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“TRUE, SHE HAS THE CULTURE YOU NEED”: A WHITE TEACHER IN AN
URBAN SCHOOL CRITICALLY REFLECTS ON THE HIDDEN, SOCIAL AND
ACADEMIC CURRICULUM

A Dissertation Presented

by

MATHEW ARLEN MCLEAN

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies,
University of Massachusetts Boston,
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

June 2014

Leadership in Urban Schools Program

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ABSTRACT

“TRUE, SHE HAS THE CULTURE YOU NEED”: A WHITE TEACHER IN AN
URBAN SCHOOL CRITICALLY REFLECTS ON THE HIDDEN, SOCIAL AND
ACADEMIC CURRICULUM

June 2014

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This dissertation is an *auto|ethnography*, meaning it places the author’s experiences at the center of analysis. The thesis argues that educators from the dominant culture can share the burden of change placed on students of color by critically reflecting on their *positionality*—or the way they socially construct their understanding of who they are in the world and therefore their relationship to educational structures and school actors. The

analysis focuses on the author's transition from suburban to urban teaching and how this experience, combined with a broadening of theoretical perspectives, increased his criticality and, therefore, ability to re-conceptualize his experience with the hidden, social and emotional, and academic curricula. The author employs a variety of theoretical perspectives including *critical constructivism*, *critical pedagogy*, *socio-cultural theory*, *critical race theory*, and *deculturalization* to examine his understanding of himself and Others. Data sources include the author's personal archive of academic writing, a semi-structured interview with the author's former students, and the academic literature. Central to the thesis is the argument that educators from the dominant culture have a tendency to subscribe to the *deficit model for student failure* and therefore use the *banking concept of education* to deposit knowledge into students from subordinated cultures. This is perpetuated by hegemony and creates a dynamic where educators from the dominant culture place added burdens on students from subordinated cultures to change, which often sparks resistance and other unintended consequences. The data demonstrate that the overuse of positivist approaches to discipline and pedagogy in the researcher's former school sparked student resistance and invalidated the knowledge and various ways students from diverse backgrounds made sense of their world. Given the insights provided by the participants in this study, the research suggests that many of the perplexing problems in urban education can be better addressed if those in power *radically listen* to students in urban schools.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I dedicate this dissertation to my gifted and loving wife Veronica for all her sacrifices as I spent precious family time to complete this endeavor (Thanks for “taking the kids”!), to my parents, George and Gloria McLean, for nurturing and supporting my learning over a lifetime, to Adelaide and Silas with the hope they will learn to appreciate the complexity and beauty at the cross-roads of cultures, to Dr. Kress for pushing me towards increased criticality, and to my students whose voices made this work possible and taught me it is time to listen!

PREFACE

This dissertation is an auto|ethnography. As such, it does not conform to the traditional structures of a dissertation; data and theory informs my own story. The opening serves as an introduction, includes the statement of the problem, rationale, research questions, an overview of the theories utilized, and other pertinent information that relates to the structure and design of the study. Chapters two through five examine my two research questions in-depth and is placed in the context of my own lived experiences. The literature is examined throughout the auto|ethnography as themes from the data and my story connect to theoretical concepts. The final chapter includes final thoughts, limitations and implications of the study.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Matt: Did you have to take on a new culture?

Terrell: Yeah, you just gotta, you just gotta know how to switch roles and talk to different types of people. But you are going to need to learn that in life anyway.

Matt: Yeah, but Molly, you don't necessarily have to do that to be successful. You don't have to learn a different culture.

Terrell: True, she has the culture that you need.

Terrell was a former student of mine who divulged to me knowledge about his world that educators rarely validate; he recognized that Molly possessed a culture that gave her an advantage. This simply stated but heavily weighted declaration from a ninth grade Black student about a White student's privileges in school reveals understanding that I failed to tap into as his teacher. I was Terrell's seventh and eighth grade social studies teacher in an urban Kindergarten through eighth grade school outside of Boston and I kicked him out of my classroom many times over the two years I taught him. The dialogue above is an excerpt from a conversation I had with Terrell and six of his classmates the year after they left my school to attend high school. I did not think of Terrell as one of my gifted students and I frequently associated his misbehavior with ignorance. But, his statement above reveals that Terrell possessed a more nuanced knowledge about race and power than I did as his teacher.

In 2004, my transition from a wealthy, nearly all White school in the suburbs of San Francisco to a minority-majority school outside of Boston brought with it intense anxiety and self-doubt. For three years I struggled in this new environment, and I desperately sought ways to restore the sense of personal competence I felt in the suburbs. The hallways in my new school were riddled with yelling matches, roughhousing, and uncontrollable laughter, and the cafeteria was referred to by the assistant principal as the “wild, wild, west”. Students did not remain quiet during my lectures and even my best lessons fell flat. But through all this, I kept the basic principles and practices of my teaching the same and did not recognize the existence of a *hidden curriculum* that favored certain students over others. The hidden curriculum includes the nuances of teaching style, the messages transmitted to students through body language, the various levels of expectations placed on individual students, and all the other “tacit ways in which knowledge and behavior” (McLaren, 2003 p. 212) are constructed and enforced in classrooms. Joe Kincheloe and Shirley R. Steinberg (1998) argue that “individuals cannot separate where they stand in the web of reality from what they perceive” (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998b p. 3).

If I better recognized my positionality, I could have deconstructed the hidden curriculum and shared the responsibility for change with my students. Kincheloe and Steinberg define positionality in the following terms:

Positionality involves the notion that since our understanding of the world and ourselves is socially constructed, we must devote special attention to the differing

ways individuals from diverse social backgrounds construct knowledge and make meaning. (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998b p. 3)

But my ignorance as to the causes for student resistance perpetuated the same behaviors as I sought new and different ways to change my students rather than myself. I continued to deliver social studies curricula in the same way I did in the affluent suburbs. Tired of the dissidence, I attempted to bring order to the chaos during my second year by taking the lead in developing a demerit program that relied solely on punitive consequences. This program was a disaster and my students of color, students like Terrell, spent significantly more time in detention than my White students.

I was grateful when the administration hired professional consultants to train me and my colleagues in a social and emotional learning (SEL) program in an effort to improve our school culture. I thought the SEL reform program we practiced would be so transformative that students like Terrell would be more easily “managed”. But, as with my academic lessons, I still found myself struggling as I focused on directly teaching social skills and behavior expectations to fill my students’ “deficits.” The Collaboration for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) defines social and emotional learning in the following way:

Social and emotional learning involves the processes of developing social and emotional competencies in children. SEL programming is based on the understanding that the best learning emerges in the context of supportive relationships that make learning challenging, engaging, and meaningful; social and emotional skills are critical to being a good student, citizen, and worker; and many different risky behaviors (e.g., drug use, violence, bullying, and dropout) can be prevented or reduced when multi-year, integrated efforts develop students’ social and emotional skills. (CASEL: Collaboration for academic, social, and emotional learning.2013)

According to CASEL, the modern SEL movement started in the 1960s by James Comer and his team from the Yale School of Medicine's Child Study Center that used a social and emotional approach to improve attendance and achievement in two impoverished schools in New Haven (CASEL: Collaboration for academic, social, and emotional learning. 2013). The success of this program encouraged the steady growth of the SEL movement and, today, social and emotional learning is incorporated into the Common Core standards as well as included separately in many state curricular frameworks (Adams, 2013).

Massachusetts developed its own SEL guidelines as required by the 2010 An Act Relative to Bullying in Schools law (Department of elementary and secondary education guidelines for the implementation of social and emotional learning curricula K-12. 2011). *EdSource* (2013) reports that

Interest in social and emotional learning is burgeoning, fueled by a desire to create positive school environments and prevent bullying, disconnection, and academic underachievement. Most recently, the fatal shootings at Sandy Hook elementary school in Connecticut and teen sexual assaults in California and elsewhere have 'triggered an avalanche of interest,' said Libia Gil, vice president at the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), a Chicago-based advocacy organization. (Adams, 2013)

After two full years of using social and emotional learning practices, I felt my school's culture became more positive because for the first time my colleagues and I coordinated our efforts and used social contracts, natural consequences and morning meetings rather than relying on detentions and suspensions to change student behavior. Power struggles between students and teachers declined (but were not eliminated) because we were more

likely to hold social conferences or expect students to re-practice walking in the hallway as a consequence for roughhousing, for example, rather than issue punitive measures like detention or demerits. Despite these positive developments, a divide persisted, however, between myself and many of my students of color, and Terrell continued to get kicked out of my class.

