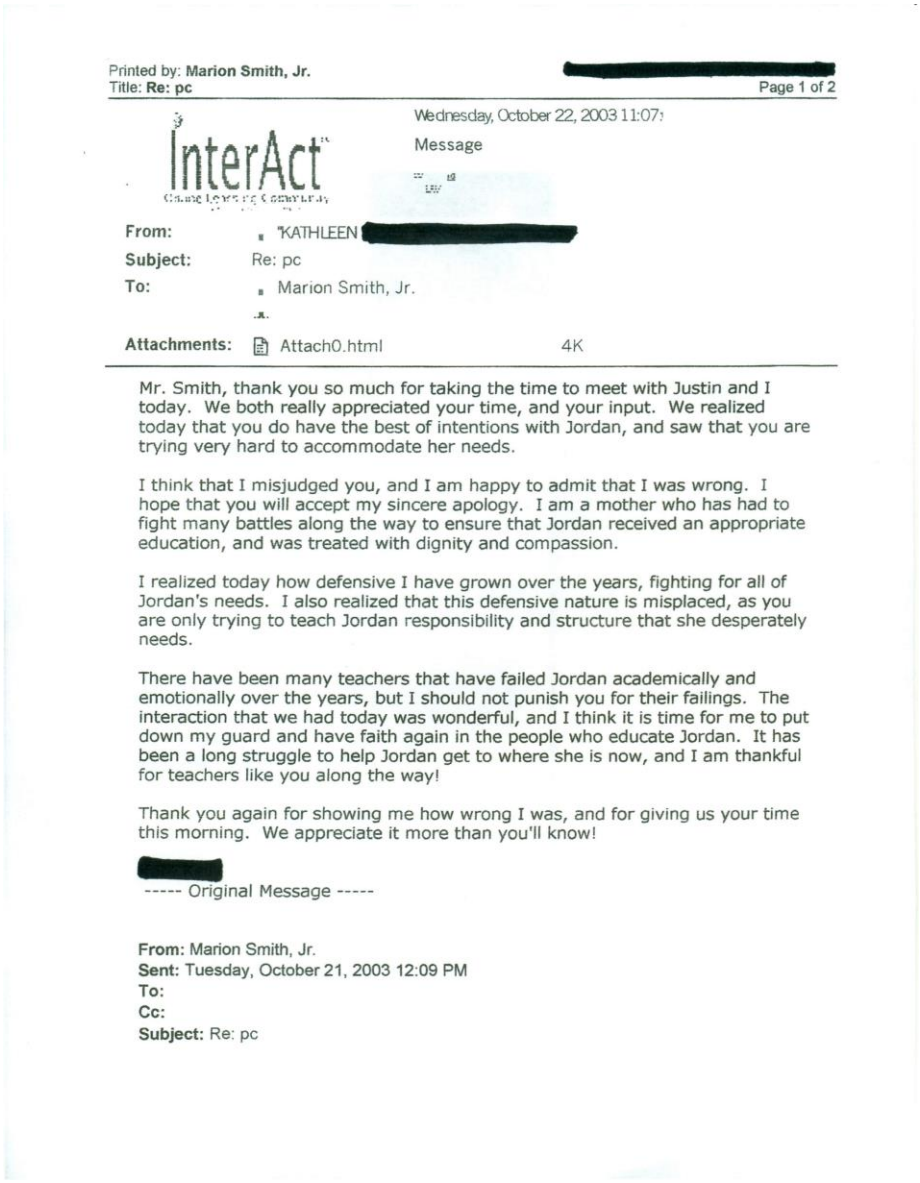
Externally, the school presented itself as an educational institution filled with professionals who were polite, espoused the "right" things in the company of visitors, but once inside the school, as an employee, reality hit me in the face. As a staff member who transferred to Cram from another school within the CCSD, I learned quickly, as reaffirmed by Ms. McCoy (an older Black woman), a long-term substitute who had been on campus for 4 days, "Excluding you, the faculty that I have met are not friendly. You are the only person that has offered help, and you don't even teach math. People don't even acknowledge me here."

I did not belong to the select groups on campus — the White teaching force, a worker in the front office, a charter faculty member of Cram, or the special education department— (the principal was a former special education teacher and her interactions and communications with those in this department illustrated her favor for them). I was made invisible. It was a special education issue that served as the catalyst for the daily confrontations I had with administration while at Cram Middle School.

After 2 months of daily "meetings," with the principal and my immediate supervisor, one of the assistant principals, that called into question my teaching philosophy (see Appendix H for my Educational Philosophy) and how I addressed the special education needs of students placed in the same classroom: 2 students clinically diagnosed with autism and 4 with Asperger's Syndrome, and what I came to learn was an illegal number of special education students placed in my general education classroom diagnosed with learning disabilities per their Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) without a co-operating teacher.

Despite being provided with no resources and being expected to provide services to all students with IEPs, I initiated communication with special educators in the school and outside to leverage my resources and professional practice to meet the IEP academic needs of all students in my classroom. This was not good enough, because I was still taken to task by parents complaining to school administration. I was called upon and asked to prove and explain when the power force, parents, had an issue with classroom happenings. These classroom happenings, holding students accountable for their actions and their work (even those with IEPs), fell upon deaf administrative ears.

> Journal Entry, October 2003: *At 9:15 am, a sub was called to my classroom so that I could attend an impromptu meeting with the principal, "concerned" parents of a student with an IEP, and my immediate supervisor. Being told that I needed to bring documentation regarding the student to the principal's office, I gathered my 3-ring binder filled with extensive notes and data, and headed to the main office (a daily scene for me). The exact details of the meeting have been long forgotten, yet after this meeting, I received an email communication from the parent. What struck a chord with me (and what has become a norm in my professional life) when I read the message from the "concerned" parent was the phrase, "I think that I misjudged you, and I am happy to admit that I was wrong." I have come to realize that this is a daily reality for me in the CCSD. I will not apologize for being a Black male in a professional world dominated by White females, so what am I to do when THEY have pre-conceived ideas and misconceptions about me and who I am and/or what I do? Sadly, it continues everyday because I can not leave 1/3 of Marion outside or bring only 2/3 of Marion to the table in my professional environment. I will not apologize for being Black; I will not apologize for being a same gender loving male, I will not apologize for being young and youthful in a profession dominated by those twice my age; I will not apologize for being an English teacher (where most Black men are relegated to teach PE, elective courses, or coaching); I will not apologize for being a Christian; I will not apologize for being light-skinned and not living up to the media version of Black male masculinity or attractiveness; I will not apologize for being appointed to school administration at the age of 28; I will not apologize for working hard to even obtain material possessions such as a new Mercedes-Benz or owning my own condo in an upper-middle class community, prior to turning 30.*



Printed by: Marion Smith, Jr.
Title: Re: pc
[redacted]
Page 1 of 2

InterAct

Wednesday, October 22, 2003 11:07:
Message

From: "KATHLEEN [redacted]
Subject: Re: pc
To: Marion Smith, Jr.

Attachments: Attach0.html 4K

Mr. Smith, thank you so much for taking the time to meet with Justin and I today. We both really appreciated your time, and your input. We realized today that you do have the best of intentions with Jordan, and saw that you are trying very hard to accommodate her needs.

I think that I misjudged you, and I am happy to admit that I was wrong. I hope that you will accept my sincere apology. I am a mother who has had to fight many battles along the way to ensure that Jordan received an appropriate education, and was treated with dignity and compassion.

I realized today how defensive I have grown over the years, fighting for all of Jordan's needs. I also realized that this defensive nature is misplaced, as you are only trying to teach Jordan responsibility and structure that she desperately needs.

There have been many teachers that have failed Jordan academically and emotionally over the years, but I should not punish you for their failings. The interaction that we had today was wonderful, and I think it is time for me to put down my guard and have faith again in the people who educate Jordan. It has been a long struggle to help Jordan get to where she is now, and I am thankful for teachers like you along the way!

Thank you again for showing me how wrong I was, and for giving us your time this morning. We appreciate it more than you'll know!

[redacted]
----- Original Message -----

**From:** Marion Smith, Jr.
**Sent:** Tuesday, October 21, 2003 12:09 PM
**To:**
**Cc:**
**Subject:** Re: pc

This propensity to overly exert myself has, in some subconscious way, affected other aspects of my lived experiences as a marginalized learner:

Journal Entry, April 2010: *I am not a remote control Negro! I defy all of your classifications and stereotypes. No, I will not kowtow to you; No, I will no longer sacrifice my health and well-being to do your will; No, I will not be exploited; No, I will no longer devote any energy to your negativity; No…I have been there and done that. I'm over it; I'm over this, and I'm over you!" This served as a type of mantra as I made an unconventional decision to be absent from work. In my decade with the CCSD, I allowed myself to be absent less than 5 times due to illness or surgery. I decided to use my earned administrative vacation time during the last month of the academic school year and eventually seek medical consultation to address health needs long ignored and sacrificed during my time in a toxic and hostile work*

*environment. In addition, this vacation time would be lost upon my return to the classroom as a licensed teacher in the 2010-2011, per the administrative reduction in force implemented by the CCSD. When I informed my administrative "team" of my planned absence dates, spread out sporadically, so that I would return to work each alternating week to complete work, my principal and assistant principal could not contain their frustration and disgust at and with me for using my earned vacation time because it would "put us in a difficult position and we will be one admin short during a most busy time of the school year." They don't care about me or my health (the main reason for this planned absence). It's time to put Marion first, after putting school and career first my entire life.*

Those who have come to know me would say that I am a guarded, private and introverted person by nature; therefore, this dissertation with its points of self-disclosure has been challenging for me. However, I am in the midst of a dynamic process, changing every day. I am thinking nonstop, feeling awakened, and altered; yet I am at peace with my confusion and complexity as a person. I have to keep reminding myself that this process is a journey and that it is "ok" to go through this research study without expectation. I have had many opportunities, both professionally and personally to revisit myself. My processes have led me to additional questions: "Who is Marion Jeston Smith, Jr., or who isn't he? What choices has he made as a man, as a student, as a teacher, as a school administrator, and as an African American that reveal his experiences as a marginalized learner?"

Recently, someone said to me, "Marion, you have a choice. You can spend the rest of your life trying to measure up, trying to figure out and then fulfill other people's expectations of you— or right now, you can make a decision to let all that go. And you can start by talking about what you know, what you feel, and what you think. You can start talking about just who you want to be."

*LVA: The Academy*

On August 22, 1993, 735 excited students entered the doors of the new Las Vegas Academy (LVA) to pursue international studies and performing arts. I was one of these students selected, by audition in instrumental music, to attend the first magnet school in Las Vegas. This school brought together culturally diverse students from all over the CCSD. Today, over 1,300 students enjoy this nationally recognized school and I was one of the originals! My decision to attend the Academy took me away from my neighborhood and all those in my previous schooling experiences entirely.

Located in the center of the Las Vegas High School Historical District, an historic urban district located in downtown Las Vegas, LVA offers students in grades 9-12 the opportunity to pursue a major in dance, vocal music, instrumental music, international studies, piano, theater or theater technology, and visual arts. In addition, I enrolled in all of my academic classes at LVA (http://schools.ccsd.net/lva/About.html). I liken my 4 years at LVA to the original movie *Fame* (1980) and to the more recent television show *Glee*.

> Journal Entry, April 1998: *The name of the school yearbook is "Eclectic" and that one word encapsulates all that was LVA during my time there as an instrumental music major (tenor saxophone) and vocalist. High school is hard especially when you have to audition for your status and compete daily for your spot. Rigorous auditions were just one challenge I faced to attend the elite public school. Walking through the halls and around campus at LVA is much different than what you'd expect from a typical public school. Students in tights running to dance class, impromptu performances in the school cafeteria by musical theater students, and a sense of collective responsibility and respect was the norm at LVA. The music you hear filtering through the school is live-- probably choral or instrumental rehearsal for an upcoming show. Down the hall, a dance classroom is filled with students perfecting their modern dance choreography or engaged in a workshop with professional dancers who work in one of the Vegas shows on The Strip. I walk to my next*

> *class and hear a minimum of 6 different languages being spoken by students as they enter various buildings. I see visual artists, sitting around campus, working on their next creation as they use paints, pastels, pencil, charcoal, or a camera. Later that same day, I'd be honing my academic skills for the upcoming Advanced Placement exams. There was always somewhere to be after school: a rehearsal, a study group, a planning meeting, a performance, or my part time job. This was my life as an LVA student.*

Since opening, LVA has placed at the top in regard to CCSD academic programs and graduation rates (see Appendix I for CCSD Graduation Rates at each secondary school for comparative analysis). In addition, LVA has received eight Grammy Signature School awards for excellence in music programs. In 2000, the U.S. Department of Education (UDE) recognized LVA as a New American High School. Two years later, the UDE honored LVA as a U.S. Blue Ribbon School, making it one out of only 17 high schools in the country to receive both prestigious awards (http://schools.ccsd.net/lva/About.html).

During my time at LVA, I excelled and received numerous accolades in my major of performing arts, despite the fact that unlike most of the performing arts students I did not participate in private lessons (I viewed this as a luxury and not essential based on the cost) or mentorship. I chose to devote my time to after school required and self-imposed rehearsals, in between my part-time job and academic schoolwork. While I did not have this upper hand, with private lessons and mentorship, I did however, live and breathe music. I studied and worked hard at and on my craft. My self-determination to excel in my major produced noticeable results: I was the sole tenor saxophonist in the Wind Ensemble (the elite and premier instrumental ensemble on campus) as a junior and senior; lead tenor saxophonist in the Symphonic Band as a freshman and sophomore; a member of the pit orchestra (in

collaborative, school-wide productions of such musicals as “Sweet Charity,” “A Chorus Line,” and “Fame” ); a member of the vocal jazz ensemble (the Lamborghini of show choirs); music department student vice president, CCSD Honor Band musician for 2 years; touring saxophone duo and quarter member for 3 years; voted “Most Likely to Succeed” by my music major colleagues during my senior year; and selected as 1 of only 2 tenor saxophonist to represent the state in the 1997 Nevada Allstate Band.


*Figure 8:* Images of Marion Smith, Jr. in 1997 (in a hotel room after winning 1st place in a nationwide instrumental music competition) and 1995 on the steps of the performing arts building at LVA.

These accomplishments and experiences during my time at LVA are impressive (at least on paper and in retrospection); however, when I began to look back on my overall LVA experience as a learner I realized that there was no sense of urgency or progressive efforts to expose me to and/or speak with me about the realities (compulsory paperwork and requirements) of getting into college. Yes, I excelled in my major of performing arts, but what was I going to do after high school, should my idealistic dream not manifest, to make my craft my profession? I visited

local libraries, read books, and filled out applications alone, took required college admission tests without guidance, and requested college view booklets and brochures without assistance. While I could boast that I attended a school noted and recognized for its superlative achievements and accomplishments in the areas of performing and visual arts, I was not prepared and knew nothing about college or life after high school. During my high school years, I had been living in my own performing arts utopia.

The information about college admission and the hidden curriculum of college readiness was on campus. I noticed this when I initiated a meeting with my guidance counselor toward the end of my junior year. I was responsible for seeking it out. By the time I did, it was too late. This experience served as a catalyst for me to accept a challenge presented to me later in my professional career:

> Journal Entry, October 2004: *During a class, a fellow graduate student presented information about the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) Program[18] and her new role in bringing AVID to the CCSD at a new school that would be opening in the 2004-2005 school year. I knew that I had to be a part of this movement. I interviewed for an English teacher position and was hired on the spot. In my first year at this comprehensive high school, I initiated communication with and began to work closely with the school AVID Coordinator, the graduate student who first introduced me to the program, to set the vision in motion (see Appendix J for AVID Mission Statement). During the following summer, I and other AVID site team members, interviewed incoming freshmen for the program and 60 were selected. During the 2005-2006 school year, in addition to my teaching responsibilities, I served as the class of 2009 AVID teacher and curriculum specialist.*
>
> *Evidenced by school data, students of color, specifically black and Latino students, and those "students in the middle"-- those with a grade point average of 2.5 to 3.0-- enrolled at the school, comprised 2% of the total enrollment in honors and advanced placement courses. This data was alarming to me because the school had a significant black and Latino student*

[18] AVID is an international structured, college preparatory program for "students in the middle" and first-generation college students. The three main components of the program are academic instruction, tutorial support, and college-prep activities.

*population. Utilizing this data as a starting point in which to engage in dialogue, I coordinated and facilitated conversations with school administrators and teachers about curriculum access and equity issues on campus. My conversations resulted in an action plan: To utilize the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) framework to restructure and implement school-wide teaching strategies to open access to college-readiness curricula to EVERY student. Why AVID? This program had over 20+ years of documented success as a systemic approach to address academic needs of "students in the middle" and students of color.*

*Initially, I worked with a teaching colleague who had previous experiences with the AVID Program. We lead a task force to champion for and to make AVID a successful reality on our campus. I took the lead to ensure that the school community was held accountable for responsibilities as they related to implementation and sustainability of the program. In meetings, I incorporated dimensions of balanced leadership and set the stage for open communication. This established a rapport with colleagues built upon vision, purpose, and respect for intellectual engagement. Clearly articulating and demonstrating expectations provided a foundation for moving the goals of this program forward with minimal dissent and/or confusion. Key challenges: teacher acceptance and willingness to embrace new ideas (ways of thinking, teaching, and learning).*

*To assist with program implementation and accountability, we were able to build relationships with those in our school community and place key people in positions of power to leverage resources. The team was comprised of various school subgroups that made decisions by consensus. The results of our discussions and collaboration enabled all stakeholders to be heard, represented, and involved in the decision-making processes.*

*After my time at the school working in this capacity, the AVID program was named as a National Certified AVID Site (after only two years of operation). Additional noteworthy results: 99% of all AVID students participated in college testing; 180 students were enrolled in the AVID program after 4 years of operation; and there was school-wide implementation and adoption of AVID methodologies and teaching strategies.*

*Of the original 60 students that began their AVID journey with me as freshmen, 55 graduated high school in 2009 and enrolled in post-secondary education. For me, it was about more than just providing students with assistance to fill out college applications, it was about making them competitive candidates for college with their knowledge base and skill sets.*

I digress…back to my learning at LVA. I enrolled in honors and advanced placement classes throughout my high school career. I believe that teachers assumed

and expected that because I was enrolled in these classes, that I knew what to do as it related to college readiness. As a result, preparing for college was rarely a topic of conversation. I enrolled in academically rigorous classes because I wanted an academic challenge and based on my common-sense, I believed it would make me more competitive as a college applicant.

In 1997, I was a member of the first, 4-year graduating class at the LVA. Graduating with an Academic Achievement distinction, a noted 3.7 grade point average, and through my own footwork and limited knowledge of the college admission process, by the time I graduated I had been accepted to a few post-secondary institutions: (a) Auburn University, (b) Purdue University, (c) University of the Pacific, and (d) Loyola Marymount University.

With no knowledge of the financial aspects of college admission, specifically the FAFSA, and with no systemic practices within my immediate educational community to inform me and/or even provide me with this essential information, I did not complete a FAFSA form, despite doing the footwork to be accepted to various colleges and universities. Immediately following my high school graduation, I had no money to attend college and no alternative plan of action.

## College Days: I Thought This Was Supposed To Be Fun

### *A Dream Deferred: University of the Pacific (UOP)*

To echo the late poet Langston Hughes: What has happened to my deferred dreams as a learner who has passed through public school classrooms mis-educated (Woodson, 1990) and without an opportunity to develop my full potential?

Knowing that I had no money to attend the college/universities where I had been accepted, I devised a plan to participate in the freshman orientation session at the University of the Pacific (UOP) in Stockton, California, to "see what I could do." My mother and I purchased tickets on Greyhound and took the 10-hour-long bus ride from Las Vegas, Nevada to Stockton, California during the summer of 1997, to expose me to a college life that I had worked so hard for, but one that I knew that I would not get a chance to experience, due to finances.

My mother stayed in a nearby hotel, while I lived in the dorm, alone (because the school did not expect me to attend the session, because I had not submitted the required paperwork by the deadline). Through each UOP activity and conversation while attempting to enjoy the pre-freshman weekend, I knew that I was setting myself up for disappointment because I had no way to afford this school, nor did the conversation between my mother and a financial aid officer produce any viable financial means for me to attend this school in the fall.

During this weekend, while immersed in college-life and participating in activities and conversations with other accepted UOP incoming freshmen, I wanted to belong to this college and knew that I had no means in which to do it. With my educational portfolio in hand, I was on a mission (an unsuccessful one):

> Journal Entry, July 1997: *During scheduled down time during the UOP activities, I made attempts to meet with the professional school personnel introduced to me on the first day. When I arrived at the office of one of the deans that I introduced myself to earlier in the day, I sensed that I would be in a bit of trouble. I had a feeling a person gets when you can intuitively sense that you do not have favor. When I reintroduced myself to the dean, who was meeting with other college professionals that had been at the morning introduction to incoming freshmen, he looked right though me. It was such a strange response. I felt uncertain, so I began to over explain who I was: "I'm Marion Smith, Jr., from the Las Vegas Academy." Without any emotion, the*

*dean slowly turned and nodded, so did the others in the room, and said, "I know who you are." His response was void of warmth or real recognition.*

*As I shared my predicament with the dean and those in the room, who did not leave, he just looked at me like I wasn't there. He was a plain looking man in his 60's with a heavy build, pale White skin, and short, greasy, graying hair. I tried not to focus on the large chunks of dead skin than hung in his eyebrows.*

*"I don't have financial aid to pay for the remaining tuition and fees, but I was offered a partial academic scholarship and told that there may be additional funds for out-of-state incoming freshman through certain school departments," I began to plead my case. "I am here to see what can be done to ensure that I have resources to permit me to attend this school in the fall."*

*"Well, nothing really, if the money you already have been issued does not cover the cost and/or you can not provide the rest through financial aid loans or parent contributions," the dean said in a matter-of-fact tone without expression on his face. He then went on to explain that they had awarded all the funds. The money was all gone. They had run out.*

*"Don't worry; you can get more money," he said in response to my crestfallen and depressed attitude written across my face that I tried to suppress. "There is plenty of money for you people," he said confidently as if he had provided a solution for my predicament. After stating that this was a myth and that based on my resources, I had come to learn that there were no available funds for me, or other Black people, less than two months prior to the start of the school semester.*

*"Well, maybe you can get money next semester," he informed me.*

*I wanted to scream. No… I wanted to take one of my size 10 ½ shoes and hit him repeatedly in the face and scream, "Are you hearing me?"*

*To make this long story a bit more succinct, with no assistance from the dean or any other person in the room and in sheer panic mode, I ran all over the UOP campus— From financial aid office to the multicultural center offices to the university president's office— stating my case and seeking assistance. Finally, after camping out in the provost's office for three hours, unannounced and with no appointment, he agreed to see me. The provost listened to my story and agreed to see what he could do to help me.*

The last day of the pre-freshman orientation, I took a picture for what was to be my student ID card for the fall semester. I did not attend UOP in the fall.

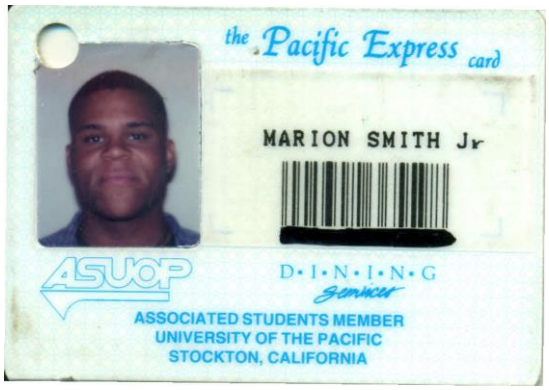



*Figure 9:* My "student" identification card

*Culture Shock: Mesa State College*

After studying for a time at another school after the UOP incident, intentionally not named here because my lived and learned experiences while at this school would require me to write another dissertation all together, I am reminded of the poem entitled "Advice I Wish Someone Had Given Me" by Darr (nd):

Advice I Wish Someone Had Given Me

Be strange if it is necessary, be
quiet, kindly as you can without
feeling the heel marks on your head.
Be expert in some way that pleasures
you, story-telling, baking, bed;
marvel at the marvelous
in leaves, stones, intercepted light;
put truth and people in their right-
full angle in the sun...find the shadow,
what it falls upon.
Trust everyone a little, no one much.
Care Carefully.
Thicken your skin to hints and hurts, be
allergic to the soul scrapers.

I have never forgotten this poem. Why? I don't know. But I selected to include it here because it seems to reflect the coping mechanism and feelings of a sheltered child taken from a comfortable environment and exploring foreign territory. For me,

relocating to Colorado where I knew no one (so different from my grounding in Las Vegas where I was surrounded daily by associates, acquaintances, and family) was like being placed on a deserted island.

At the risk of sounding esoteric, I do not attempt to recall all that I lived through and experienced during my short time in Colorado, but an underlying theme of wanting to be acknowledged and nurtured is ever present in my awareness.

I remember coming to Grand Junction and seeing a sea of White. White people were everywhere. The experience was jarring because I was used to seeing a sea of diversity. If I were to recreate the feeling for a White person, I might suggest that he or she attend an all-day, all-Black event, where s/he is the only White person. And s/he would need to stay for the entire event, no matter how much s/he may want to leave. I would say to that person "Stay even though your insides are burning and the internal white noise in your mind is yelling deafening cries to leave." Doing this is the only way I know that a White person may have a somewhat equivalent experience to that of a Black person in the educational arena of my experience.

> Journal Entry, April 1999: *When the Littleton, Colorado massacre occurred, I was in Grand Junction, Colorado, surrounded by students who knew people directly affected by the shootings and who lived in Littleton. What struck a chord with me, while going to classes, was the irony of a sense of business as usual.*
>
> *Classroom presentations were moving forward and on time. The campus was a buzz with the usual activities.*
>
> *People were having their lunches, laughing, discussing pop culture, and other "stuff" having nothing to do with their classes.*
>
> *We were all still alive!*
>
> *I could not do business as usual.*

## In The Classroom

*My Voice*

I train teachers in the district [CCSD] that you cannot take classic literature and the canon into an inner city classroom where students have only been introduced and exposed to the realities of urban living. (White student enrolled in one of my graduate-level education courses)

As the only Black urban school student and teacher (at the time) with lived experiences and background in urban education, I brought a unique perspective to the table of the course which I attempted to share in what I thought was an open space for critical inquiry and reciprocal teaching and learning. Everything was fine until I raised my voice to critically question and challenge this institutionalized racist statement in a graduate-level class on teacher preparation and curriculum for K-12 teachers and future education administrators; I was perceived as the "angry Black man" by my professor. Later that week, I received an email from the professor following my critical challenge to the White student's comment:

> *Marion, I am thinking at length about what you said during class this week, and if indeed you feel that is difficult for you to express your thoughts and reactions in ways that are acceptable to me (and to some other class members), I would be happy to make any other arrangements so you can still get credit for the class (by writing the assignments and papers and meeting with me to talk about readings and ideas individually).*
>
> *I talked with [the White student] and know she had no problems with your response to her. I also received emails from other students who indicated they felt most uncomfortable with that. Most important, I as a teacher find it unacceptable in this classroom. I also realize the caring, passion and integrity which you bring to these issues and will be happy to work with you so you don't feel you have to compromise. I will be happy to accommodate you in different ways so you don't lose the credit for the course.*

Following the receipt of the above email, which I interpreted as an invitation to either respond in some artificial, ambiguous professor-defined manner or remove

myself from the course and work with my professor outside of the classroom, I decided to write about it— not to the professor, but to myself. In addition, I decided not to remove myself from the course. I was paying $1,000 + per course, so who is she to tell me that I am not allowed to have a voice when I am paying my money to receive an education. “Bitch, please!”

I note the following of this experience:

1. The professor accused me of backing the student into a corner (which I denied), or being too quick to shout racism and of being angry (which I denied and she insisted that I was).

2. She informed me via email, not face-to-face, that my behavior was unacceptable to her as the professor of the class.

3. White is right. Yet again, I see the pattern!

4. I did not apologize for raising my voice to critically, challenge a blatantly institutionalized racist remark despite the professors inability to recognize the student’s institutionalized racist remark and remained unable to do so. She was able to conclude that I was too quick to shout racism.

My questions:

1. How can you teach teachers and future school leaders how to address the needs of all students, without creating a safe place for discussing “confrontational” issues of relevance?

2. Why was there space for the consideration of the professor’s feelings, the White student’s feelings, but not mine?

3. When the opportunity presented itself to dialogue around the issue, why did the professor prohibit and/or ignore the issue completely?

4. Is the professor aware of CRT and the concept of microaggression[19] when she devalued and silenced my voice while accusing me of being angry when I voiced my counternarrative?

[19] Within the context of CRT, microaggression is defined as “stunning small encounters with racism, usually unnoticed by members of the majority race” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 151). “Racial microaggessions are brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color”(Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

5. What will happen the next time, if there is a next time, a person of color enters this unsafe, un-open academic space and raises his or her voice in a critically challenging manner?

How would I address this as a teacher? As an English teacher, I began by openly discussing and advocating an importance of creating a safe space for discourse for all students while implementing my philosophy of education (previously noted to see Attachment I for my Educational Philosophy).

*Their Voice*

The student voice, although clamoring to be heard, has been largely silenced, ignored, and/or pushed to the margin by others. During the end of the 2007-2008 school year, which at the time marked my last year in the classroom as an English teacher in the CCSD, my students were provided an opportunity to contribute their voice to a class anthology. This anthology of student writing, respectively titled, "From the Margin to the Center: A Student Speaks," placed the student voice as the centerpiece and served as a counter-narrative to the notion that students within an oppressive educational system are void of the ability to think, read, and write critically.