Years later and after significant reflection with the help of theories including *critical constructivism*, *critical pedagogy*, *socio-cultural theory*, *critical race theory* and *deculturalization*, I have come to believe that the hidden, social and emotional, and academic curricula I practiced were not helpful in my transition from suburban to urban teaching because, in part, they placed an added burden for change onto some of my students and even encouraged their resistance. Despite my efforts with social and emotional learning, for example, I could not transform the culture of my classroom or reach all of my students because the hidden curriculum kept pushing them to change while I remained the same. Putting pressure on students to change is an essential component of schooling but expecting only some students to figure out how to make cultural changes without guidance creates an unjust and added burden.

The hidden curriculum, social and emotional, and academic curriculum were rooted in positivist principles that postulates learning outcomes can be predicted and measured by applying logic and reason to a social phenomenon. My positivist orientation and some of my methods (such as social and emotional learning) may have offered temporary relief and stability but, they could not necessarily encourage (and may in fact

prevent) critical reflection on the part of my colleagues and myself. Joe Kincheloe and Kenneth Tobin (2009) describe this proclivity in what they refer to as hidden or “crypto-positivism” in social science research.

As these insidious modes of positivism creep into research practices, they work to promote a belief that what we perceive about the world in our unexamined first glance is simply “what is.” It is profoundly difficult to escape this culturally conditioned way of seeing that simply takes for granted the veracity of the Western gaze as well as dominant sociocultural ways of being in the world. (Kincheloe & Tobin, 2009 p. 519)

My adherence to positivist methods to manage classroom learning and behavior meant all my students were expected to fit into structures that could be predicted, manipulated and measured (Smith, 1999). Students that could have benefited from a constructivist approach (such as critically analyzing the structures of top-down leadership) were still forced into this epistemological interpretation and may have been dismissed by me as irrelevant or subjected to a multitude of interventions born out of positivist paradigms in an attempt to assimilate them to my way of knowing the world. Defenders of positivism argue that empirical approaches are essential to generate new understandings about the social world and without these tools, knowledge will become “detached from the very reality they are supposed to help clarify” (Turner, 1985 p. 29). I do not take issue with the fundamental worth of positivism but I believe educators miss much of the story when we become hyper focused on inputs and outputs at the expense of deep understanding of a student’s understanding of the world.

Years later, I wonder if approaching my urban students through my Western gaze dehumanized some of my students who had different understandings about the world. In

Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples, Linda Tuhiwai Smith

(1999) makes the point that positivist methods can harm people by expecting them to change their ways of being to match the dominant culture.

From an indigenous perspective Western research is more than just research that is located in a positivist tradition. It is research which brings to bear, on any study of indigenous peoples, a cultural orientation, a set of values, a different conceptualization of such things as time, space and subjectivity, different and competing theories of knowledge, highly specialized forms of language, and structures of power. (Smith, 1999 p. 42)

In practice, I placed the responsibility for change on the backs of my students and I allowed hegemonic school structures and my own culture and practices to remain unexamined. In the context of urban schools, this means students whose voices were already marginalized may have been further silenced, and new and/or better ideas they could have offered were potentially lost to regurgitations of the same worn-out ideas and practices that are packaged as something new. Kincheloe and Tobin (2009) warn about what could be lost when various perspectives are silenced by positivist approaches.

In this hidden positivist place it is essential that contemporary educational researchers listen carefully to diverse voices—from other conceptual frameworks and other sociocultural settings. Often because of their location in social space and associated standpoints, those who are different from mainstream researchers can distinguish the tacit epistemologies and ontologies that go unnoticed by those who employ them. Individuals coming from diverse locations can provide profound insights into the way these tacit beliefs about knowledge and being shape the outcomes of crypto-positivist research and the actions they engender. (Kincheloe & Tobin, 2009 p. 526)

The tendency for teachers like myself to fill students with the knowledge deemed essential for success is described by Brazilian educational philosopher Paulo Freire (1993) as the *banking concept of education*.

In the banking concept of education, knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing. Projecting an absolute ignorance onto others, a characteristic of the ideology of oppression, negates education and knowledge a processes of inquiry. (Freire, 1993 p. 53)

The banking concept's one-sided approach may have closed the door to dialogue or other constructivist reforms thus perpetuating a narrow focus on positivist ideas as I attempted to improve my classroom management and teaching. My failure to listen to and learn from some of my students not only potentially alienated them, but it also made my job more difficult as they resisted my attempt to squeeze them all into a one-size-fits-all box.

University of Massachusetts, Amherst professor Sonia Nieto (1999) writes:

'Learning is an active process in which meaning is developed on the basis of experience'. But this proposition is not apparent in many classrooms and schools, where learning continues to be thought of as the reproduction of socially sanctioned knowledge. How students replicate and represent the dominant attitudes and behaviors deemed important in a specific society, as these are reflected in the curriculum, is often the yardstick used by teachers to determine whether or not students have learned. (Nieto, 1999 p. 3)

The "yard-stick" I brought into my demographically diverse urban classroom was incapable of measuring all the knowledge contained within its walls. My banking approach to education could have supported a hidden curriculum that continued the "one-way process in which students need to learn the culture and values of the school, but that teachers need not learn the culture and values of their students" (Nieto, 1999 p. 132). I

fear that this phenomenon, if reproduced across thousands of classrooms and multiple generations, have made urban schools zones for assimilation and acculturation or, what the historian Joel Spring (2010) describes as *deculturalization*: “the educational process of destroying a people’s culture” (Spring, 2010 p. 8).

Even though I thought I was teaching in a manner that stimulated critical thought, my reliance on methods that worked in a more homogenous community may have fallen short as I began working with students from backgrounds dissimilar to my own. Giroux argues that “the nature of critical thinking itself” is threatened by the over-reliance on positivism.

By not reflecting on its paradigmatic premises, positivist thought ignores the value of historical consciousness and consequently endangers the nature of critical thinking itself. That is, inherent in the very structure of positivist thought, with its emphasis on objectivity and its lack of theoretical grounding with regard to the setting of tasks (Horkheimer 1972), are a number of assumptions that appear to preclude its ability to judge the complicated interaction of power, knowledge and values and to reflect critically on the genesis and nature of its own ideological presuppositions. Moreover, by situating itself within a number of false dualisms (facts vs. values, scientific knowledge vs. norms, and description vs. prescription) positivism dissolves the tension between potentiality and actuality in all spheres of social existence. Thus, under the guise of neutrality, scientific knowledge and all theory become rational on the ground of whether or not they are efficient, economic, or correct. In this case, a notion of methodological correctness subsumes and devalues the complex philosophical concept of truth. (Giroux, 2001a p. 16)

If I had instead engaged in a critical dialogue with Terrell, searched for his “profound insights”(Kincheloe & Tobin, 2009 p. 526), and placed into proximity what I learned from him with my own racial, cultural and socioeconomic identity, I may have found new

ways to enhance my own practice and create a learning environment more favorable to Terrell. Instead, I looked at Terrell in terms of what he was lacking, and I tried to fix his behavior by teaching him skills to navigate my understanding of formal education. I therefore placed the burden of change solely upon him.

This auto|ethnography is an effort on my part to explore how the hidden, social and emotional, and academic curricula in my classroom and school saddled my students with the responsibility for change rather than compelling me to assume some of the responsibility for change myself. My goal is to increase my understanding about these important five years of my professional life so I can better position myself to share the responsibility for change as I move forward in my career in urban education leadership.

I am the Problem

I am writing this auto|ethnography with the premise that the problem starts with me. I am a Western educator born and raised in White suburbs. Many of my Western values played a dominant role in my classroom because I reproduced the same classroom structures I was familiar with as a child and assumed these structures worked for all kids (Giroux, 1984). Through a careful and deep reflection of my own ever-shifting theories on school, history, culture, and power, and with input from students directly impacted by how I once saw the world, I hope to explore how my position in society and the hidden, social and emotional, and academic curricula I practiced placed an added burden of change onto my students.