The collection of student writing was presented in its purest, most noble form: unedited. All students were given the opportunity to produce a piece of writing on a topic of their choice, written in their mode of expression. The anthology provided a space for the exchange of words, thoughts, and ideas.

Classrooms are connected to the broader sociological world beyond our classroom doors. Through our study of literature during the academic year, students were able to ask the big "how" and "why" questions about society while challenging

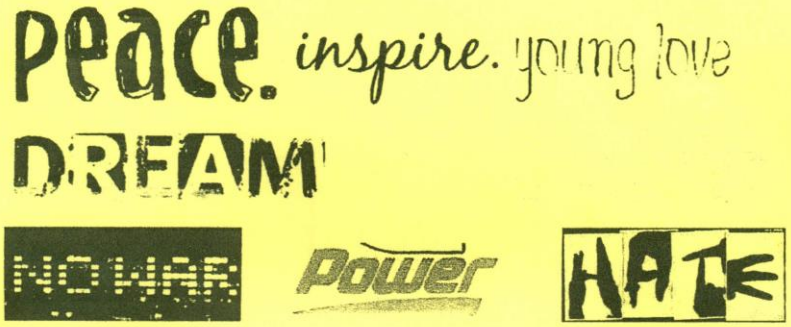
themselves and others to think deeply, to question fundamental social premises, and to have the courage to confront and discuss real issues with one another.

Imagine a society without people who are secure, articulate, and competent thinkers, writers, and readers. The students who contributed their writings to the anthology refuse to picture their world this way; therefore, in our classroom and through these writings, we have prepared ourselves for the future by approaching English and reading as a prerequisite life skill that will craft a space for marginalized voices to be heard, validated, and honored. A random sample of these student voices is presented on the following pages.

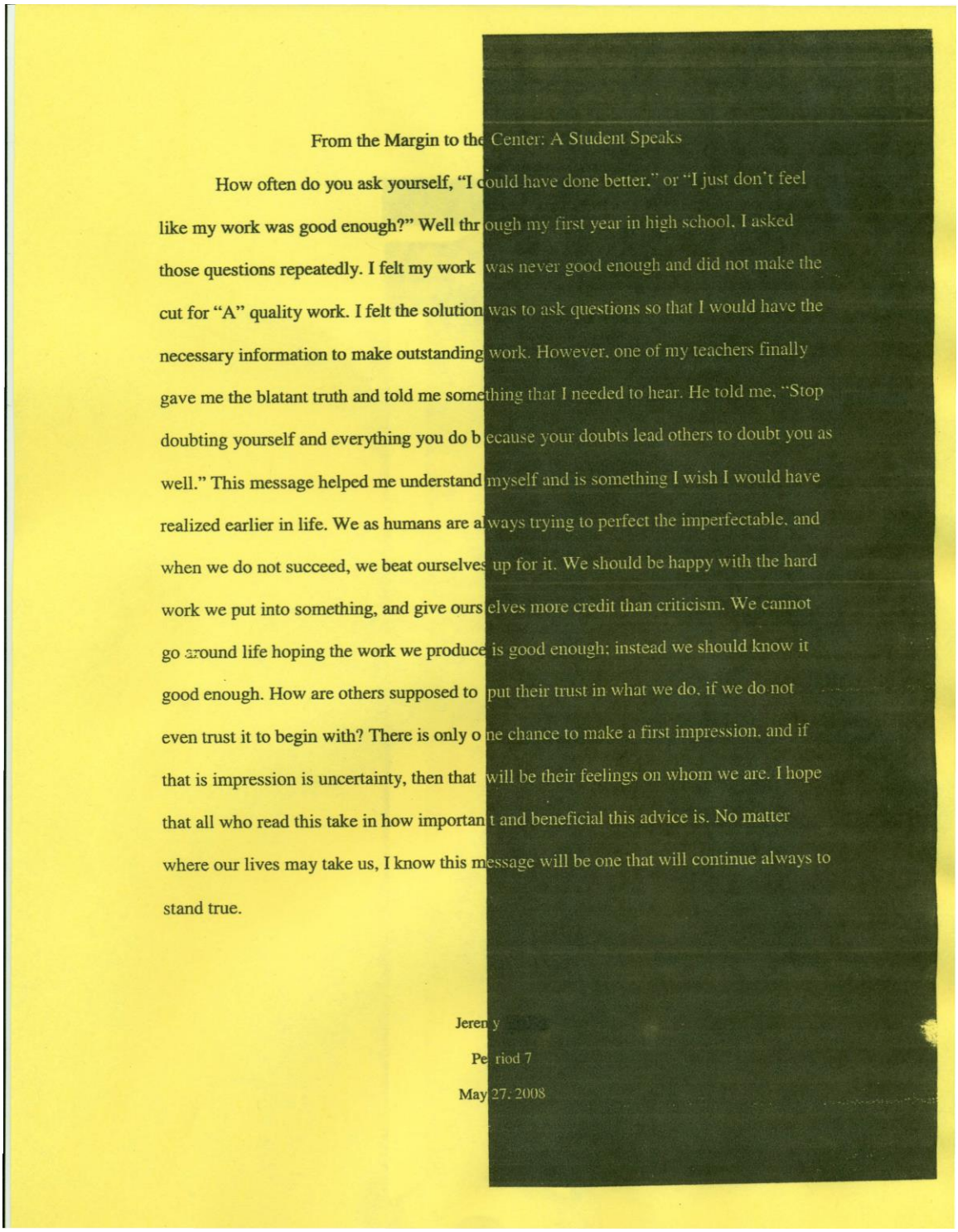
*Student Voice 1:*

Michelle [redacted]
Mr. Smith
English 1 Honors period 6
05/21/2008.

This English class has been very different from any other English class I've had before. In this class, we didn't just go over the "normal stuff" like spelling or grammar, we learned way more. This class taught me how to look at something and be able to connect it to real issues our society faces. I learned every author writes to prove something, you just have to look deeper in their writings and you will find it. I now look at literature in a completely different way, being able to take in what the author is saying about society and applying those lessons to my life. I'm able to explore other points of views that may be totally different from mine or exactly alike. This year, I learned how one person can leave such a strong statement to others through writing.



*Student Voice 2:*



From the Margin to the Center: A Student Speaks

How often do you ask yourself, "I could have done better," or "I just don't feel like my work was good enough?" Well through my first year in high school, I asked those questions repeatedly. I felt my work was never good enough and did not make the cut for "A" quality work. I felt the solution was to ask questions so that I would have the necessary information to make outstanding work. However, one of my teachers finally gave me the blatant truth and told me something that I needed to hear. He told me, "Stop doubting yourself and everything you do because your doubts lead others to doubt you as well." This message helped me understand myself and is something I wish I would have realized earlier in life. We as humans are always trying to perfect the imperfectable, and when we do not succeed, we beat ourselves up for it. We should be happy with the hard work we put into something, and give ourselves more credit than criticism. We cannot go around life hoping the work we produce is good enough; instead we should know it good enough. How are others supposed to put their trust in what we do, if we do not even trust it to begin with? There is only one chance to make a first impression, and if that is impression is uncertainty, then that will be their feelings on whom we are. I hope that all who read this take in how important and beneficial this advice is. No matter where our lives may take us, I know this message will be one that will continue always to stand true.

Jeremy

Period 7

May 27, 2008

*Student Voice 3:*

***Regretted Mistakes***

*Rewind the clocks of time to when this mistake happened*
*We wish we weren't in there, why didn't we listen to ourselves*
*Reasons not known to ourselves but things taken to far,*
*Mistakes done today and created great affect tomorrow and in life,*
*But learned from everyday from now on...*

*Playing that game, but playing it wrong...*
*And ending up losing it all, losing things not planned or weighted in...*
*Suffer the effects of this cause... All I had was school and my education that's all I knew*
*You had my love, my trust, and your world including mine, sports is your thing*
*That's some things that we lost*

*For this year mistakes were learned from, also many new lessons we learned,*

*The feeling of deepest ocean never ending of depth, universe to big to find anything else*
*That's my love that I feel for you and that's something that I don't regret*
*It's a wonderful to feel love and care for someone else besides yourself,*

*My love for I apologize that your faith was as mine in that bad ending*
*To wish we got a restart and get that redo on that mistake,*

*But still anyone who's done a mistake do remember this keep your nose above that water*
*And don't let it go down... the most to do for that regretted mistake is to learned from it!...*

*- Merlyn* [redacted]

*Student Voice 4:*

***They said I would Fail***

***By: Renaysha [redacted]***

They said I would fail,
"Me succeeding!?" they couldn't tell.
Just the thought of this rebellious black, little girl ever doing right...
SIKE! Her limit isn't even pass her height!

She fights, she yells, she screams.
But being her mama's future graduate was always what she dreamed.
Switching schools every year,
Going home in fear.
"Your kicked out and can't come back!"
is all she would ever hear.

But yes, she is a future business woman and high school graduate at that!
She just knows that she can prove everyone wrong,
And that's a proven fact.
She just hopes that everyone sees her trying to be that young lady that her mom once seen, again.
That doubted her would only make her stronger,
And strive for the best much longer.

So go ahead, doubt her.
See if your evil wishes come true.
But you'll be surprised and amazed,
When she becomes something much more than you!

*Student Voice 5:*

Demy [redacted]
Mr. Smith
Eng.1 Per. 1
5/21/08

Anthology

"Just breathe Demy, just breathe..." I say to myself every morning. Opening my eyes is just the start, ambulance sirens echoing my neighborhood, as there the reason I wake.
I have learned you can't trust anyone, not even your best friends. There is no such thing as a "perfect" friend. Not after what I've seen and been through. It's shame really.
I always tell them, "Do you like what I'm becoming? It's all for you. If you'd believe me, I'd tell you everything." I sigh, I'm so sick of people.
Still each time I always meant.
Every word
In conclusion;

Honestly, Mr. Smith, You seem like the only person I have to talk to. No one really listens to me, and helps me with my "problems." You have made me stronger emotionally, I have learned how to think, speak, write and read. I never learned so much in a matter of days from a teacher. Your really the most educated, talented, truly an amazing teacher overall. I feel adults will take me seriously now, and you have the diction and attitude to control a class. I have learned so many things; I could go on for days. Thank you so much for everything.

Well, back to the hard things in life.
I've learned friends are in your life to make things "dramatized" and complicated.
As you exhale, I'll grow pale without you. I visualize it as a rollercoaster, it has the ups and downs, twists and turns, after many years it finally comes to a slow stop. The key is to hold on really tight. That's how I feel about friendships and trust.
Will the flood behind me, but out the fire inside me? I've always wondered.

You personally have made me think, so much about things in life and people around me. I know you're not my counselor or my therapist... but I talk to you like one.
Thank you for being there!

Final thought; I have learned that you don't need this and that. All these objects and "things" there not necessary for survival in this cold cruel world. I have so much ahead of me, and I learned so much along the way.

I actually learned, that the only person you need is yourself.

To survive.

**Out of the Classroom**

*It was these sequences of racialized incidents involving black women [and men] that intensified my rage against the white man sitting next to me. I felt a killing rage. I wanted to stab him softly, to shoot him with the gun I wished I had in my purse. And as I watched his pain, I would say to him tenderly racism hurts. With no outlet, my rage turned to overwhelming grief and I began to weep, covering my face with my hands. All around me everyone acted as though they could not see me, as though I were invisible, with one exception. The white man seated next to me watched suspiciously whenever I reached for my purse. As though I were the black nightmare that haunted his dreams, he seemed to be waiting for me to strike, to be the fulfillment of his racist imagination. I leaned towards him with my legal pad and made sure he saw the title written in bold print: Killing Rage. (hooks, 1995, p. 11)*

My learning as a professional in my context of K-12 urban education has become a site of resistance and rebellion. The hooks passage positions me in my environment as a former English teacher and current school administrator.

*The Talking Head (a.k.a. Billy the Bastard):*

> Journal Entry excerpts, February 2006-March 2010: *I started my professional career with the CCSD at the age of 21. After being denied a long-term substitute position earlier in the year because I arrived at the interview sans suit with my physically defiant demeanor exposed (after a year-long "battle" with CCSD administrators and their preconceived ideas of what an educator should look-like during my student-teaching and internship experiences). I was radical in my dislike of the experiences that I had encountered just trying to get to this stage in my professional career. All of this aside, I interviewed with CCSD representatives a few months prior to completing my undergraduate degree.*
>
> *Interviewing for a licensed teaching position, a 'sista on her way out of the building (who I later found out did not get hired), gave me words of wisdom that I have internalized to this day. Stay on your P's and Q's, dot your I's and cross your T's, don't share personal business with them, and do your job.*
>
> *The Talking Head knew me from my high school days and later hired me to be a charter faculty member at what was to be "The New American High School" (this espoused belief did not manifest, despite the talent that was hired as charter faculty members and staff, and after 4 years of employment and progressive efforts amidst The Talking Head, I left).*
>
> *I had become a robot, to some extent. During my fours year at this school, I was a good soldier— do as you're told. I accepted every non-teaching*

*responsibility there was because at the time for me I believed that this school would be THE place to envision my teaching philosophy. I worked at the school during the summer months initially writing a mentor program curriculum (additional sundry tasks were assigned and completed during the summer months), I facilitated teacher professional development and training sessions, worked as the lead English I teacher, worked in a grassroots effort with AVID…AVID…AVID (in other schools, the responsibilities and tasks I was held responsible for with AVID constituted a full-time job by itself), I wrote major portions of the school Northwest Accreditation reports, Because of my attention to detail and ferocious work ethic, I received email communication from The Talking Head in which he verbalized that he expected me to serve as the department chair and later as the grade-level leader (I declined both offers on numerous occasions and was ignored for a period of time).*

*Completing the necessary pre-requisites such as the CCSD K-12 administrative leadership program in December 2006, serving as an intern in various administrative positions in my work settings, and following protocol for expressing interest in administrative positions, had yet to enable me to move beyond the classroom and toward a desired goal: appointment to an entry-level, school-based administrative position at the secondary level.*

*Temporary obstacles to my goal of moving beyond the classroom into the area of educational administration are different based upon whom you ask: limited networking opportunities with those in power; nepotism; fear of greatness from an individual that makes excellence a necessity; age (too young in a "traditional," old system); and/or pre-conceived ideologies as to who I am as a future school leader are all factors.*

*To learn more, do more, and position myself well for consideration for upcoming administrative positions made available in the district, I completed the following and continued to be progressive and aggressive:*