After completing my bachelor's degree and a year of graduate school in New Hampshire, I moved to Oakland, California to become an urban middle school teacher. Instead, I found myself teaching in two affluent and mostly White suburban schools. Urban education remained a professional calling and after five years of teaching in my suburban comfort zone, I applied to teaching jobs in urban communities in and around Boston. I self-identified as a liberal¹ and at the time, I interpreted this to mean I had to help disadvantaged kids recognize that education was their ticket out of urban blight. I landed a middle school teaching position in an urban school with students from a wide variety of racial, cultural, and economic experiences. Days after the school year started, I felt out of my league with regards to student behavior management, and I did not critically reflect on how my positionality could be impacting the conflicts I had with kids.

As I struggled to “control” Terrell and others, I made assumptions that unruly behavior was caused by deficits born out of poverty and families disinterested in education (McLaren, 2003). I also found the same classroom management techniques that worked for me in the predominantly White and affluent suburbs of Oakland unexpectedly fueled hostility with some of my urban students outside of Boston. The demographics of my students may have changed, but the majority of teachers I worked with continued to focus on various ways to change our students rather than change our

¹ For the purposes of this auto/ethnography, I use Lisa Delpit's (2006) definition of liberal: “those whose beliefs include striving for a society based upon maximum individual freedom and autonomy”. (Delpit, 2006 p. 284)

understanding of them. Sonia Nieto (1999) captures this unfortunate mindset with the following words:

There is ample evidence that some educators believe that bicultural students have few experiential or cultural strengths that can benefit their education. Teachers consider them to be “walking sets of deficiencies”, or “culturally deprived” just because they speak a language other than English as their native language, or because they have just one parent, or because of their social class, race, gender, or ethnicity. (Nieto, 1999 p. 85)

I led a committee that constructed a punitive demerit system and after that failed to establish order, our principal hired consultants from a social and emotional program designed to build character, community, and to explicitly teach students about school behavior expectations. Although the SEL program proved far more effective than the demerit system, both approaches did little to alter the hidden curriculum, relied heavily on fixing student deficits, and placed the burden of cultural change only on the students. Only one member of my team, Mr. Harrison-- a Black math teacher, tried to force the discussion of race and culture into the mix. Unfortunately, colleagues who perceived him to be “playing the race card” ignored him.

The culture transmitted to me in my White suburb nurtured an approach to teaching consistent with the Western worldview that approaches education from a positivist perspective; meaning teaching and learning can be broken down into components that can be studied and managed through objective reason and applied research (Kincheloe & Tobin, 2009). *Positivism* is a way of seeing the world that applies scientific reasoning to social life. Researchers in education have applied positivist methods to educational research since the early twentieth century leading to the dominant

belief that student behavior can be understood by applying logic to empirical data (Kincheloe & Tobin, 2009). Research based on positivist methodologies have influenced the constructions of learning institutions that rely too heavily on positivist approaches with regards to curriculum and behavior management.

Positivist epistemology is based on the foundational principles that celebrate the values of reason, truth and validity. Positivist organization theorists study organizations as objective entities and are attracted to methods adapted from the physical or hard sciences. They gather data using survey and laboratory or field experiments relying upon measures of behavior that their assumptions lead them to regard as objective. Based on statistical analysis of the data collected using these methods, they derive theoretical models that that they believe provide factual explanations of how organizations operate. (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2006 p. 13)

My positivist outlook on the world caused me to react to my new teaching experiences by seeking classroom management and teaching techniques that could be studied, measured, and understood using reason. This in itself was not a problem but my overreliance on positivist approaches such as social and emotional learning meant other valid ways to approach my predicament were ignored. The social and emotional learning program I was trained in, *Developmental Designs*, articulates its positivist principles in the following way.

Because student success relies on a blend of good relationships, social skills, and engagement with learning, *Developmental Designs* comprehensive practices integrate social and academic learning. Teaching and learning are weakened by misbehavior, lack of a safe, inclusive community, and student apathy. The practices in the *Developmental Designs* approach are designed to meet adolescent needs by addressing these key elements of effective teaching. (Origins: Developmental design "about the approach".2012)

Breaking down the “key elements” of a complicated classroom culture and repairing non-working components is one way to approach school culture but it is not the only way.

Because I did not turn a critical eye on my own cultural identity, I maintained the academic curricula I taught and continued my dependence upon a behaviorist approach to understand my students. I expected the behaviors of my students to change without critically looking at my own.

Behaviorism shares an epistemological foundation with positivism and like positivism; it has the potential to reduce multifarious social, political and cultural dimensions of human behavior into flat, quantifiable patterns. Behaviorism is based on the belief that psychology is objective and behavior can be predicted and controlled (Kincheloe & Tobin, 2009). Behaviorism marked a shift away from mind-centered thinking about human psychology and toward a more behavioral science approach with emphasis on the prediction and control of human behavior (Silverman, 2011). Ivan Pavlov’s work in classical conditioning drew attention toward the use of scientific reasoning and observable data to make predictions about human behavior. The researcher B.F. Skinner further popularized the trend in his book *The Behavior of Organisms* (Silverman, 2011). Because much of the work of behaviorists that focused on student learning was quantifiable and reproducible, it gained in popularity in a culture that became increasingly attracted to scientific reasoning. Kincheloe and Tobin describe the environmental orientation of behaviorism in the following excerpt:

From a behaviorist perspective, psychology is an objective experimental branch of natural science with a theoretical goal of predicting and controlling behavior. There is almost a preoccupation with method as a means of replicating results, and thereby identifying reproducible outcomes. The sources of behavior are external, belonging to the environment. A defining characteristic of behaviorism is a rejection of introspection and consciousness. If mental terms or concepts are used they are to be translated into behavioral concepts. Causal regularities, laws and functional relations that govern the formation of associations are identified through experimentation in order to predict how behavior changes and the environment changes. (Kincheloe & Tobin, 2009 p. 516)

Much of the curricula I have used as a classroom teacher and now as an administrator, including social and emotional learning, intertwine positivist and behaviorist principles.

Developmental Design describes its “rigorous response to rule breaking” with the following language that suggests a behaviorist undertone as routines and “noticing” are used to adjust student misbehavior.

Structures are introduced to students early in the year and carefully maintained, reducing misbehavior. When students break rules, *Developmental Designs* helps teachers notice and understand what's happening and use appropriate language and *Developmental Designs* structures to address the situation. (Origins: Developmental design "about the approach".2012)

The problem is that as a practitioner of this SEL program, my eye was focused on identifying behavioral faults in my students without recognizing how my positionality influenced my actions or the hidden curriculum. I was expected to change my own behaviors at a superficial level (i.e. how I spoke to and punished students or which leaders I taught about in social studies class) but the burden was placed on my students to change their cultural practices to better match the hegemonic structures of the school. In

my own experience, the burden of change was placed solely on the students, and I was not encouraged to critically deconstruct the racial, cultural, and socio-economic differences between students of color and myself. The deep structures of my school and how they may have favored the culture and knowledge of some at the expense of Others, were not examined or altered, meaning the hidden, social and emotional learning, and academic curricula were layers of the same positivist principles and could not possibly create a inclusive environment in which all students could thrive.

This auto|ethnography provides the opportunity to look back at myself as a thinker with help from seven of my former students whose voices provide a catalyst for critical self-reflection. With the benefit of hindsight, I reflect on my own academic writing and a semi-structured interview with former students in an effort to better understand my place in the complex world of urban education. This work focuses on the intellectual evolution I experienced over the five years I taught in this urban school as a middle school social studies teacher and my experience as a doctoral student. My understandings about race, culture, power, history and public education, have grown, twisted, looped back, and been rewoven, hedged and nurtured like an aggressive vine. I have noticed, however, a bumpy road towards increased criticality over the course of my professional and academic life, and I am eager to reconstruct at least one part of this journey.

My Rationale and Purpose for this Study

The rationale for this auto|ethnographic study is grounded in the very personal feeling that I cannot be an honest advocate for urban schools and students of color until I understand my own position in the social order. I am a school leader on a personal mission to help restructure schools to make them more democratic and inclusive. I concur with Deparle (2012) that schools maintain the privileges of the White dominant classes and that social mobility, often lauded as uniquely American, is, in reality, rare. I know that deep down inside me, there are racist and Western attitudes nurtured in the hegemony of the Connecticut suburbs that caused me to direct my attention towards changing the behavior of some of my students of color without taking a critical look at myself.