*- January 2007- January 2008: Expressed interest and applied for administrative positions made available in the district*
*- July 2007: Telephoned and spoke with a former graduate college professor who served as a former district area superintendent*
*- Met and spoke with former supervisor and retired district principal*
*- Initiated a meeting and formally introduced myself to the Southwest Region Superintendent— this Black doctorate degree holder was not impressed or interested by anything I had to say. Later, she even declined the offer to serve as my external reader for my dissertation.*
*- August 2007: Initiated a meeting and formally introduced myself to the Southeast Region Superintendent— this Black male with an earned doctorate and experiences in the CCSD as a teacher and administrator may relate to my plight as a marginalized learner. He was offered and accepted the invitation*

*to serve as the external reader for my dissertation.*
*- September 2007: Facilitated a training session on progressive teaching methodologies to regional administrators and department chairpersons*

*No call backs and only a handful of interviews with principals. What to do?*

- *January 2008-May 2008: Expressed interest and applied for administrative positions made available in the district. This time I emailed my resume and letter of interest/cover letter directly to the principal. In addition, I initiated a meeting and had a face-to-face conversation with the Northeast Region and East Region Superintendents.*

- *April 2008: In a conversation with The Talking Head in a rare impromptu meeting in his office, I expressed my concerns. Starting from nothing and building something of quality, substance, and integrity is difficult, even when you have support. Based on previous talks and our professional relationship, he was made aware of and knew my intentions to move on to school administration and to complete my doctorate degree. I sat in his office and asked one question: "Are you an advocate for me? By advocate I mean that at any given opportunity you speak with those in your professional circles about this amazing teacher and program leader and what I have brought to this school. As I strive to get that initial interview for a school admin position, I am at a loss because when they call you, what do you actually say about me? So, I ask you again, are you a true advocate for Marion?" With a brief silence and a few mutters, The Talking Head attempted to respond, but I could see in his face based on the time it took him to calculate a "safe" retort, the real answer to my inquiry. After the conversation, I smiled, shook his hand, and stated in an ambiguous manner, as I left his office, "Thank you again for this conversation." After this meeting, I decided that I would complete my year at the school (two months). This would enable me to see my initial freshman students and mentor students graduate, and then I would move on. Where I was going, I had no clue, but I would not be teaching at that school after June 2008.*

*The White Woman Who Finally Broke My Black Back*

My second year (and as of this writing, my last) as a school administrator in the CCSD… Year 1 as a school-based administrator was tough, to say the least. But I earned superlative marks on my evaluation and my probationary status was waived. I expect nothing less, as evidenced on every evaluation I have received in my time with the CCSD. Year 2 as an administrator was a testament to my faith, resilience, and

endurance. *Question to self: After conducting over 15 employee investigatory discipline conferences, per her directive (resulting in two support staff employees being dismissed— after more than two years of documentation, and one licensed teacher resigning on the spot), how, or better yet, why did I not accept this as her way of dealing with issues (and that my time was numbered and that I would be next)?* Even as I recount these experiences, I feel an overwhelming urge to vomit and anxiety sets in; this visceral reaction is palpable.

> Journal Entry, November 2009: *I will not waste any more time stressing about, talking about and attempting to navigate through the oppressive and hostile experiences that I encountered with you. I have been there, done that. I will place frustration you caused me back on you. It would be justified and expected, but I'm in another place (slowly but surely). I will not put any negative vibes out there; I've done that enough. It may have begun sooner than I noticed, but I was and still remain focused on the students. In response to my question regarding how I know when you are making conversation, offering a suggestion, or giving me a direction, you said to me during one of our weekly administrative meetings, "Everything I say to you is a directive."*
>
> *Issuing me a notice of investigatory conference, I attended the conference to discuss issues you had with how I chose to address employee "deficiencies" that I supervised. You were ready with your arsenal of questions, notepad and accusations. I responded to your questions, accusations, and frustration (by the end of the conference you were yelling at me and noticeably shaking—I simply sat there, stoic in face, standing my ground) because I made administrative decisions (if you did forget, I am an administrator despite how you see me and treat me) in regards to employees under my direct supervision, without communicating my every move and decision with you. Certain statements I made during this "conversation" stood out and were even captured in the discipline document (an admonition) that you wrote and issued to me days later:*
>
> 1. *"In this situation, I made an administrative choice, after listening to what EMR said, and based on the evidence and existing practices, I placed the two people before this broken protocol of issuing them an undeserved discipline document." You reminded me that I had written a discipline document to a teacher's aide when the aide did not report to work. I responded that the campus monitors attended a district training in the morning, but did not return to campus on that day, thus being absent for 2*

*hours, not the entire day like the teacher's aide. I added, "Students were not on campus because it was a districtwide staff development day and not returning to the school site after these types of trainings is documented in one of the campus monitors folders who has worked here for 20 years. Why is this even an issue now? I made a different professional decision."*

2. *"You have seen my schedule in the dean's office, so not calling you to the office when I met with the first campus monitor this morning was not intentional. There was an unexpected down time in the office and when the campus monitor walked by the door, I asked her to stop in my office and we went over the documents. When I turned the documents over to you, right after meeting with her, you reminded me that you wanted to be present. I forgot you told me this (on Friday afternoon as I was leaving campus). I immediately called the campus monitor via radio and we all met in your office."*

3. *After asking me a question numerous times and receiving the same response from me, I stated to you, "Let's move on now. My answer is not going to change. Plus, you just said that everything you say to me is a directive, so there is really no need for me to respond or even speak with you. I just better do."*

*The discipline document that I received from you — now in my personnel folder for the next three years— ,a written admonition, skipped all aspects of progressive discipline: (1. oral warning, 2. written warning and 3. written reprimand), and included the following written directives:*

1. *Remember that directions from you supervisor are not suggestions that you may or may not choose to follow;*
2. *Be professional in all campus interactions—it is inappropriate for you to suggest to your supervisor that he/she "move on" during a conversation;*
3. *Comply with all supervisory directions.*

*Really? I am being "admonished" and a discipline document with my name on it as a recipient now taints my perfect record with the district, as I try to pursue the next-level of school based administration. But this is how you operate.*

*I never told you that one day after school, around 4:30 p.m., as I walked toward your office to bring you a few documents I completed early, your office door was closed and I heard you say, "Who does he think he is? He has to work his way up. He's only been a dean for a year." Yes, I know how you really feel about me; your two-faces have no power here anymore.*

*That's when I realized that no matter how hard I work, no matter how smart I am, no matter how much I value myself, I'm still going to be Black (and all*

*that means to White society and those in power). People like you, the majority in society, are still going to try to deny me from progressing and maximizing my full potential. This is not new, but an awakening.*

*I got it. I completely get it.*

*This incident served as the catalyst for the daily barrage of confrontations I experienced while serving as a school administrator at YOUR school until my exit due to the district reduction in force— an answered prayer and blessing in disguise.*

*My final words to you: "God don't like ugly!"*

My official response to being disciplined and "put in my place:"

November 24, 2009

I preface this writing with a belief that it is not about agreement but clarity.

This writing is in response to the discipline document I received on October 28, 2009. I will not rationalize, minimize, or explain my actions away. However, I will state explicitly and with steadfast candor that the information presented in the discipline document is inaccurate, and at best out of context, and does not capture the essence of the incidents it proposes to present. "Inefficiency," "unprofessional conduct," "insubordination," "neglect of duty," "inadequate performance," and "failure to comply with such reasonable requirements…" are words and phrases used in the discipline document to characterize and define my work performance. These words and phrases cease to have real meaning and are negated when placed in the context of my work since starting my employment with the Clark County School District.

I have a consistent history of personal success and achieving excellence as evidenced in *all* CCSD Licensed Employee Appraisal Reports since my employment began in 2002. These evaluations document my ferocious work ethic, how I make solid judgments across a variety of issues and incidents, and how I put excellence, integrity, and quality ahead of what is easy in all professional endeavors. In addition, my professionalism and superlative work performance are well-substantiated and persuasively presented in these documents and through my daily interactions over the years with colleagues, supervisors, students, parents, and teachers.

After reading the discipline document and navigating through the experiences after its issuance, I can now state with conviction and clarity that I understand my context within the Clark County School District.

In closing, find attached a letter written at my request by a colleague who has worked with me since 2006. This letter, one example of a myriad, speaks to the essence of who I am as a professional and is included to provide an accurate portrait of Marion Smith, Jr.,- educator, school administrator, and professional.

With respect,

Marion Smith, Jr.

The Rose that Grew from Concrete

Did u hear about the rose that grew from a crack
in the concrete
Proving nature's law is wrong it learned 2 walk
without having feet
Funny it seems but keeping its dream
it learned 2 breathe fresh air
Long live the rose that grew from concrete
when no one else even cared!

(Shakur, 1999, p. 3)

I am reminded of this Tupac Shakur poem daily, as I walk up and down the stairs in my home. I come face-to-face with a 30 x 40 limited edition canvas painting by Kevin A. Williams (artistically referred to as WAK) that encapsulates an interpretation of the poem. According to Williams (nd), "The rose that grew from the concrete is originally a poem by Tupac Shakur. It is a miracle that takes place in urban America where something beautiful comes from nothing. Some dreams are built from the concrete as is my dream to be an artist. Against all odds… STILL I RISE" (http://www.wak-art.com/newrelease.htm)

"Still I Rise" by Kevin A William (nd)

*Figure 10.* Print number 456/1500 of original artwork by Kevin A Williams (2007) on display and framed in my home.

# CHAPTER 5

# STUDY LIMITATIONS, FINDINGS, AND IMPLICATIONS

## Limitations of the Study

In my exploration and counternarrative response of the question *"How does a marginalized learner, specifically an African American male in K-12 urban education, create the circumstances and the opportunities to be educated?"* I have identified five limitations to my study and challenges to conducting this study. First, as the sole participant, the stories told and retold through my narrative were uniquely relational to, as well as embedded within me. As I presented my perspective, I recognized that it was only one of many possible perspectives or interpretations to which the phenomena under examination might have been subjected. Other individuals, who come to consider the nature of my lived experiences as a marginalized learner, will have to judge for themselves this particular story's veracity.

A second limitation of my study comes from those who contest a methodological and philosophical genre that is composed of retrospective text, personal, and "absent of a public method that would allow critics to assess the so-called validity of the author's assertions" (Charmaz, 1995; Dawson & Prus, 1993; Farberman, 1991, 1992; Kleinman, 1993; Kunda, 1993; Snow & Morrill, 1993; as cited in Denzin, 1997, p. 216). A danger of such a narrative text resides in losing its connections to the world it is attempting to reveal having positioned myself as the "topic of inquiry and a resource for uncovering" (Denzin, 1997, p. 217). My experiences as a marginalized learner deprive anyone else from asserting different

conclusions. Denzin enumerates additional critical concerns as "narcissism…absence of guidelines for doing nuts and bolts research…privileging discourse over representation, description and analysis…and illusions of intimacy and verisimilitude" (p. 216).

With this understanding, this study adheres to the tenets of phenomenological research activities presented by van Manen (1990):

1. turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world;
2. investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it;
3. reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon;
4. describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting;
5. maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon;
6. balancing the research context by considering parts and whole. (p. 30)

Third, in writing this study, I grappled with content selection. I wrestled with deciding about what particular events or stories should be included or excluded. This struggle led me to question myself as to why, or why not, a particular piece of my work ended up in or out of the final narrative text of my story. If a particular item of my storied marginalized learning was included, to what extent, I wondered, was I required to relate the context? What denotes enough detail to advance the aims of this study? Oppositely, what level of detail was too much? These types of decisions demanded me to be present during the course of research more than I might have imagined was necessary.

A fourth challenge I encountered during the course of this study was related to the nature of my research data. The magnitude and scope of my data— accumulated over 20+ years— was voluminous. Given my organizational skills and technological

advancements, my capacity for telling my lived experiences was more retrievable than originally thought.

A final challenge was knowing when to stop writing. Given the intention of my study, when do I step back and declare the work is finished? Speaking practically and aesthetically, even now, as I type the concluding pages, I sense that what lies within the pages of this study is incomplete, unfinished. The nature of how the content of these particular pages reverberates off of each other reminds me of all the stories that were left off the pages.

## Findings

The findings of this study reveal how the use of (counter)storytelling and race-conscious perspectives can enhance the way those in K-12 and postsecondary education frame and understand marginalized learning to inform educational practices and re-conceptualize school change efforts, thus equipping both educational researchers and leaders with tools needed to better understand and serve the next generation of marginalized learners. Or better yet, to eliminate teaching and learning practices that systemically marginalize learners.

While it may be argued that, as a researcher, I was not in the educational pipeline, specifically K-12 and postsecondary settings, to engage in an analysis of pedagogical practices of other education professionals, my own teaching and research necessitates making sense of my schooling contexts, their philosophical constructs, and lived experiences encountered by me. My lived experiences in the educational pipeline afforded me a unique opportunity. I was able to experience my schooling from three distinct positions— K-12 student, English teacher, and school

administrator— in the same school district, spanning a time of 22 years. Doing this provided an opportunity to delve more carefully into my own background in order to question assumptions that I held about learning, teaching, and school change efforts.

Armed with personal memories which were the educational snapshots of my schooling and learning, I returned to educational communities, literally and figuratively, where I was schooled and where I encountered teachers and other educational professionals who were a part of and/or became touchstones in my experiences as a marginalized learner. I also encountered children of my peers and grandchildren of my parents' friends. The images and events that had been logged in my memory and other artifacts were pried loose from romanticized niceties. I came to understand the privileges, benefits, and disadvantages that my learning has conferred upon me and the ways that my lived experiences have aided to shape my mental models and identity as a marginalized learner.

Research findings also reveal how my lived experiences shape my individual perspectives concerning learning, thus demonstrating the need to center race and racism within the discourse of educational practices and race-conscious education policies. The findings from this study are open to multiple interpretations that lead to varying implications, depending on the standpoint of the reader. To support my personal and professional aims with this study, I focus on findings that translate into implications for informing educational practice and reconceptualizing urban school change efforts.

Through my overarching phenomenological methodology with a CRT perspective, I was able to understand positionality which gave me insights into many

of the issues that face marginalized learners in urban schools and the educational professionals charged with our learning. This also raised many questions and points that I ponder and present as learned lessons in the following section.

## Implications for Those That Give a Damn

Britzman (1991) writes,

> We are all situated by race, class, and gender, and without an understanding of the social meaning that over determines how we invite and suppress differences, the complexity of biography is reduced to the dreary essentialism that beneath the skin we are all the same, or to the insistence that difference can be overcome through sheer individual effort. (p. 223)

Furthermore, she writes that, "if race, class, and gender do not matter, then racism, classicism, sexism, homophobia and so on are not recognized as fashioning oppressive spaces that require intervention" (p. 235) to address the needs of learners in schooling environments.