The purpose of this auto|ethnography, therefore, is for me to examine trends in my thinking over time to in an effort to better understand how a lack of critical reflection on my positionality may have influenced decisions I made as a classroom teacher. Through an analysis of my own past writings and reflection juxtaposed with an interview with former students, in this work, I examine my own thinking at a deep level to identify how I have understood my culture in relation to Others'. As an individual enmeshed in a large and exceedingly complex social world, my understanding of the world has been constructed by immeasurable influences (Kincheloe, 2008). I believe, however, that ideologies nurtured and reproduced by hegemony have played the most significant role in how I have conceptualized urban education and reform as a teacher and now

administrator. My inability to understand or check my Western ideologies encouraged me to subscribe enthusiastically to curricula without recognizing that I was placing the burden of change mostly onto my students because I did not examine the underlying hegemonic structures that could have impeded student success. My purpose, therefore, is to conduct a critical ontological review of the hidden, social and emotional, and academic curricula that I practiced in an effort to better understand how my positionality influenced my actions. This will not be a study that is replicable because it tells only my story. But, perhaps it will spark readers to consider how the critical reflection of one's positionality is an important part of deconstructing a hidden curriculum that places the burden for change onto the backs of kids.

Placing My Experience into a Global-Historical Context

In a larger context, urban schools in the U.S. are typically controlled by people like me: White, middle class educators who are linked to Western modes of understanding the world and therefore can impart privileges on students that display similar cultural attributes. This tendency can place the burden of change onto students that have different forms of cultural knowledge and ways of being while the hegemonic structures of a school go unchecked. For example, Kenyatta (2012) notes Black students (particularly Black males) face disproportionate amounts of school punishment compared to White students, which is “commonly the result of the perceived ‘toughness’ of male

African American students that can evoke fear in school personnel” (p. 39). Black students can appear threatening to teachers that fail to place their form of expression into a cultural context and “such fear is managed and overcome through punishments and policies that criminalize Black boys” (Kenyatta, 2012 p. 39). A disproportionate burden, therefore is placed on the students to alter their cultural expression rather than on the teacher to understand various forms of expression and work with them.

Yet, I also recognize it is an oversimplification to frame this issue in the context of White middle class teachers like myself trying to force students of color from lower income families to change; hegemony does not adhere to racial or class boundaries. Henry Giroux (1981) makes the point that hegemony works by “positioning certain ideas and routines as natural and universal” (p. 94), meaning the values disseminated are enigmatic. It is undeniable, however, that White people have been the dominant race in Europe and North America since the Enlightenment, colonialism, slavery, and the systematic destruction of Indigenous peoples (Hall, 1992). The reorganizing and classification of indigenous knowledge is a long-standing Western practice with a direct impact on the development of Western thought and hegemony.

While colonialism at an economic level, including its ultimate expression through slavery, opened up new materials for exploitation and new markets for trade, at a cultural level, ideas, images, and experiences about the Other helped to shape and delineate the essential differences between Europe and the rest. Notions about the Other, which already existed in the European imagination, were recast within the framework of Enlightenment philosophies, the industrial revolution, and the scientific “discoveries” of the 18th and 19th centuries. When the scientific foundations of Western research are discussed, the indigenous contribution to these foundations is rarely mentioned. (Hall, 1992 p. 93)

The epistemologies that have been shaped by this intellectual history can now be collectively referred to as Western thought which approaches the “Other” through scientific reasoning. Hall continues,

The globalization of knowledge and Western culture constantly reaffirms the West’s view of itself as the center of legitimate knowledge, the arbiter of what counts as knowledge and the source of “civilized” knowledge. This form of global knowledge is generally referred to as “universal knowledge”, available to all and not really “owned” by anyone—that is, until non –Western scholars make claims to it. When claims like that are made, history is revised (again) so that the story of civilization remains the story of the West. (Hall, 1992 p. 96)

Commenting on Hall’s work, Smith synthesizes his definition of Western thought by noticing how it functions as a dominant system of knowledge.

... Western research draws from an “archive” of knowledge and systems, rules and values which stretch beyond the boundaries of Western science to the system now referred to as the West. Stuart Hall makes the point that the West is an idea or concept, a language for imagining a set of complex stories, ideas, historical events and social relationships. Hall suggests that the concept of the West functions in ways which (1) allow ‘us’ to characterize and *classify* societies into categories, (2) condense complex images of other societies through a *system of representation*, (3) prove a standard *model of comparison*, and (4) provide *criteria of evaluation* against which other societies can be ranked. These are the procedures by which indigenous peoples and their societies were coded into the Western system of knowledge. (L. T. Smith, 1999 p. 42)

This tradition of thought has not escaped many modern day urban classrooms (including my own) that function on positivist approaches where classifying, condensing, comparing, evaluating and ranking are the accepted and largely unquestioned norm. Kincheloe and Tobin argue that this tradition of positivist thought in education has real and hurtful implications in contemporary society.

From the perspective of many Islamic scholars (e.g., Said 1979) (and of course many other scholars from around the world) the power of Europe and its scientific knowledge was won at the expense of the “non-Western other.” In this tradition scholars operating under the flag of positivist objectivity have proclaimed the inferiority of Muslims and many other Asians, Africans, Latin Americans, the progeny of such peoples now living in the West, and indigenous peoples from all over the world. To those who would argue that this is a practice of a previous historical era, we would direct them to recent research on Islamic and Latin American peoples (e.g., Huntington 2004) and Africans with their average I.Q. of 75 (Herrnstein & Murray 1994). It is fascinating in this context to study the history of Western produced positivist knowledges in education and a variety of fields as compared to the indigenous knowledges constructed by people with an intimate knowledge of a particular locale. (Kincheloe & Tobin, 2009 p. 520)

I was raised in an incubator where socially sanctioned knowledge was the norm and when I met Terrell, I made assumptions that he lacked knowledge or held knowledge that was inferior to mine. I assumed that my “better” knowledge would have automatic value for Terrell, and I lacked the sophistication to recognize that his knowledge of the world could possibly transform me. This missed opportunity to recognize and value various forms of knowledge was a habit reinforced through *hegemony*, which Peter McLaren (2003) defines as:

the maintenance of domination not by the sheer exercise of force but primarily through consensual social practices, social forms, and social structures produced in specific sites such as the church, the state, the school, the mass media, the political system and the family. (McLaren, 2003 p. 202)

Like McLaren (2003), I assume that schools are essential tools in the maintenance of hegemony because the power to define what is acceptable and unacceptable knowledge is crucial to maintaining control across generations. As an educator born and raised in a society that gives power to White, middle class men, there was limited pressure placed upon me to change my culture or way of being because hegemony exalted my knowledge

as superior and provided me certain privileges to exercise my knowledge freely. This Western system of education more frequently places the burden of change on students who may also lack the cultural and economic capital needed to make the change. This dynamic makes social and emotional learning curriculum, for example, an attractive choice because it offers a logical response that involves repairing deficits and offering students skills needed to change their behavior to match the expectations of the dominant culture.

The Liability of My White Privileges

When I entered the urban school for the first time, my position as a White middle class, formally educated male brought with it the privilege of easily proving my legitimacy to my colleagues. As Francis Kendall points out in *Understanding White Privilege: Creating Pathways to Authentic Relationships Across Race*:

White privilege has nothing to do with whether or not we are “good” people. We who are white can be jerks and still have white privileges; people of color can be wonderful individuals and not have them. Privileges are bestowed on us solely because of our race by the institutions with which we interact, not because we deserve them as individuals. We are sometimes granted opportunities because we, as individuals, deserve them; often we are granted them because we belong to one or more of the favored groups in our society. (Kendall, 2006)

I had many new and different responsibilities as an urban teacher but these did not include convincing my colleagues of my worth or changing my ways of being to match my environment. Even though I moved from a suburban to an urban landscape, I could remain essentially the same person as I placed the burden for change onto my students (Kendall, 2006). In retrospect, this lack of critical self-reflection set the stage for some

conflicts because I did not reflect on how my understanding of the world could be different than some of my students. In her article, “Educating the White Teacher as Ally” (1998), Connie Titone speaks to the need for urban school educators to critically reflect on their own position in society in order to alter the conceptual framework that undermines student success.

As White educators, we need to understand ourselves critically in relation to “the Other.” We need to challenge ourselves—to *change* ourselves—to understand ourselves differently from how we may have been taught. We need information, a safe holding environment for open sometimes confrontational, dialogue, time for reflection and feedback, and strategies and action plans for immediate implementation. Moreover, we need to learn to practice new responses in real settings. This should be required work for prospective teachers, policy makers, administrators, academicians, researchers, and the like. It should be set into the conceptual frameworks that drive entire schools of education. It should be an obvious, and steady, thread through courses, field experiences, and advising. We cannot leave it to the initiative of individual students or serendipitous events. (Titone, 1998 p. 168)

Titone’s argument, that meaningful reform cannot happen unless White teachers from Western orientations recognize their own Whiteness, resonates with me as I try to define and understand my place in urban education. White privileges are a set of cultural capital that are arguably bestowed automatically upon White people without, for the most part, being recognized or scrutinized. Peggy McIntosh (1988) best explained the concept of White privilege in her “invisible backpack” metaphor.

As a white person, I realized I had been taught about racism as something which puts others at a disadvantage, but had been taught not to see one of its corollary aspects, white privilege, which puts me at an advantage.

I think whites are carefully taught not to recognize white privilege, as males are taught not to recognize male privilege. So I have begun in an untutored way to ask what it is like to have white privilege. I have come to see white privilege as an

invisible package of unearned assets which I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was 'meant' to remain oblivious. White privilege is like an invisible weightless backpack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools and blank checks. (McIntosh, 1988p. 165) p.188)

University of Texas Professor Jennifer Adair (2008), building off McIntosh's work, describes the power of White privileges to negate other ways of knowing.

These sets of privileges are passed from generation to generation, through the family, classrooms and other institutions in society like banks, schools, and the media. In her definitive article, *Whiteness as Property*, Cheryl Harris (1993) said, "The fundamental precept of Whiteness—the core of its value—is its exclusivity" (p. 1789). In other words, Whiteness as an identity (and a marker of power) is linked to its insistence on being the only version of right, good, and worthy, to the exclusion of other versions of being. (Adair, 2008 p. 190)

My own White privileges possibly became a liability for me as a teacher because they prevented me from recognizing that I had much to learn. I excluded "other versions of being" (Adair, 2008 p. 190) because I was more interested in depositing White, Western and positivist values into my students.

Today, I recognize that the more I tried to pull Terrell towards my White cultural worldview by depositing knowledge into him, the more intensely he resisted. I was trying to control Terrell's behavior without understanding the underlying motivation for much of it. Like my White suburban students, he may have been disruptive to have fun, avoid work, or to gather the attention of his peers. But my failure to critically reflect on my own White privileges created a dynamic where I made assumptions about Terrell's deficits as I tried to change him without recognizing that I may need to change as well.

Theoretical Framework

It is important to note that this dissertation is an auto|ethnography that does not conform to traditional structures. Chapter two provides a summary of the theories used but they are examined in more detail as relevant themes emerge throughout the analysis chapters. The purpose of the table on the following page is to provide my readers with a quick snapshot of the theories that inform my story.

Table of Theories

Theory	Brief Description
Critical Constructivism	Critical constructivism influenced me to see the world as socially constructed and to recognize that my understandings are the product of my cultural and world experiences (Kincheloe, 2008, p. 4). Critical constructivism changed my primary lens of viewing urban education and helped me to better criticize all forms of knowledge including my own.
Critical Pedagogy/ Hegemony	An essential component of critical pedagogy is the belief that subordinated cultures must be provided with the tools to both question and change their situation (Freire, 1993). Critical pedagogues believe humans are “essentially unfree and inhabit a world rife with contradictions and asymmetries of power and privilege” (McLaren, 2003 p. 193). The potential of oppressed people can only be realized through actions they take toward their own liberation. Hegemony “is the social, cultural, ideological, or economic influence exerted by a dominant group” (Hegemony. (n.d.). <i>Merriam-webster.com</i>). My understanding of urban education radically changed once I “felt” the power of these important concepts.
Socio-cultural Theory	Social-cultural theory places culture in all parts of a person’s life and recognizes its expression in various forms of capital that are used to leverage power and access in the cultural fields an individual participates in (Swartz, 1997). The concept of structure and agency is essential to my use of socio-cultural theory. At the center of my thesis is the belief that school structures are set up to favor the agency of some students over others (Sewell, 1992).
Critical Race theory	Critical race theorists believe that racism does not occur as separate incidents but is a reflection of larger structures perpetuated by White hegemony over generations (Taylor, 1998). Critical race theory proposes White people have used hegemony to establish their “truths” as universal and to suppress the knowledge of people of color (Taylor, 1998). I use critical race theory to explore how my privileges as a White middle class person influenced my actions with regards to my students of color. Moreover, critical race theory encourages me to re-conceptualize student behaviors I once viewed as deficits into strengths.
Deculturalization	Joel Spring defines deculturalization as “the educational process of destroying a people’s culture” (Spring, 2010 p. 8). I use his theory to reflect on how placing the burden on students to change can be a form of assimilation.

Research Questions

Two research questions guided my inquiry:

- 1) *How did my positionality as a White middle class educator influence my understanding and actions as a teacher of students from subordinated cultures?*
- 2) *In what ways did my positionality afford my perpetuation of the hidden curriculum, social and emotional learning curriculum, and academic curriculum?*

Methods

A detailed description of my methods is laid out in chapter two. In short, I conducted an auto|ethnography, that is, a critical ontological review of my cultural influences and my experiences as a teacher as I transitioned from suburban to an urban school. My data included my own academic writing dating back to 6th grade, peer reviewed literature, researcher reflections, and a transcript from a semi-structured interview I video-taped with several of my former students who experienced my transition from suburban to urban teaching along side me.

Overview of Dissertation

As an auto|ethnography, this dissertation does not conform to structures typical of the traditional dissertation; data and theory inform my own story. This opening chapter serves as an introduction, includes the statement of the problem, rationale, research

questions, a brief overview of the theories utilized and a brief description of my methods. Chapter two details my methods and includes a more detailed description of the theories used to explore my data. It also includes a discussion on why auto|ethnographic research was the most relevant option for me. Discussions about Whiteness, critical constructivism, critical pedagogy, socio-cultural theory, hegemony, critical race theory and deculturalization cannot be cleanly delineated so concepts spill over between chapters. The literature review is enmeshed throughout the auto|ethnography as my research questions are explored.

In chapter three, I examine the hidden curriculum in my classroom and explore the forces behind its development and the extent to which it placed the burden for change onto my students. In chapter four, I explore my experience with a social and emotional learning curriculum, the reasons why I may have been attracted to this type of reform initiative and how it affirmed my expectation for others to change while allowing me to stay essentially the same. In chapter five, I critically analyze my understanding of academic curriculum and how it was used to validate or invalidate forms of knowledge different from my own. Chapter six contains final thoughts, limitations in the study and implications for future research.

Conclusion

I tried to “save” Terrell by pulling him towards the scholarly life as I defined it. In hindsight, I know this approach made inappropriate assumptions about his life

experiences and placed an added burden of change onto him. I was raised to believe that education is the great equalizer and urban kids just need to study their way out of poverty. But because I did not critically reflect on my own positionality, I was unable to recognize that my understanding of education was a politicized social construct loaded with generations' worth of Western ideology that can perpetuate the very injustices I set out to eradicate. My lack of critical self-reflection on what it means to be culturally White in relation to my students of color caused me to teach in a manner consistent with how I learned and I failed to recognize that the knowledge I delivered could be open for deep critical dissection. In essence, I set out to save Terrell from himself but I never took the time to ask Terrell who he is.

At the same time I was attempting to “reform” my classroom as a teacher during the day, I was also deepening my understanding about culture, power, and my own White identity as a doctoral student at night. The deeper I got into my studies and the more I applied my learning to my experiences in the classroom, I came to realize that I could not understand my students of color until I understood my own Whiteness (Kendall, 2006). The educational philosopher Paulo Freire has taught me that critical consciousness—or the understanding of my own identity in relation to a complex world-- is a never-ending process that is essential for both the oppressor and the oppressed to partake in on the path to liberation (Freire, 1993; Shor & Freire, 1987). If I had instead approached my diverse urban classroom as a learner as well as a teacher, I may have shared the responsibility for change and created a critical dialogue with students that may have disrupted the hidden

curriculum. This auto|ethnography retraces this transitional experience in my career with the hopes of gaining new insights in order to transform myself into an educator leader capable of understanding and rectifying social injustices.