Through my study, I have become more cemented in my understanding that positionality and utilizing the experiential knowledge and lived experiences of marginalized learners can be a lens to aide education professionals and policymakers to better understand how these often times silenced and muted voices in traditional educational research and in schooling practices are valid and offer insights that can serve to inform educational practices and school change efforts. I argue that for many in the field of education, understanding positionality and accepting qualitative data, such as that illustrated in my study, is an integral part of the ability to develop pedagogy, ways of thinking and knowing, and altering mental models, that are reflective of various perspectives and alternatives. Educators at all levels, K-12 and postsecondary who work with marginalized learners, need a "third eye" (Landsman,

2004). This is the ability to see that knowledge and understandings are not simply right or wrong and quantitatively measured, but that they are relational and contextual. Even what is viewed as "the facts" or "what data says" are constructed by an ideological framework that gives them meaning and significance. Educators and policymakers, with national, state, and local mandates on data-driven decision making, have become data rich and information poor. It is noteworthy to complement quantitative data with that of qualitative experiences thus understanding the limitations, likely inaccuracies, and to know which data are relevant in any given context.

This study contributes to existing knowledge concerning urban education and learning by utilizing a "voice of color" thesis to document and explore the counterstories of a marginalized learner who lived in and through the realities of urban education. It also gives voice to the silenced perspective of a Black marginalized learner along the educational pipeline as a K-12 student, English teacher, and school administrator in the same school district spanning 22 years, which offers significant insight into the salience of racism in education, and an organic perspective on how lived experiences in urban education may inform educational practice and assist with reconceptualizing school change efforts while supporting the academic achievement and life changes of marginalized students, which in turn may benefit all students.

*Lessons Learned (or at least points to consider)*

This study has enabled me to bring to the surface and articulate six main conclusions about how my lived experiences as a marginalized learner along the

educational pipeline undergirds my professional practice and how my experiential knowledge may be used to inform educational practices and school change efforts beyond my context. The reoccurring theme that connects each of the lessons learned is that of hypocrisy.

**Lesson 1: Rhetoric Rules**

- The bottom line is that a majority of educators want to look good and be liked. They dress the part, espouse educational jargon anchored in the latest educational trends (whether or not the program or initiative is effective in helping students), and follow pre-determined protocols because they are afraid to challenge the "powers that be" by asking tough, "impolite" questions. These educators say the "right" things in public, but there is no ownership of these statements once they leave the workplace. I argue that instructional practices and programs used by underqualified, culturallyinsensitive teachers is counterproductive and is merely a waste of time, money, and student potential. As Thompson (2007) states, "When we know and accept the truth and are willing to speak truth, the truth can set you free. When we are cowardly and in denial, we will strut around like the naked emperor—looking ridiculous" (p. 80).

**Lesson 2: Urban Schools are Oppressive, So Move Beyond Your Ivory Collegiate Tower of Theory "Dr. Professor"**

- I am reminded of a saying that states if the corn does not grow, the farmer does not blame the corn. However, in educational settings, if the student does not learn and/or does not produce expected results, those in and outside of the classroom blame the student, the teachers, and/or the parents. What about the inherent institutional and systemic issues and structures? How do we move beyond victim-blaming when

decisions are made about educational practices and pedagogy? Teacher and school leader preparation courses need to be taught by professors knowledgeable about the skills and information that new teachers and leaders need in urban schools today. Just because you were a K-12 educator in the late 1960s or 1970s, or have an earned doctorate degree and can recite at command theoretical and research findings about urban education, does not make you an "expert" on current urban school realities. Articulated over 40 years ago, "few teachers' have been trained to teach in bi-racial schools, there is a clear need for teacher training with an emphasis on the social and psychological factors which influence the learning process in the multi-cultural school" (Perry, 2005). In other words, those who work with future and current education professionals must not be ignorant to school realities and must know what is really happening in K-12 public urban schools.

**Lesson 3: "Too many influential people still don't believe that America's stepchildren are capable of academic excellence" (Thompson, 2007, p. 273).**

- Many school reformers are big hypocrites. They don't really "walk the talk." School change efforts anchored in the fundamental belief that public school students are too dumb to do well academically harbor educators incapable of creating viable programs and implementing reform efforts that will close the achievement and opportunity gaps. In the end, these schools "perpetuate the class differences that exist in the larger society" (Freire, 1985, p. 58).

**Lesson 4: Silenced in Schools; Muted in Educational Research**

- As long as the voices, needs, and concerns of marginalized learners continue to be ignored, teachers and students will find creative ways to derail educational practices and school change efforts. Research on 90/90/90 schools[20] indicates that one of the most effective school change strategies is to create an inclusive environment.

**Lesson 5: Testing! Testing! Testing! Let's Move Beyond One-Size Fits All**

- Rethinking how to address the needs of marginalized learners in a traditional education system involves moving beyond appearances and external factors. At best, schooling assessment practices based on high-stakes, multiple-choice exams, produce something that looks good (like high test scores), but that might not actually be good at its core. Students may earn high test scores, but that does not necessarily mean that true learning has occurred. "No test-- especially a test that contains measurement flaws, that is culturally biased, 'normed' on middle-class white students, and that measures socioeconomic status rather than what students' have been taught in school-- can truly illustrate what students know" (Thompson, 2007, p. 279). Countless students, at all levels in the U.S. urban education systems, continue to have their brilliance overlooked and their potential underestimated because they are judged solely by test scores.

**Lesson 6: Danger! Educated Ethnic Minority Ahead**

- A final lesson I have come to understand as a marginalized learner is how difficult it has been and remains for Black and Latino school administrators to change the status quo at the school district and at underperforming school sites. Because of resistance and racial prejudice, school administrators are said to pull out the "race card" when

[20] High-performing, high-minority, high-poverty schools have been referenced in research literature as "90-90-90" schools. These schools have at minimum a 90% ethnic student minority (mainly Black and/or Hispanic), 90% qualify for free and reduced lunch, and 90% achieve at the proficient or higher level on high-stakes standardized assessments (Reeves, 2000, 2001).

they attempt to speak boldly and directly about the role that racism and privilege play in fostering inequality of educational opportunity (Thompson, 2007). Opposition to change is everywhere; therefore, a school administrator of color must be a strong, transformational visionary who enables the creative capacities of members of the school community to be liberated, while they maintain a vision despite external demands and mandates that may present challenges.

*Now What? Where Do We Go From Here?*

Whether public urban education continues to exist, and whether it rises to the challenges before it, remains an open question. How educational leaders and policy makers respond will help determine the answer. The United States has the most diverse group of learners enrolled in K-12 urban schools in its history, and all the basic trends indicate that the diversity will become even greater. Among our school-age population the U.S. has only a generation before the entire country becomes majority non-White or non-European in origin (Orfield, 2003). Yet our public schools remain largely segregated and are becoming more so. Therefore, U.S. public schools must, as Breunig (2005) proclaimed, "prepare people for the future work in the world 'that is,' while still offering [learners] a vision of what 'could be'" (p. 112) to begin the process of creating a more socially just world. "We can teach for the society we live in, or we can teach for the one we want to see" (Christensen & Karp, 2003, p. 45).

The questions surrounding effective urban school change efforts are plentiful and subjective: What is wrong with the U.S. urban education system? Why can't we fix our schools? What can we do? Why have past school improvement efforts not

achieved their intended results? What course of action offers the best hope for those who seek to make urban schools more effective? I posit that conventional-thinking educators do not have the answers to these posed questions. Often, conventional thinkers in education have yet to begin asking the *right* questions. Our children deserve a world-class education. The enemy has been identified: “All of us support change as long as it is someone else changing” (Noguera, 2008, p. 200).We must demand an end to public urban schools that provide a one-size-fits-all education. A new definition of what a public urban school is and a more open, democratic system that provides real choices to meet diverse student interests is compulsory to effective and efficient school reform. In the end, Harvey and Kearns (2001) provided an analogy of the depth of the crisis facing urban school change efforts: “Many [school leaders] were busy prescribing Band-Aids and aspirins…when they needed [to implement] bypass surgery” (p. 54).

# CHAPTER SIX

# CONCLUSION

## Journey Toward My Silent Revolution

The problem under investigation was how does a marginalized learner, specifically an African American male in K-12 urban education, create the circumstances and the opportunities to be educated? The process of writing this dissertation to address the noted problem has been a journey toward my silent revolution, complete with peaks and valleys of emotion which have illuminated my perspectives and understanding of my place in the world and more specifically my place along the educational pipeline— my K-12 urban education continuum. It has been an experience rich in resilience in having my initial research proposal denied, twice, which propelled me into a state of fearless learning that altered my thinking and enabled me to uncover an organic research problem and issue that was there all along.

Originally, I wanted to conduct research to "anchor school reform efforts in the context of race by presenting and documenting the urban schooling experiences and perspectives of Black and Latino/a students, teachers, parents, and school leaders to present a counter-narrative that challenges the status quo and key assumptions located within mainstream education discourse about urban school reform efforts and the possibilities of educational practice in secondary public urban education." I was emphatically told to not pursue this route based on being denied permission to conduct this research in the CCSD.

I decided to heed the feedback and comments provided to me by the CCSD research committee and at their espoused support to review my proposal if resubmitted, I made the decision to revise my proposed study to meet their noted criteria, while remaining true to the integrity of my scholarship. I made a wealth of changes and concessions to my second research application. I altered the focus of my study which would now present and document the perceptions, experiences, and mental models of Black and Latino students, parents, and educational professionals in urban schooling environments to develop a 'voice of color thesis' (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000, 2001) to describe the realities of urban schooling for Black and Latino people. More specifically, this research study examines personal narratives by utilizing counterstorytelling, situated within a theoretical framework of critical race theory (CRT), to understand how Black and Latinos perceive the school system and their level of academic achievement and potential.

I addressed all of the previous committee comments; I even changed the research study title to be less aggressive (eliminating the critical race theory moniker that screamed, "Black man doing research about Blackness"). However, I also stood my ground on a few points of disagreement and provided a rationale explaining why I chose not to adapt some of the personal beliefs the CCSD research committee imposed on my research. Despite these changes, my research proposal was denied for a second time by the school district research committee.

As a result of my experiences with the school district research committee, my dissertation took a different pathway— one not envisioned or anticipated at the start of my dissertation journey. I faced a number of systemic challenges getting my

research approved by the school district. After reviewing my notes and writing, I had a conversation with my dissertation chair and I began to talk again about narratives. This led me to reconceptualize my thinking to develop a phenomenological study to chronicle and embrace my own experiences as a K-12 student, English teacher, and school administrator in the same school district (the same district that had denied me on two occasions the opportunity to present the voices of those in the system with similar experiences), and we knew at that moment that my story would be a powerful (and possibly transformative) example to address my research problem (stated at the start of this chapter) and the following core research questions:

1. What is it like being a marginalized learner?
2. In what ways has being a marginalized K-12 student, secondary English teacher, and secondary school administrator in the same school district, shaped my psyche and understanding of my place in a traditional educational system?
3. How have my ways of thinking, insights, and/or experiences (my experiential knowledge) served as a catalyst for informing educational practice and school change efforts?

I let these questions guide my work. The narratives that I included enabled me to appreciate my educational journey and marginalized learning in retrospection. Working on this dissertation came at the right time for me. I had to face me. As I read sections of my dissertation aloud to my momma, I asked, “Do I sound like a mean, confrontational and unhappy person in this dissertation?” She graciously responded,

"Well I see your smile, and I know your laughter." In other words, the answer to my question was "yes." To say the least, this process of self-examination and discovery has been my silent revolution: a cathartic step toward reclaiming my life, reestablishing my priorities, and working within a system to change it.

*Marion: In Review*

My writing for this dissertation was organized around several broad parts to capture the phenomenon of being a marginalized learner: an overview of Marion as a hybrid— as the researcher and as the research participant; a "traditional" review of related literature infused with personal narratives; a "traditional" outline and explanation of my research methodology seasoned with anecdotes, journal entries and personal reflection statements illustrating my experiences living a theory; and personal narratives included to articulate my lived experiences during selected phases of my marginalized learning.

This dissertation was presented in six chapters. First, Chapter 1 provided an introduction to Marion as I responded to the question, "Who is Marion Smith, Jr., and why is his story important?" This chapter provided a context into my life, personal and professional. I then stated the research problem, purpose of the study, and concluded this chapter by stating the significance of the study. Next, Chapter 2 presented a review of related literature from three areas of study: (a) epistemologies of learning, (b) narratives of the self, and (c) an interpretive, historical view of K-12 schooling in the United States. Concluding this chapter was a discussion and analysis of past school reform initiatives. Moving forward, Chapter 3 outlined and explained the research design and methodology used in this study. In addition, the methods used

to collect and analyze data were noted. Chapter 4 should be viewed as the epicenter of this document, in that it presents personal narratives that chart my lived experiences as a marginalized learner along the educational pipeline. Next was Chapter 5 that documented the limitations and findings of the study. This chapter ended by providing insights into possible next steps for those in education who want to inform educational practice and school change efforts. Chapter 6 concludes my dissertation. In this chapter, I provide a synopsis of the entire dissertation and my process toward a "silent revolution."

## My Silent Revolution[21]

Am I crazy, sharing so blatantly so many details about my personal and professional life? *A recent visit, my first, to a mental health specialist is just the tip of that iceberg.* Will sharing my thoughts and experiences through the written word come back to haunt me? I wonder about this even as I compose the final section of my dissertation. What will completing this document cost me? I am torn between sharing so much of myself and the promise of the sharing process that Nelson (2000) and Harrison (2002) call "exploration." Explorations are opportunities for us to "peel the onion" of our lives, "allowing exposure to the layers, allowing us to probe beneath the surface of our consciousness to places that might hide pain" (Harrison, 2002, p. 40).

According to Nelson (2000),

> People need to be guided into exploring these things with their writing but they do not necessarily need limitations…Explorations lead students into doing the work that must be done in order to bring about changes in our writing and our being. Because these explorations are open ended and

[21] This title is derived from, and presented here as an homage to, the 1971 poem by Gil Scott-Heron titled "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised."

> adaptable, and because we are always changing, they can be done over and over again; and stories that evolve from them will continue to help us find a deeper understanding of ourselves and others…At the heart of the work on our writing and being is the way we use our words to show rather than to tell. (p. 17)

I respect the concept of exploration as presented by Harrison (2002) and Nelson (2000); however, I can hear certain voices in my ear saying that it is dangerous to put that much of one's self, especially as a Black man, out there. Information is power, and information can be used to build you up or tear you down. I know that this may not be the spirit that either Harrison or Nelson intended. Maybe this thinking is one of the many reasons I call my study and the process of writing this dissertation my "silent revolution."

My voice and mere presence in the world of K-12 education *is* a threat to the status quo! This oppositional voice *is* the counternarrative and "makes [them] quake and tremble on their sandy foundation" (Latner, 2005). I used the latitude gained from my lived experiences as a K-12 student, English educator, school administrator, and researcher, spanning a time of 22 years in the same school district to present and argue for the implementation of effective educational practices and school change efforts anchored in the needs and realities of marginalized learners. Each of my experiences has provided me with unique perspectives from which to explore issues of learning, teaching, and school change efforts as viewed from the lens of a marginalized learner— one who continues to grow from concrete.