CHAPTER II

CHAPTER IIREVEALING MY STORY LAYER BY LAYER

Introduction

This auto|ethnography is an exercise in locating and examining my position in the “web of reality” (Kincheloe 2008 p.131) as I look back at my urban teaching and the hidden, social and emotional and academic curricula that I perpetuated which may have unfairly placed the burden for change onto my students. If my thesis postulates that educators need to share the burden of change with their students, then I need to be willing to look in the mirror and deconstruct understandings I have taken for truth. To accomplish this, I need multiple theoretical frameworks at my disposal so I can view my experiences through a variety of perspectives that challenge my “common sense” cultural understandings of the nature of lived experience. The design of this study, therefore, is dependent on theories that complexify my thinking rather than try to reduce it. I am accepting the premise that it will be impossible to confine a messy and complex social world into one simplistic package. Kincheloe (2008) writes in his *Critical Pedagogy Primer*, “theory is not an explanation of nature---it is more an explanation of our relation to nature” (Kincheloe, 2008 p. 132).

Recognizing that research in the social sciences can never be truly objective, it is essential that diverse theoretical concepts can be utilized to bring greater depth and

understanding to my data. This approach to qualitative research is referred to as theoretical bricolage and better allows for the textured layers of my experiences to emerge than if I used more traditional methodologies. Lincoln and Denzin (2005) compare this process to the making of quilts.

The qualitative researcher as bricoleur, or maker of quilts, uses the aesthetic and material tools of his or her craft, deploying whatever strategies, methods and empirical materials are at hand (Becker, 1998 p. 2). If the researcher needs to invent, or piece together, new tools or techniques, he or she will do so. Choices regarding which interpretive practices to employ are not necessarily made in advance. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005 p. 4)

Denzin and Lincoln believe this approach “adds rigor, breadth, complexity, richness, and depth to any inquiry” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005 p. 5). In this chapter, I will provide an overview of the theoretical bricolage I used to explore my data and build my research methodology. I also detail my data sources and discuss how I authenticated the data.

Theoretical Framework

As I stated in the introduction to this chapter, including multiple theoretical perspectives will allow me to broaden my thinking as I analyze my position in the world of urban education. To rely on one or two theories would be contrary to the aim of this study, which is to encourage the complexity of culture and positionality in order to better understand my own ways of knowing and being in relation to my diverse students.

Borrowing from the “researcher as bricoleur” interdisciplinary approach, I will “abandon the quest for realism” (Kincheloe, 2008 p. 131) and recognize the best I can do with this auto|ethnography is deepen understanding, not provide certainty. The term bricolage is

pulled from the French word, *bricoleur*, handyman or woman who “makes use of the tools available to complete a task” (Kincheloe, 2001 p. 680). Kincheloe (2001) describes the need for the handyman-- or *interdisciplinary*-- approach to social science is based on the reality that the human world is socially constructed and multifarious, and all knowledge is value-laden. As Kincheloe (2001) explains:

Once understanding of the limits of objective science and its universal knowledge escaped from the genie’s bottle, there was no going back. Despite the best efforts to recover “what was lost” in the implosion of social science, too many researchers understand its socially constructed nature, its value- laden products that operate under the flag of objectivity, its avoidance of contextual specificities that subvert the stability of its structures, and its fragmenting impulse that moves it to fold its methodologies and the knowledge they produce neatly into disciplinary drawers. My argument here is that we must operate in the ruins of the temple, in a post apocalyptic social, cultural, psychological, and educational science where certainty and stability have long departed for parts unknown. (Kincheloe, 2001 p. 681)

Kincheloe (2008) also notes that “our pluralistic and multiperspectival orientation is omnipresent,” meaning that I look at the world through a variety of theoretical positions (Kincheloe, 2008 p. 8). My exploration into my own data will involve a variety of theoretical frameworks that are intended to offer multiple avenues toward criticality and understanding. Interdisciplinary research will allow me to learn something new and meaningful about my world in a way that remaining confined within the walls of one discipline cannot. Threading ideas through and across various theoretical frameworks offer insights unobtainable by other researchers because the tapestry created is unique to my blend of data, interpretation, and analysis.

Bricolage does not simply *tolerate* difference but *cultivates* it as a spark to researcher creativity. Here rests a central contribution of the deep interdisciplinarity of the bricolage: As researchers draw together divergent forms of research, they gain the unique insight of multiple perspectives. Thus, a complex understanding of research and knowledge production prepares bricoleurs to address the complexities of the social, cultural, psychological, and educational domains. Sensitive to complexity, bricoleurs use multiple methods to uncover new insights, expand and modify old principles, and reexamine accepted interpretations in unanticipated contexts. Using any methods necessary to gain new perspectives on objects of inquiry, bricoleurs employ the principle of difference not only in research methods but in cross-cultural analysis as well. In this domain, bricoleurs explore the different perspectives of the socially privileged and the marginalized in relation to formations of race, class, gender, and sexuality. (Kincheloe, 2001 p. 687)

This auto|ethnography explores the “different perspectives of the socially privileged and the marginalized,” and, therefore, I will derive the most authentic meaning if I use a variety of methods. The theories used to reconstruct my journey toward increased criticality include *critical constructivism*, *critical race theory*, *critical pedagogy*, *socio-cultural theory*, and *deculturalization*. Throughout my analysis, I compare these theories to what I conceptualize to be contrasting theoretical constructs: *positivism* and *behaviorism*, meaning these are also a part of my story.

Critical Constructivism

Central to my analysis of my own evolution of thought is the recognition that my thinking evolved from positivist to critical constructivist. When I first transitioned to urban teaching, I was unable to step back from the world as I was accustomed to perceiving it, and therefore I processed it through my Western perspective (Kincheloe, 2008). I was latched to a deficit model to explain urban student failure and I fit my understanding of student behavior into this limited worldview (McLaren, 1998).

Students that interrupted my lectures, for example, were disciplined because I thought punishment could be used as a tool to leverage engagement. I may not have recognized that many of these “disruptions” were actually on point and reflected the cultural tendency of some students to actively interact with knowledge rather than passively receive it. In short, I lacked the skills or knowledge to ask the penetrating questions needed to assess the complexities of behaviors I attempted to control.

Critical constructivism encourages me to develop a “critical consciousness” thus allowing me to step back and to see how my perspective was “constructed via linguistic codes, cultural signs, race, class, gender and sexual ideologies, and other often-hidden modes of power” (Kincheloe, 2008, p. 11). Critical constructivism positions me to see the world as socially constructed and to recognize that my understanding of reality results from my own cultural and world experiences. I created myself with the “cultural tools at hand” and these tools influenced how I perceived power and the manner in which people are marginalized (Kincheloe, 2008, p. 4). The critical constructivist perspective expects me to criticize all forms of knowledge and to recognize how my own construct of knowledge may have influenced the actions I took as a teacher.

Critical Pedagogy

Paulo Freire argued that members of subordinate cultures must be provided with the tools to both question and change their situation (Freire, 1993). At the foundation of critical theory, is the belief that humans are “essentially unfree and inhabit a world rife with contradictions and asymmetries of power and privilege” (McLaren, 2003 p. 193).

According to this theory, a human's potential will go unrealized if he or she and the cultural group he or she is associated with are subordinated by the dominant culture which "affirm[s] the central values, interests, and concerns of the social class in control of the material and symbolic wealth of society" (McLaren, 2003 p. 201).

Paulo Freire encouraged teachers and students to view their worlds with a critical lens and to abandon the banking approach to education in favor of reading both the "word and the world" (Banks & Banks, 1997 p. 396). In other words, the oppressed use learning to better comprehend their lived experiences and to transform their world as a means to liberation. Critical pedagogues do not assume students come from a place of ignorance; rather they use knowledge from lived experiences as a launching point for deeper inquiry. Various ways of knowing the world are seen as assets and education becomes dependent upon critically analyzing various perspectives to gain a deeper understanding of social order rather than to identify certain truths. Critical pedagogues believe education should equip students with a critical mode of consciousness, or *conscientization*, capable of seeking answers. Freire saw conscientization as a

requirement of the human condition...as a road we have to follow to deepen our awareness of the world, of facts, of events, of the demands of human consciousness to develop our capacity for epistemological curiosity. (Freire, 1998 p. 55)

It is through critical questioning and action that human beings become citizens in a democracy capable of transforming injustices (Banks & Banks, 1997). Freire described this ongoing, never-ending process as *praxis*: "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (Freire, 1993 p. 33).