The Invitation

It doesn't interest me what you do for a living
I want to know what you ache for
and if you dare to dream of meeting your heart's longing.

It doesn't interest me how old you are
I want to know if you will risk looking like a fool
for love
for your dreams
for the adventure of being alive.

It doesn't interest me what planets are squaring your moon...
I want to know if you have touched the center of your own sorrow
if you have been opened by life's betrayals
or have become shriveled and closed
from fear of further pain.

I want to know if you can sit with pain
mine or your own
without moving to hide it
or fade it
or fix it.

I want to know if you can be with joy
mine or your own
if you can dance with wildness
and let the ecstasy fill you to the tips of your
fingers and toes
without cautioning us to
be careful
be realistic
to remember the limitations of being human.

It doesn't interest me if the story you are telling me
is true.
I want to know if you can
disappoint another
to be true to yourself.
If you can bear the accusation of betrayal
and not betray your own soul.
If you can be faithless
and therefore trustworthy.
I want to know if you can see Beauty
even when it is not pretty
every day.
And if you can source your own life
from its presence.

I want to know if you can live with failure
yours and mine
and still stand on the edge of the lake

and shout to the silver of the full moon,
"Yes."

It doesn't interest me
to know where you live or how much money you have.
I want to know if you can get up
after a night of grief and despair
weary and bruised to the bone
and do what needs to be done
to feed the children.

It doesn't interest me who you know
or how you came to be here.
I want to know if you will stand
in the center of the fire
with me
and not shrink back.

It doesn't interest me where or what or with whom
you have studied.
I want to know what sustains you
from the inside
when all else falls away.
I want to know if you can be alone
with yourself
and if you truly like the company you keep
in the empty moments. (Oriah Mountain Dreamer, 1999, p. 1)

If my dissertation has not caused you, the reader, to be emotionally affected and/or filled with passion to address an injustice in your life, it doesn't interest me; that is your issue, not mine. Using what I have learned from my lived experiences, I will continue trying to find my sphere of influence, so that I might inform educational practices and win victories for and empower marginalized learners in oppressive educational systems and schools. I conclude with a quote by Perry (2005) referenced earlier in my writing, and repeated here because of its clarity, poignancy, and resonance: **"A regular Black man falls down, but he will never stay down. Rise up**

**brothers. Stand tall. Man up because nobody is coming to save us. Begin" (p. 146).**

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# Appendix A

## School Demographic Summary Report

[redacted] Middle School

**SUMMARY OF STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS**

**2008-2009 School Year**

**Enrolled Students As of June 2, 2009**

### Active Students By Grade

| | # Students | % Students |
|---|---|---|
| Grade 06 | 330 | 31.4% |
| Grade 07 | 350 | 33.3% |
| Grade 08 | 370 | 35.2% |
| **Total Enrolled Students:** | **1,050** | |

### Active Students By Gender

| | Females | | Males | | Unknown | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Grade 06 | 159 | 48.2% | 171 | 51.8% | 0 | 0.0% |
| Grade 07 | 164 | 46.9% | 186 | 53.1% | 0 | 0.0% |
| Grade 08 | 186 | 50.3% | 184 | 49.7% | 0 | 0.0% |
| **Total Enrolled Students:** | **509** | **48.5%** | **541** | **51.5%** | | |

### Active Students By Ethnicity

| | Unknown | White | | Black | | Asian/Pacls | | Am/Alasind | | Hispanic | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Females | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Grade 06 | | 7 | 0.7% | 12 | 1.1% | 2 | 0.2% | | | 138 | 13.1% |
| Grade 07 | | 7 | 0.7% | 11 | 1.0% | 2 | 0.2% | | | 144 | 13.7% |
| Grade 08 | | 4 | 0.4% | 13 | 1.2% | 3 | 0.3% | 1 | 0.1% | 165 | 15.7% |
| tal Females: 0,509 | | 18 | 3.5% | 36 | 7.1% | 7 | 1.4% | 1 | 0.2% | 447 | 87.8% |
| Males | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Grade 06 | | 9 | 0.9% | 9 | 0.9% | 1 | 0.1% | | | 152 | 14.5% |
| Grade 07 | | 4 | 0.4% | 18 | 1.7% | | | 1 | 0.1% | 163 | 15.5% |
| Grade 08 | | 4 | 0.4% | 14 | 1.3% | 4 | 0.4% | 1 | 0.1% | 161 | 15.3% |
| Total Males: 0,541 | | 17 | 3.1% | 41 | 7.6% | 5 | 0.9% | 2 | 0.4% | 476 | 88.0% |
| Total Enrolled: 1,050 | | **35** | **3.3%** | **77** | **7.3%** | **12** | **1.1%** | **3** | **0.3%** | **923** | **87.9%** |

### Active Students By ELL

| ELL/Eng Prof Code | Grade 6 | Grade 7 | Grade 8 | Total By Code |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| A | 5 | 1 | 4 | **10** |
| B | 72 | 72 | 65 | **209** |
| G | 22 | 22 | 12 | **56** |
| **Total ELL Students:** | **99** | **95** | **81** | **275** |

June 2, 2009

# Appendix B

## School Discipline Data Count of Events

[redacted] Middle School

### Count of Events By Month

*For The Period 8/25/08 to 6/4/09*

| Event | Aug | Sep | Oct | Nov | Dec | Jan | Feb | Mar | Apr | May | Jun | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Attendance Policy Reviews | 0 | 4 | 11 | 4 | 1 | 4 | 10 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 37 |
| Behavior Contracts Signed | 5 | 17 | 36 | 19 | 20 | 24 | 21 | 22 | 22 | 24 | 0 | 210 |
| Behavior Warnings | 20 | 126 | 12 | 14 | 24 | 12 | 26 | 36 | 29 | 39 | 3 | 341 |
| Bus Referrals | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Citations Issued-Tru/EdNeg | 0 | 0 | 8 | 10 | 4 | 8 | 2 | 4 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 37 |
| Deans' Detentions | 2 | 274 | 234 | 138 | 85 | 85 | 88 | 55 | 39 | 60 | 0 | 1060 |
| Detention No Show (Tchr&Dean) | 0 | 91 | 43 | 18 | 11 | 2 | 11 | 28 | 2 | 30 | 0 | 236 |
| Detention No Shows (Deans') | 0 | 59 | 16 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 75 |
| Dress Code Violations | 15 | 35 | 5 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 5 | 2 | 9 | 39 | 1 | 115 |
| First Fight/Susp Notifications | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 8 |
| In-House Suspensions | 4 | 65 | 106 | 108 | 83 | 100 | 123 | 71 | 88 | 113 | 2 | 863 |
| Mediation Referrals | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 8 | 0 | 2 | 3 | 0 | 19 |
| No Contact/Harassment Contracts | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| Notice of Truancy (1st) | 3 | 41 | 39 | 46 | 25 | 18 | 48 | 54 | 65 | 31 | 0 | 370 |
| Notice of Truancy (2nd) | 0 | 8 | 26 | 20 | 26 | 10 | 13 | 23 | 38 | 13 | 0 | 177 |
| Notice of Truancy (3rd) | 0 | 2 | 10 | 12 | 2 | 9 | 4 | 10 | 8 | 19 | 0 | 76 |
| otice of Truancy (Cont) | 0 | 0 | 5 | 7 | 4 | 7 | 1 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 0 | 37 |
| Police Referrals | 0 | 4 | 6 | 0 | 3 | 3 | 20 | 3 | 5 | 13 | 0 | 57 |
| Referrals to Counseling Office | 1 | 2 | 5 | 2 | 13 | 2 | 9 | 2 | 3 | 12 | 0 | 51 |
| Referrals-Academic RPC | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 10 |
| Referrals-Unwritten | 28 | 171 | 123 | 69 | 44 | 47 | 67 | 71 | 64 | 73 | 6 | 763 |
| Referrals-Written | 6 | 90 | 197 | 103 | 87 | 63 | 111 | 151 | 131 | 180 | 5 | 1124 |
| Requested Parent Conferences RPC-A | 0 | 2 | 23 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 2 | 1 | 49 |
| Required Parent Conferences RPC-B | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Required Parent Conferences RPC-T | 5 | 58 | 112 | 56 | 75 | 88 | 94 | 64 | 44 | 63 | 0 | 659 |
| RPC-Administrative | 0 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 5 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 13 |
| School Beautification Program | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 2 |
| Student Searches Conducted | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 4 | 1 | 7 |
| Substance Abuse Awareness Program R | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Suspensions | 2 | 16 | 45 | 43 | 35 | 26 | 41 | 82 | 58 | 72 | 4 | 424 |
| Suspensions-Alt Placement | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| Suspensions-Behavior Program | 0 | 2 | 1 | 11 | 12 | 4 | 4 | 8 | 9 | 0 | 0 | 51 |
| Suspensions-Expulsion | 0 | 2 | 7 | 7 | 4 | 5 | 3 | 7 | 6 | 8 | 1 | 50 |
| Tardies | 0 | 186 | 170 | 181 | 149 | 172 | 130 | 100 | 38 | 80 | 0 | 1206 |
| Tardy Policy Reviews | 0 | 1 | 6 | 0 | 1 | 8 | 10 | 16 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 43 |
| uancy Notices | 3 | 53 | 87 | 90 | 57 | 46 | 68 | 94 | 117 | 68 | 0 | 683 |

The totals on this report may not equal the totals on the Count of Incidents By Month report for categories such a Tardies or Truancies because this report is looking only at the "Source" field (a single value), whereas the incident report is looking at all four incident code fields.

June 3, 2009

# Appendix C

## CCSD Research Denial Letter #1

ASSESSMENT, ACCOUNTABILITY, RESEARCH & SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT
4260 EUCALYPTUS AVE •LAS VEGAS, NV 89121•(702) 799-5195•FAX (702) 799-0292

CCSD
CLARK COUNTY
SCHOOL DISTRICT



October 1, 2009

Dear Mr. Smith:

The Clark County School District Research Review Committee reviewed your proposal entitled: *Critical Race Theoretical Approaches in Education: A Framework to Re-Conceptualize and Reinvent a U.S. Urban Secondary School*. Because your application has merit, we would like to extend to you the opportunity to revise and resubmit your application. The committee would review your application a second time.

If you have any questions or require assistance please do not hesitate to contact [redacted] at [redacted] or e-mail him at [redacted].

Sincerely,

[redacted]

[redacted]
Coordinator IV
Research Department
Chair, Research Review Committee

JNC:clk

Cc: [redacted]
Research Review Committee
[redacted]

RRC-9-2010

# Appendix D

## CCSD Research Committee Comments #1

(with feedback comments to me from Dr. Norman Harris)

| | |
|---|---|
| **Part I: Appropriateness of the Research in CCSD:** | |
| Is this project relevant to the mission of the CCSD? | Research question is not well defined |
| Is the intrusiveness of the research outweighed by its potential benefit to the District? | The research design is unlikely to provide measurable benefits to the District |
| Are the research activities compatible with the public school setting? | No, the research project does not seem to have an objective purpose |
| **Part IIa: Quantitative Research:** | |
| Are the questions or hypotheses well developed and related to the problem? | I think the research question needs to be redefined as relating to the perceptions of students, educators, and parents (see comments above) |
| Are data collection methods appropriate? | some of the questions are leading and need to be eliminated or revised (exploratory research with an action research direction would deal with this ) |
| Can the research accomplish its intended purpose? | Not sure if it can determine CRT as a method to reinvent education and I don't see that "action" component that CRT requires. However, it is an interesting project and can accomplish the purpose of better understanding the various perspectives. (see comments above) |
| **Part IIb: Qualitative Research:** | |
| Are the research questions broadly stated? | -I believe the research question needs to be revised to be about the perceptions of Black/Latino students, educators and parents of school reform<br>-Too broad (see comments above) |
| Are the data collection methods appropriate to the problem and its context? | -Methods are appropriate except that the focus group questions are too many and several of those are leading questions. (see comments above)<br>- How can you study race when you only look at blacks and Latinos. You should at least talk about race with some white students and teachers (My suggestions could deal with this) |
| Is the study likely to accomplish its stated purpose? | -I don't think it can determine CRT as a method to reinvent education, but it could access the perceptions of participants related to school reform. My suggestions could deal with this)<br>- No, it will simply confirm the assumptions of the theory and the researcher. It is not an objective methodology My suggestions could deal with this) |
| General Comments | This research approaches the very relevant issue of school reform from a different and necessary perspective. The researcher should consider juxtaposing his findings against existing findings regarding urban school reform to see if they indeed differ or if there are similarities that can be extended with the dimensions added through this study. Also, it is important to remember that due to its qualitative nature, this type of study should be replicated in other urban schools to determine if similar conclusions are reached. An urban |

**Comment [NH1]:** See my suggestion about making this an exploratory research question: "Are there relationships between the way marginalized students perceive the school system and their level of academic performance?" I think this question can get to the CRT info you want without labeling it as such.

**Comment [NH2]:** By defining your research as exploratory (with an action research bent), you relieve yourself of having to prove "objectivity.

**Comment [NH3]:** This is part of exploratory research

| | |
|---|---|
| | school in CCSD and the experiences of its students and faculty may very well differ from one in another school district. |
| Is the problem clearly focused? | I don't think this project will help "reinvent an urban secondary school" |
| Is an initial, appropriate theoretical framework presented? | The theory is not appropriate an evaluative, but rather prescriptive, or even a polemic. (My suggestions could deal with this) |
| Is the study design open and emergent? | Interview questions are leading, i.e. "How do schools foster inequality?" It assumes schools foster inequality, when perhaps they could help alleviate inequality. |
| Are the data analysis methods appropriate to the data? | Unclear |
| **Part III: Qualitative Research:** | |
| When appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provision for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of subjects. | The researcher indicates that student data including grades, attendance records and discipline records may be used to add context. If this data will be used, then students and parents should be notified about this, especially if the data will be collected in an identifiable format. There is no indication of this in any of the consent documents. We also need to know how the researcher will access, store and eventually dispose of this type of data. |
| Risks to subjects are reasonable in relation to anticipated benefits, if any, to subjects, and the importance of the knowledge that may reasonably be expected to result. | Could agitate or disturb students. Little benefit will come from the study. |
| Selection of subjects is equitable. | Only choosing blacks and Latinos which will bias results |
| When some or all of the subjects are likely to be vulnerable to coercion or undue influence, additional safeguards have been included in the study to protect the rights and welfare of these subjects. | Unclear |

Marion Smith, Jr.

**Comment [NH4]:** Remove the claim—it won't hurt your research

**Comment [NH5]:** You won't convince this person that water is wet—remove the question, and consider my suggestion.

**Comment [NH6]:** Your copy to me does have these documents; indicating how you will deal with destruction info is a standard piece.

**Comment [NH7]:** Earlier comments in this section contradict this statement. I think the statement can be dealt with via the comments I make on your application.

**Comment [NH8]:** The methodological approach I suggest could address this.

**Comment [NH9]:** I think my suggestions will deal with this.

Appendix E

CCSD Research Denial Letter #2 and Comments

ASSESSMENT, ACCOUNTABILITY, RESEARCH & SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT
4260 EUCALYPTUS AVE •LAS VEGAS, NV 89121•(702) 799-5195•FAX (702) 799-0292

CCSD
CLARK COUNTY
SCHOOL DISTRICT



January 19, 2010

Dear Mr. Smith:

The Clark County School District Research Review Committee reviewed your proposal entitled: ***Counterstorytelling and Critical Race Theory: Exploring Black and Latino Narratives as a Methodological Framework to Understand How Ethnicity, Beliefs, and Perceptions Shape Schooling Experiences and Academic Achievement.*** **The committee regrets to inform you that your proposal has not been approved.**

**If you have any questions or require assistance please do not hesitate to contact [redacted] at [redacted] or e-mail him at [redacted]**

**Sincerely,**

[redacted]

**Coordinator IV**
**Research Department**
**Chair, Research Review Committee**

**JNC:clk**

**Cc:** [redacted]
**Research Review Committee**
[redacted]

**RRC-21-2010**

## Research Review Comments

**Is the intrusiveness of the research outweighed by its potential benefit to the District?**
Unclear whether this will yield findings that can translate into action for the District. It may contribute to a body of knowledge, but I'm not sure it will directly benefit the District.

**Are the research questions broadly stated?**
Research question could be better. It needs to be rewritten to be more open-ended and compatible with the descriptive nature of the study. In other words, not a yes/no question: "What is the relationship..." versus "Is there a relationship..." It is unclear whether question refers to perceived or actual academic achievement and potential. If actual, how will researcher measure academic achievement and potential? I don't see how researcher will incorporate parent and educator perspectives into the research question, as it is currently written.
The research question as stated cannot be answered using the approach described. The research states their question is: Is there a relationship between the way marginalized students, specifically Black and Latino, experience and perceive the school system and their level of academic achievement and potential? But there is no way the information the research collects will answer this question. Qualitative research can provide "thick description" and looking at students with a 2.0 GPA who are student leaders will not allow you to see how perceptions of race influence achievement. The research is not collecting any information that can tell her about what influences achievement. He or She is collecting information that can be used to better understand student perceptions of race. That is it.

**Is an initial, appropriate theoretical framework presented?**
Be careful not to suppress the voices of your participants by trying to remain within the underlying assumptions of CRT. Realize that CRT may or may not be compatible with what students, educators and parents want for education in their communities. This will require a delicate balance between researcher's expectations and what ideas actually surface in the narratives.

**Is the study design open and emergent?**
*See my previous comment above*. Also, be careful of expecting too much from your respondents in terms of critical insights. Be open to the fact that they may or may not discuss the issues to the critical depth that you desire.
The research design doesn't seem very open to new concepts or categories. It seems to be imposing a theory and selecting subjects and questions to support the theory.

**Are the data collection methods appropriate to the problem and its context?**
Selecting only students who have a GPA of 2.0 and that are disciplined student leaders, doesn't make sense. In addition, selection faculty who follow the criteria of "these teachers will be selected based upon their documented involvement and interests in discussing with a group of like-minded educators how the perceptions and experiences of Black and Latino/a people in urban schooling settings connect to levels of academic achievement and/or perceived potential" will produced biased results. There is no effort in this research project to get diverse perspectives. In fact, there is intensive effort to select a homogeneous group of "like-minded" people to discuss perceptions of race. This is not careful social science research; it sounds more like a polemic.
No data analysis technique is described. I would recommend some form of qualitative data analysis software to help analyze so much interview data.

**Is the study likely to accomplish its stated purpose?**

Depending on the nature of responses, you may or may not be able to support or negate CRT. However, you may end up with new and untapped perspectives on the topic at hand.

The research design will likely select a biased, homogeneous group of subjects of "like-mind". The data will unlikely provide any new ideas; rather it will simply insure the confirmation of the ideas already presented in the theory. Instead of uncovering a "counter-story" the research design will impose a "counter-story" by strategic sampling and unclear data analysis.

**Selection of subjects is equitable?**

Need to justify the selection criteria. Why only focus on students with 2.0 GPA, leadership potential, good attendance, etc? What about Blacks and Latinos who don't perform well? Shouldn't we be interested in their perspectives as well? Is it an issue of difficulty in getting a hold of them – why are they omitted? I think they are an important group for this research topic.

I understand the idea behind a "counter-story" and the desire to only select minority students, but the selection criteria will create a group that is extremely different from the target group you are interested in.

# Appendix F

## Guiding Research Questions

The questions and prompts below were categorized into three sections, three *lifeworlds* in which I experienced the CCSD, that inquire about my lived experiences along the educational pipeline. In responding to these questions, through a retrospective presentation of what it was like to live through and live in these moments, it was my intent to answer the three core research questions. The questions and topics below were used as a guide rather than as a set of concrete questions requiring directly aligned answers.

*As a K-12 student:*

1. What are my educational experiences at school? Elementary? Middle School? High School?
2. Describe a typical day at school.
3. Because I attended Title I, magnet and inner-city schools, how was I viewed/perceived by my teachers in each of those school settings? Other adults? Community members?
4. What makes a school "good"? a teacher?
5. Name and explain one issue that I feel needs to be addressed or discussed more in my schools. Why does this issue need to be addressed? How could this issue be "fixed?"
6. Describe the students that attended school with me.

7. What should educators know about the academic achievement and potential of Black students like me?

8. How am I perceived by others? Does this affect the way I see myself? Explain.

9. Do I believe that my teachers believe that all students can learn at high levels? What makes me believe this?

10. Say something about my teachers.

*As a teacher:*

1. Tell me about your professional experiences in urban education.

2. What are your thoughts on Black and Latino/a students in urban schools today?

3. What, if anything, should be changed to improve schools for Black and Latino/a students?

4. How can we ensure equal educational outcomes for Black and Latino/a students in urban schools?

5. What do you believe to be more significant in shaping one's schooling experiences/life chances: race/ethnicity, personal beliefs, or societal perceptions?

6. What must be done to ensure that all Black and Latino/a urban students achieve at high academic levels?

7. What are your beliefs and perspectives about Black and Latino/a students that attend Renaissance Middle [or other schools in the CCSD with similar demographics]?

8. Tell me about your professional colleagues. What do they believe to be true about the academic achievement or potential of Black and Latino/a urban students today? Why do you believe this to be true?

9. When did you know you were going to be an educator? Why the field of urban education?

10. What words of wisdom would you give Black and/or Latino/a students in an urban public school?

11. Is race or class more significant in determining one's life chances? Schooling experiences in CCSD?

12. What must educators give up to enable all students to achieve the results we espouse?

13. Describe my professional experiences as a teacher. What was my proudest moment? Most frustrating moment or aspect?

*As a school administrator:*

1. Describe what it feels like to be a school administrator in the CCSD.

2. If one wanted to change another person's mind about something, how would one do that? Explain.

3. Someone tells me a story about a [Black or Latino/a] welfare recipient who used her money to raise her children, then went to school and became a lawyer and is now a federal judge. How do I react? How do I think the general population would respond to this story?

4. What results should we expect from Title 1 and/or students in urban schools like those in which we work?

5. What is the most effective way to organize a school to help all students achieve at high academic levels?

6. What knowledge and skills must teachers and leaders of urban schools have and apply to help all students achieve at high academic levels?

7. What is my vision of what urban schools should look like?

8. Name something that my ethnic/racial community has had to struggle against/with as it relates to education.

9. Who speaks and who listens?

10. How has the status quo played a part in my personal and professional journey?

11. Why Renaissance Middle School for me?

12. What is a leader?

13. What does it mean to speak truth to power in the CCSD?

14. Is there genuine advocacy and support between and among people of color in education administration in CCSD?

*As a marginalized learner:*

1. Discuss the achievement/opportunity gap between Black and White students. Why aren't Black and Latino/a students performing at higher levels? Who should be held responsible for this?

2. What are my thoughts on Black students in urban schools today?

3. What makes a school "good"?

4. How do schools foster inequality?

5. What barriers, obstacles, and challenges do urban students face in society? In the CCSD?

6. In terms of race and identity, what does it mean to be Black? How does one define this? How does being Black affect ones' schooling and learning experiences?

7. Do urban schools today, like those which I experienced, need to change? If yes, why? If no, why?

8. What, if anything, should be changed to improve schools for urban school students like those from my experiences and others of the same demographics?

9. How can we ensure equal educational outcomes for Black students in urban schools?

10. Is race an important issue in urban schools today? Explain.

11. Today more Black students attend segregated schools than they did when *Brown vs. Board of Education* was decided. What does this say about reform through law? About society? About these types of schools in the CCSD?

12. What makes a school "urban?"

13. Does White privilege exist in urban schools? If so, give an example. Is there such a thing as Black privilege in urban schools?

14. What are my thoughts on No Child Left Behind?

15. Do all people of color share something in common, namely their oppression, or can we only speak of oppressions?

16. What makes a teacher "highly qualified"?

17. Say one thing that I believe to be true about urban education. Explain why I believe this to be true.

18. Do policymakers really want to close the achievement gaps, improve urban schools, and eradicate inequality of educational opportunity? Explain.

19. How does one "walk the talk" as it relates to being a change agent?

20. Do urban schools today need to change? If yes, why? If no, why?

21. In what specific ways does the current K-12 educational system in the CCSD reward conformity and discourage individuality and change?

22. Where do I see public urban schools in the CCSD headed in the next 5 years?

23. “Today’s minority students have been given equal opportunities to quality education.” Do you agree with that statement? If so, what needs to happen for those opportunities to translate into successful outcomes? If not, how will they be able to access those opportunities?

24. Would it not be logical for ethnic minorities to unite in one powerful coalition to confront the power system that is oppressing them all? If so, what prevents them from doing so?

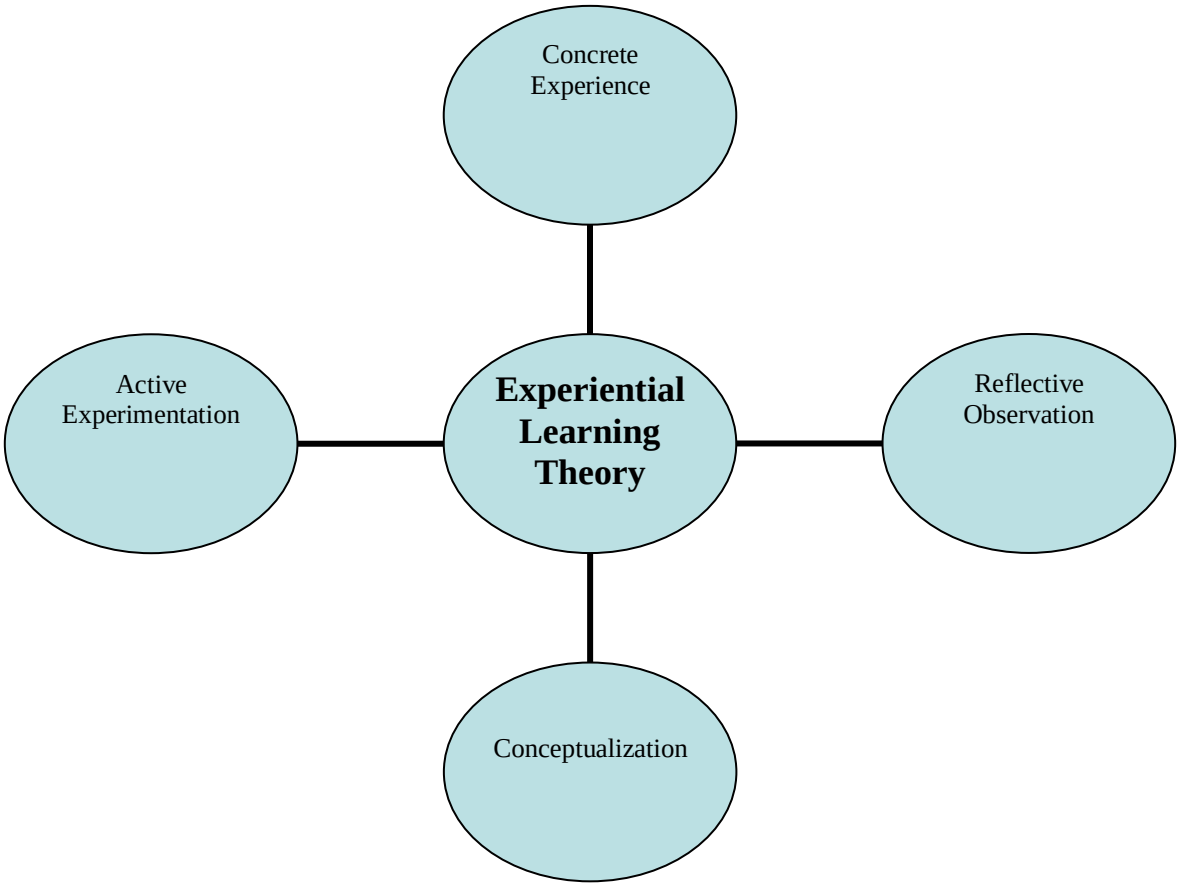
25. Who will/should lead urban schools and reform efforts? Why?

26. Can the system of K-12 urban public education be made effective for all of its learners? If so, how? If no, why?

27. What words of wisdom would I give marginalized learners in the CCSD?

Appendix G

Schema for Experiential Learning Theory (ELT)



Appendix H

Educational Philosophy Statement

**Educational Philosophy- Teacher**

**Written by Marion Smith, Jr.**

***Updated and Revised- January 2008 from original work on July 2003***

I became enthralled with the act of teaching at a very young age. Several memories stand out like touchstones to remind me of the beginning of my teaching path. Quite by accident, I taught my younger cousins and neighborhood friends to read while playing school in the long afternoons that followed my Kindergarten mornings. Through the years, I have felt increasingly called to the teaching profession; it has become a conduit for the greatest contribution, learning, and growth of which I am capable. My educational philosophy finds it genesis in these formative experiences. It is comprised of several interwoven strands representing the aspects of education I value most: craft, rigor, and engagement.

As a teacher-leader, I have learned that banking- in which students memorize and recall information at a later date- is a very easy, ineffective, and unsatisfactory way to teach English. Over the years, the educators and educator leaders who have provided rigorous experiences for me to question my assumptions, push against personal and intellectual boundaries, and experiment with different modes of expression have made the most substantial impressions. These are the educators I hold in my heart, whose work I emulate and move forward. To those ends, I embrace the metaphor of teaching as a performance art, involving crafted choreography,

creativity, rehearsal, improvisation, celebration, and regular feedback and revision. I have high expectations for my students and colleagues; I enjoy helping them set and achieve lofty goals.