Reality which becomes oppressive results in the contradistinction of men as oppressors and oppressed. The latter, whose task it is to struggle for their liberation together with those who show true solidarity, must acquire a critical awareness of oppression through the praxis of this struggle. One of the gravest obstacles to the achievement of liberation is that oppressive reality absorbs those with it and thereby acts to submerge human beings' consciousness. Functionally, oppression is domesticating. To no longer be prey to its force, one must emerge from it and turn upon it. This can be done only by means of the praxis: reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it. (Freire, 1993 p. 33)

Humanism is central to the theory of critical pedagogy because the liberation of the oppressed will only happen if individuals “unveil the world of oppression” (Freire, 1993 p. 36) and develop the agency to free themselves. Education becomes not learning what Others know but developing the ability to recognize and transform the submerged state of consciousness that results from oppression.

Understanding the influence of hegemony is crucial to understanding critical pedagogy. Peter McLaren describes hegemony as “the maintenance of domination not by the sheer exercise of force but primarily through consensual social practices, social forms, and social structures produced in specific sites such as the church, the state, the school, the mass media, the political system and the family” (McLaren, 2003). Cultural hegemony not only influences my thoughts about urban education but also sets the stage for discourse. This means the questions I asked and my approach to curricula were shaped by unexamined forces (Giroux, 1981). Hegemony's real power is its ability to influence both the oppressor and the oppressed without their consciously recognizing it. Attitudes I have about classroom management and curriculum are largely the

manifestation of my own experiences in school, and many of the expectations I place on students go unquestioned as a result.

Socio-cultural Theory

Although my understanding of his work has evolved with my increased knowledge of critical race theory, it is Pierre Bourdieu's cultural reproduction theory that first started to alter my conception of urban education. Bourdieu places culture in all parts of a person's life and it is expressed in various forms of capital that are used to leverage power and access in the cultural fields in which an individual participates. *Culture* is one of those multifarious words that means different things to different people. The word culture was frequently used interchangeably with *tradition* in the early nineteenth century (Banks & Banks, 1997 p. 36). Subsequent generations of anthropologists and sociologists added more organic qualifiers to the term as it was increasingly described as "a whole system consisting of interrelated parts" (Banks & Banks, 1997 p. 36). More contemporary definitions describe culture as consisting of "small chunks of knowledge that is possessed within the group as a whole" (Banks & Banks, 1997 p. 37). In this model, an individual need not know all the chunks in order to participate in the culture, rather, their general understanding of its structure allows for participation (Banks & Banks, 1997 p. 36).

Bourdieu's conception of culture combines social structure with culture into a completely intertwined brew (Banks & Banks, 1997). Bourdieu taught me that culture is not something I choose to enact or not enact; rather it is inherent in all aspects of my life

(Banks & Banks 1997). Cultures can be formally defined as with religious groups practicing aged traditions. Or, they can be informal, such as the culture that emerges from people joined together on an intramural soccer team. An individual can be a member of multiple cultures-- each with its own sense of order, rituals and status. Schools, particularly urban schools, can never be described as having one culture. Instead, they are more accurately depicted as fields where multiple cultures interact with the structure of the school. Bourdieu described cultural fields as “areas of struggle for legitimation” or “structured spaces of dominant and subordinate positions based on types and amounts of capital” (Swartz, 1997 p. 123).

Socio-culturalists argue “the cultural experiences in one’s home facilitate the interactions children have with schools and influence their achievement” (Monkman, Ronald, & Theramene, 2005 p. 10). If the structure of a school and its schemas (its routines, expectations, rewards and punishments) is misunderstood or conceived differently by the multiple cultural groups that inhabit the school, then conflict will result. If a teacher perceives positive participation to be quiet listening, and an African American student perceives positive participation to be active vocal involvement, then the teacher may poorly receive the habitus of the student and the student will face punishment.

Central to socio-cultural theory is the understanding of structure and agency. The debate over how humans act upon social structures, how these structures impact human behavior, and how structures change is a constant in the social sciences (Sewell, 1992).

William Sewell defines structures as “sets of mutually sustaining schemas and resources that empower and constrain social action and that tend to be reproduced by that social action” (Sewell, 1992 p. 19). In this interpretation, schemas are the patterns of meaning that humans can generalize and apply to new situations or contexts. For example, a high school student’s schema regarding toughness can change based on context (i.e. toughness in a hockey game versus toughness to persevere in honors chemistry). Resources can be both human and nonhuman:

Nonhuman resources are objects, animate or inanimate, naturally occurring or manufactured, that can be used to enhance or maintain power; human resources are physical strength, dexterity, knowledge, and emotional commitments that can be used to enhance or maintain power, including knowledge of the means of gaining, retaining, controlling, and propagating either human or nonhuman resources. (Sewell, July 1992 p. 9)

To be human is to be an agent that accesses resources to gain power by applying different schemas to various structures. A student in my former school may hold influence within the structure of his neighborhood because he learned how to use language as a resource to gain attention. Within the structure of a public school classroom, his *habitus*, or way of being, may be a disadvantage because the cultural schemas he employs may be dismissed as disruptive to learning. Our former school may have been constraining for many students because there was a disconnect between teachers and kids as to the cultural schemas that were recognized as valuable within the structure of the school. Although the debate around structure and agency is ongoing, the work of Sewell (1992) is influential in

this paper because he argues that structures can be transformed over time based on the push and pull of schemas and resources against structures.

Critical Race Theory

Proponents of critical race theory argue that racism does not occur as separate incidents but as reflections of larger structures perpetuated by White hegemony over generations. “CRT challenges the experience of whites as the normative standard and grounds its conceptual framework in the distinctive experiences of people of color” (Taylor, 1998 p. 122). Moreover, it aims to force recognition that perspectives around justice are reflections of the lived experiences of the knower and that White people have used their influence and hegemony to establish their interpretation of truth as universal and to subjugate the knowledge of people of color (Taylor, 1998). Critical race theorists propagate the belief racism is not the exception; rather it is commonplace throughout society and influences decisions made in institutions. Viewing urban schools through the critical race lens unveils tremendous new understanding as I juxtapose the status quo and what I experienced as an urban classroom teacher against my own upbringing in an affluent White community.

Deculturalization

It may sound hyperbolic to use the term *deculturalization* in reference to my actions as an educator in contemporary times; the word seems better suited when discussing the stolen generation of the aboriginal Australians or Native Americans. But after conducting a critical self-reflection on how my White privileges have influenced my

thinking as an educator, I believe the word has relevance and is needed to describe my actions--or intended actions-- as I transitioned from suburban to urban teaching. The historian and critical theorist Joel Spring (2010) defines deculturalization as “the educational process of destroying a people’s culture” (Spring, 2010 p. 8).

Deculturalization includes the use of educational institutions to extinguish cultures and replace them with preferred practices from the White dominant culture (Spring, 2010).

Deculturalization can happen explicitly and unashamedly or, as I believe is the case with many positivist reform programs, it can happen covertly. Many words can be connected to deculturalization including, colonialism, internal colonialism, cultural genocide, and assimilation. It is hard to see myself as a colonizer or one who partakes in cultural genocide. But, I believe the data laid out in this auto|ethnography suggest that my White identity may have caused me to push a student out of her culture in an effort to pull her toward mine. My data suggest that I participated in the deculturalization of students of color because as a White, ethnocentric, middle class person, I focused on the deficits of nonwhite students, and I became more interested in changing some students to be more like me than in participating in their liberation.