For me, the greatest poverty in the world is not physical but mental. As an English educator, I enable students to examine the world as they read the words on the page. I approach English instruction anchored in sociology. By exploring literature and language, I simply do not teach literature; I serve as a catalyst for students to explore texts while thinking critically about the world and their place in it. My experiences in middle school and high school classrooms as an English Language Arts teacher for 7 years was anchored in creating a climate of intellectual engagement where questioning, dialogue, and respectful debate were the norm. I make the case that English is a mass medium arguing that all media are, in one way or another, language based and therefore not only appropriate but vital as sources of information and expression in the English Language Arts classroom. Reading, writing, listening, speaking, and critical thinking are not only the key components of the English Language Arts curriculum, but compulsory life skills.

Through studying literature and not teaching literature, I provide knowledge about world cultures, international events, and appreciation of the diversities and commonalities of human values, beliefs, and interests. This focus enables students to incorporate who they are and how they think; therefore, attaching personal meaning to concepts presented in each lesson.

With an internalized "pedagogy of confidence" (Jackson, 2001) - a framework that is rooted in a belief in students' potential for high academic achievement and in

my own abilities to support all students, I have first-hand experiences that it is possible to reverse historic trends of underachievement in urban schools.

Through extensive writing, discussion, and the dialogue of our reflective comments, I enable students to develop a critical consciousness and creative voice, encouraging them to act as agents of positive change in their world.

I expose my students to the canon of classic literature of our culture and I constantly strive to expand that cannon, giving legitimacy to the great writing of historically marginalized subcultures. I use young adult literature in conjunction with the classics in my classroom. I feel that thematic units that blend contemporary young adult literature and classical literature are more accessible to students; therefore, they will get more out of their readings. In addition, reading is a great way to introduce or incorporate writing into the classroom. I guide students to communicate fluently and appropriately in the standardized language of our culture, and I am highly skilled and confident in teaching English grammar in a meaningful context. I make a priority to establish a classroom and school culture and climate in which all students feel safe (due to our Conduct Code centered on RESPECT). Students leave my class at the end of the year with the ability to be critical, cultural consumers and active, cultural participants in an ever-changing world.

Nothing in the world is void of language; therefore, my approach to English education encourages students to embrace the unfamiliar and outgrow their current pre-determined mental biases and notions. Because literature is written to make an impact, students in my class talk about it, argue about it, look for points of agreement and disagreement with the author, and look for ways the literature connects to their

own lives. My teaching provides an outlet for students to examine their needs, and from this establish a plan that enables them to use various angles of vision to examine thoughts, beliefs, and actions.

As an English, reading, and language arts educator, I know that creating opportunity for renewal and rejuvenation is essential to my longevity and continued professional excellence. A teacher who stops learning and developing new thoughts and ideas in turn stops teaching. I believe in nurturing a sense of spirit through my rich connections with my students and colleagues, through my reflective role as a researcher in my own classroom, and through artistic endeavors associated with my teaching. The best teachers of writing practice their craft and share their writing with their students. I model appropriate techniques by sharing pieces from all stages of my own writing process. Modeling effective and efficient writing instead of just doing grammar exercises allows the students to make grammar more relevant.

In the end, all lessons center on empowering students to become successful independent learners. I recognize and validate the limits of both my students and myself, but I teach *within* and *through* and if necessary, *around*, *over*, and *under* them in order to reach those students who enter my classroom. I will have it no other way! With my altruistic and passionate approach to education, I dispel the notion that schools are simply physical conveniences--like bathrooms-- with no spiritual or intellectual relationships to draw people or hold them there.

Imagine a society without people who are secure, articulate, and competent thinkers, writers, and readers. My students refuse to picture their world this way; therefore, in our classroom we are preparing ourselves for the future by approaching

English and reading as requisite life skills, which will ensure personal and academic success.

When others puzzle over the amount of time and energy I invest in teaching and learning, I let them know that for me teaching is much more than a career I have chosen; it is how I make the most of the gifts and opportunities I have been given. By helping my students achieve in ways they had not previously imagined possible or necessary, my daily work becomes my living prayer, one of praxis, petition, and praise. Even if they do not remember my name 20 years from now, it is certain that my former students will remember that I challenged them beyond what they might select for themselves and in the process enabled them to learn and grow without limits.

By engaging in daily conversations with school personnel, students will articulate their success. Ultimately, students will be able to demonstrate their successes by thinking critically and articulating how they have moved beyond the traditional 3 R's: reading, writing, and arithmetic, toward an understanding of the new 3 R's: reasoning, resilience, and responsibility. At any time, my students will be able to communicate with anyone on campus what they are learning, why they are learning this material, and why this material matters.

# Appendix I

## CCSD Class of 2008 High School Graduation Rates (by school)

| Class of 2008 Graduation Rates | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| School | All Students % | Male % | Female % | American Indian / Alaskan Native % | Asian / Pacific Islander % | Hispanic % | Black / African American % | White % |
| **District** | **65.1** | **62.8** | **67.3** | **44.7** | **80.4** | **54.9** | **54.7** | **73.4** |
| *for comparison--Class of 2007* | *63.0* | *60.3* | *65.7* | *51.0* | *76.4* | *52.0* | *51.9* | *71.4* |
| A Tech | 97.8 | 98.1 | 97.4 | 100.0 | 97.5 | 97.1 | 100.0 | 97.6 |
| Academy for Individualized Study 6-12 | 28.5 | 28.1 | 28.7 | 12.5 | 34.6 | 17.8 | 20.0 | 33.1 |
| Arbor View HS | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| Basic HS | 66.3 | 66.3 | 66.3 | 33.3 | 72.7 | 63.0 | 44.6 | 71.5 |
| Bonanza HS | 65.1 | 62.3 | 68.1 | 50.0 | 72.7 | 56.3 | 54.6 | 71.8 |
| Boulder City HS | 88.2 | 84.0 | 92.5 | 75.0 | 100.0 | 87.5 | 40.0 | 90.2 |
| Burk Horizon SW HS | 28.4 | 26.1 | 29.8 | 0.0 | 46.7 | 24.7 | 21.7 | 33.3 |
| Canyon Springs HS | 51.5 | 45.9 | 56.1 | 66.7 | 81.8 | 42.0 | 50.4 | 71.6 |
| Centennial HS | 81.7 | 78.0 | 85.4 | 100.0 | 91.7 | 71.0 | 75.9 | 84.2 |
| Chaparral HS | 48.2 | 46.3 | 49.8 | 71.4 | 71.1 | 45.9 | 36.5 | 51.6 |
| Cheyenne HS | 56.2 | 56.9 | 55.5 | 0.0 | 73.3 | 53.6 | 55.3 | 57.7 |
| Cimarron-Memorial HS | 65.9 | 63.3 | 68.8 | 42.9 | 69.8 | 61.2 | 57.2 | 71.4 |
| Clark HS | 59.9 | 56.6 | 62.5 | 33.3 | 79.4 | 48.8 | 50.8 | 73.9 |
| Coronado HS | 89.5 | 89.0 | 89.9 | 100.0 | 92.6 | 91.8 | 72.7 | 89.8 |
| Cowan Sunset SE HS | 38.1 | 32.7 | 42.4 | 0.0 | 16.7 | 51.7 | 33.3 | 23.8 |
| CSNHS East | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 0.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| CSNHS South | 91.2 | 88.9 | 92.3 | 50.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 89.7 |
| CSNHS West | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| Del Sol HS | 46.3 | 43.2 | 49.4 | 33.3 | 59.3 | 42.1 | 33.3 | 56.0 |
| Desert Pines HS | 51.1 | 49.7 | 52.6 | 14.3 | 92.6 | 48.4 | 56.3 | 50.0 |
| Desert Willow School | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| Durango HS | 73.7 | 73.3 | 74.0 | 66.7 | 77.3 | 72.0 | 69.2 | 74.4 |
| Eldorado HS | 53.4 | 53.5 | 53.3 | 25.0 | 60.9 | 52.0 | 45.1 | 57.6 |
| Foothill HS | 77.4 | 78.0 | 76.8 | 50.0 | 89.7 | 68.1 | 70.7 | 79.6 |
| Global Community HS | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| Green Valley HS | 85.1 | 81.9 | 88.3 | 80.0 | 91.1 | 80.7 | 81.8 | 85.8 |
| Indian Springs HS | 75.9 | 77.8 | 75.0 | 0.0 | 100.0 | 60.0 | 100.0 | 80.0 |
| Las Vegas Academy | 94.1 | 94.2 | 94.1 | 0.0 | 96.9 | 90.6 | 91.3 | 95.3 |
| Las Vegas HS | 70.4 | 67.1 | 73.7 | 100.0 | 85.9 | 63.4 | 64.6 | 76.9 |
| Laughlin Jr/Sr HS | 67.6 | 65.0 | 70.6 | 0.0 | 50.0 | 66.7 | 100.0 | 66.7 |
| Legacy HS | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| Liberty HS | 77.5 | 74.0 | 80.8 | 75.0 | 84.2 | 66.7 | 77.8 | 80.2 |
| Miley Achievement Center ES | 35.7 | 11.1 | 80.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 50.0 | 100.0 | 22.2 |
| Moapa Valley HS | 82.1 | 82.3 | 81.9 | 33.3 | 100.0 | 75.0 | 100.0 | 84.2 |
| Mojave HS | 42.0 | 41.9 | 42.2 | 0.0 | 55.8 | 35.4 | 44.1 | 44.4 |
| Morris Sunset East HS | 18.4 | 9.7 | 23.9 | 0.0 | 25.0 | 26.7 | 7.4 | 4.6 |
| Palo Verde HS | 76.7 | 71.7 | 81.5 | 40.0 | 82.3 | 62.1 | 73.9 | 79.4 |
| Rancho HS | 52.0 | 47.1 | 56.6 | 30.0 | 93.9 | 47.3 | 40.0 | 74.0 |
| Sandy Valley Jr/Sr HS | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| SE CTA | 89.8 | 89.2 | 90.3 | 0.0 | 91.4 | 93.6 | 83.8 | 84.6 |
| Shadow Ridge HS | 71.3 | 70.4 | 72.2 | 100.0 | 88.7 | 70.0 | 57.0 | 72.2 |
| Sierra Vista HS | 72.0 | 68.8 | 75.4 | 0.0 | 81.8 | 60.9 | 59.4 | 77.6 |
| Silverado HS | 77.1 | 74.9 | 79.8 | 40.0 | 86.3 | 77.3 | 59.7 | 78.3 |

Accountability From Prelim NDE files 4/22/09

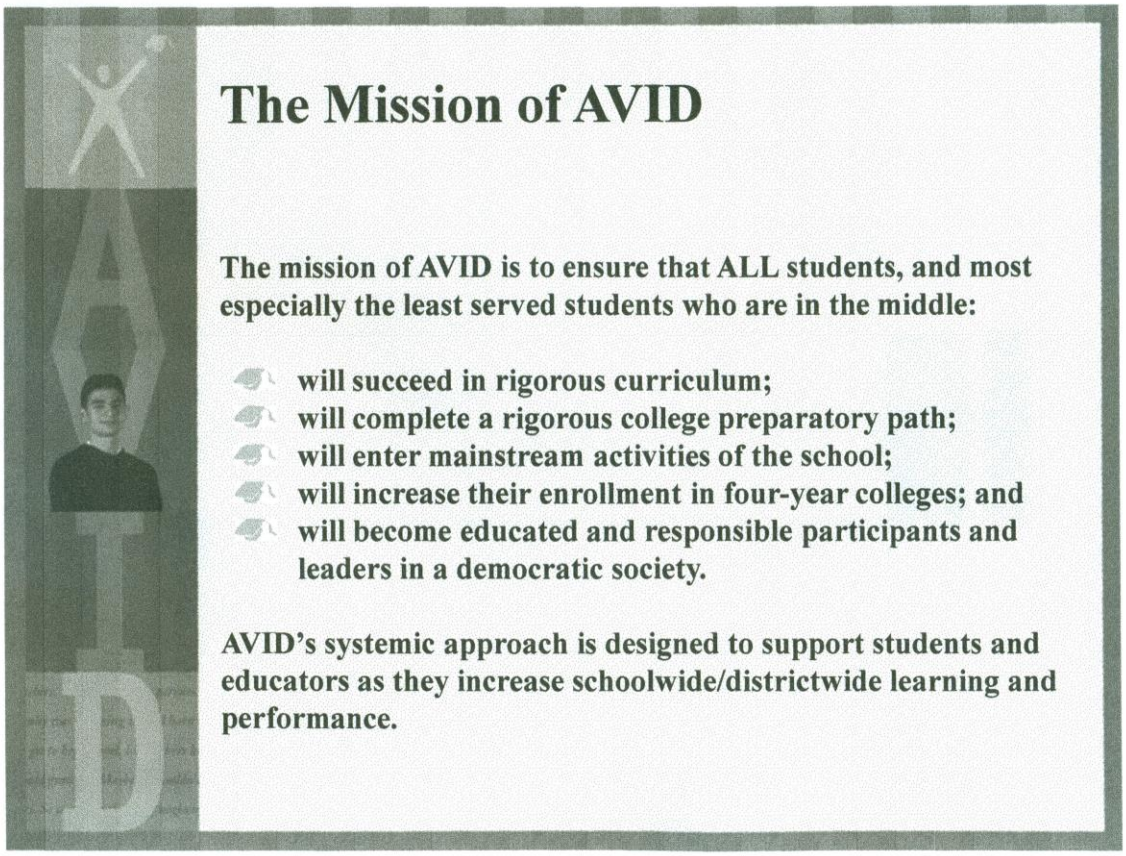
| Class of 2008 Graduation Rates | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| School | All Students % | Male % | Female % | American Indian / Alaskan Native % | Asian / Pacific Islander % | Hispanic % | Black / African American % | White % |
| Spring Valley HS | 73.8 | 73.7 | 73.9 | 40.0 | 87.4 | 69.9 | 72.5 | 70.5 |
| Stewart School | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| Valley HS | 55.5 | 55.2 | 55.7 | 50.0 | 72.0 | 49.3 | 53.0 | 64.9 |
| Virgin Valley HS | 90.2 | 90.3 | 90.0 | 50.0 | 100.0 | 83.8 | 100.0 | 92.9 |
| Virtual HS | 31.8 | 26.9 | 35.0 | 0.0 | 75.0 | 57.1 | 0.0 | 27.5 |
| Western HS | 41.3 | 36.7 | 45.8 | 33.3 | 55.0 | 38.8 | 36.9 | 50.0 |
| Charters (not included in CCSD totals) | | | | | | | | |
| Delta Academy | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| Explore Knowledge | 29.4 | 25.0 | 33.3 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 33.3 |
| Innovations International | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| Odyssey Charter HS | 28.6 | 26.5 | 30.6 | 0.0 | 33.3 | 25.0 | 31.3 | 29.6 |

N/A--cannot calculate Grad Rate because 4 years of data are not available.

2008-09 Accountability Report

Appendix J

Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) Mission Statement




*Source: www.avidonline.org*