Methods

Traditional academics may believe that only “objective” work where the researcher is an outside observer and gatherer of data can be considered research. I challenge this belief and argue that no research can truly be objective because all people

look out at the world through a lens informed by their own cultural and life experiences (Kincheloe, 2008). The research questions that guide this auto|ethnography pushed me to deconstruct objectivity so it was essential that my methodology was equipped for this task. Auto|ethnography was the best method for this study because at the foundation of this methodology, is the belief that the subjective nature of qualitative research can become an asset, not a hindrance for gaining deeper understandings about social phenomena. Auto|ethnography puts the Self at the center of observation and analysis and provides the structure to learn about myself within the complicated cultural fields I taught in. By transference, what I learn from myself and my experiences in this one school will add insights to education reform movements in a larger context. Attempts to remove myself from this qualitative research process would be counterproductive and would lead to fragmented and deficient conclusions. There is much more to learn if I approach this work with a critical consciousness and examine my perspectives, biases, and cultural practices as essential components that shaped my attitudes about my urban students and myself (Roth, 2005).

I believe it impossible to truly understand the complexities of a classroom culture unless you are intimately entwined with it. As a teacher with ten years experience and now an assistant principal, I never pretend that I can reconstruct a class's identity simply by observing or spending one period in the room. This is particularly true when trying to analyze the immense and complex topics of culture and power. The school that is the focus of this study was within walking distance of two highly respected higher education

institutions. Researchers would frequently visit my social studies classroom to collect data. I was skeptical of their note taking and wondered how they interpreted the interactions they witnessed. Even after multiple observations, they could not gather enough information to understand the complexities of the relationships within my classroom. I felt as if these “educational experts” had power over me as they sat in the corner of the room taking notes on my words and actions. Did they see me as just another teacher failing to use the best practices in my teaching? Of course this question exposes my insecurities but the vast majority of education research involves outsiders looking in-- collecting notes and using their academic training to derive meaning in an effort to ascertain a “truth”. In my research, I did not wish to engage in this outsider’s method of data collection. Rather, I wanted to dive in, reveal my biases and construct a new understanding of my growth as an educational thinker. Most importantly, I wanted to deconstruct the power imbalance between the researcher and the researched and enter the process with the assumption that my former students have as much to teach me as I have to teach them.

I wanted to disrupt a system of research where socioeconomically comfortable people observe and make conclusions about students that are traditionally underserved in society. Instead, I used words of my former students and my own written work to understand myself at a profound level. As such, my own biases are essential to this research. Conducting auto|ethnographic research provided the extraordinary opportunity to learn about myself as an educator and how my attitudes about urban schooling and

reform where shaped by cultural and life experiences. Through this work, I did not seek to declare a TRUTH in the world of urban education reform that can be replicated and made into policy. Instead, I strove to understand myself with the hopes that other educators can learn something about themselves too. Ultimately, the goal of this type of research was to help push the discussion towards increased criticality and to share my belief that reform based on scientific research is never free of biases, since we all live in a political world where knowledge is constructed and used to leverage power.

The Definition and Roots of Auto|ethnography

After being introduced to auto|ethnography, I was relieved to learn that I could offer something new to the body of research on urban education without pretending that I was on a path to discovering some ultimate *truth*. Auto|ethnography has been defined in many ways. For the purpose of this study, I have chosen to align myself with W.-M. Roth (2004) of the University of Victoria, Canada who argues that one cannot ever fully remove him or herself from the society and culture one is studying. He defines auto|ethnography as “the exploration of culture in general, whether it is someone else’s or, because of transference and counter-transference in the research process, one’s own” (Roth, 2005 p. 4). Roth includes the Sheffer stroke “|” to separate auto and ethnography or biography because the “individual and its society—mutually presuppose one another” and “stand in a dialectical relationship” (Roth, 2005 p. 4). The stroke is a mathematical symbol pulled from Boolean algebra and calculus and means “not and”. I will also use the Sheffer stroke throughout this document for that reason. Roth’s description of

auto|ethnography and the meaning behind that very important line gave me the confidence to press on with my study. I was relieved to know I could seek the perspectives of my students and how they relate to my own ever-evolving understanding of urban schools and reform without the pressure of trying to define a truth; my goal was to increase my own understanding.

Auto|ethnography as a research methodology is linked to ethnography, which has its roots in cultural anthropology. The tradition can be connected to anthropological research of primitive cultures during the late 19th centuries (Creswell, 2005). During this period, researchers believed the best way to learn about a culture and its practices were to spend extended periods of time taking field notes. These early ethnographers thought they were remaining objective observers by avoiding total immersion with a culture (Creswell, 2005). They would observe and interview research subjects (much in the same way the researchers would sit in a back corner of my classroom) and would compare the cultures with their own. The University of Chicago became a leader in ethnographic research during the 1920s as researchers investigated individual case studies in-depth to gain an insider's perspective into a larger cultural group (Metz, 2000). Despite noble attempts, I believe it was impossible for these observers to remain objective as their observations were filtered through their individual cultural perspectives.

Professor Heewon Chang of Eastern University, Pennsylvania, (2008) writes a description of autoethnography (she does not use the “|”) that was also helpful in the design of my study. She believes that an autoethnographer “combines cultural analysis

and interpretation with narrative details” and the stories that autoethnographers produce are “reflected upon, analyzed, and interpreted within their broader sociocultural context” (Chang, 2008 p. 46). Central to Chang’s definition of autoethnography is the principle that “culture and individuals are intricately intertwined” (Chang, 2008 p. 46). She writes:

[The] term autoethnography refers to the process and the product just as ‘ethnography’ does. Second, like ethnographers, autoethnographers attempt to achieve cultural understanding through analysis and interpretation. In other words, autoethnography is not about focusing on self alone, but about searching for understanding of others (culture/society) through self. Thus, self is a subject to look into and a lens to look through to gain an understanding of a societal culture. (Chang, 2008 p. 46)

I plan on employing a style of autoethnography referred to by Chang (2008) as *autobiographical ethnography*. This approach encourages me to include personal experiences in my own ethnographic writing (Chang, 2008).

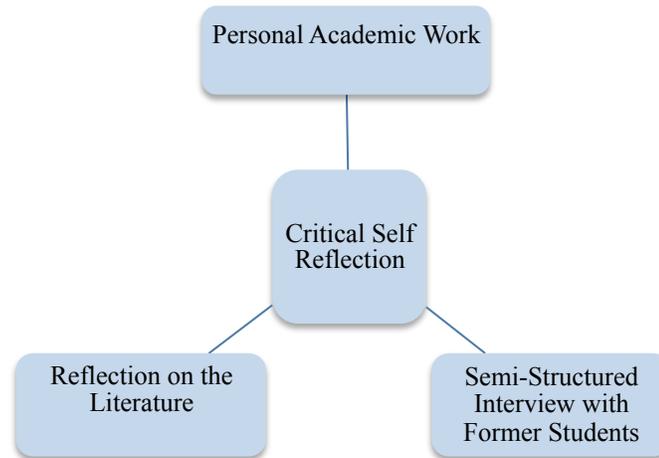
Both Roth and Chang advocate for a methodology that is at the same time difficult and liberating. It is difficult because numbers and statistics might be easier than digging deep into my own biases. It is liberating because I can construct a story that is meaningful to me. Roth writes that the “Self|Other dialectic makes auto|biography immediately a plausible way of sociological investigation as we find in ourselves always also an aspect of the Other” (Roth, 2005 p. 92). By exploring my own academic writings, I will be learning about myself but also about society and my ever-changing, complex relationship with it. It will be impossible to reconstruct exactly what I was thinking at the time I wrote the texts used as data because I cannot completely recreate how social and

cultural forces were impacting my understanding of the world at the time I first typed the words. As Roth points out, “How we read and understand some text changes over time, as we never look back at the same original text but always through an ever-expanding interpretive horizon, including our own and other’s readings” (Roth, 2005 p. 89). But, by retracing my learning and trying to understand how the social and cultural forces impacted my thinking, I can offer my readers a deeper understanding nurtured by embracing “‘radical doubt’ or ‘suspicion of ideology’” (Roth, 2005 p. 90).

The Data

The nature of this qualitative study requires an approach to triangulation that is different from methods used to validate data in more traditional or scientific inquiries. The majority of my data comes from two sources: personal academic writing and journals collected since I attended middle school and from a transcript compiled from a video recording of a semi-structured interview I conducted with former students the year after we all left the school. I used this information and connected it with ideas present in a variety of academic literature to generate new understandings. This figure illustrates how these three branches informed my critical reflection.

Figure of Data and Critical Self Reflection



I am not looking to establish truths that can be measured. Rather, I am looking to learn from my own experiences and offer my readers insights into a social dynamic that existed in an urban school six years ago. The inclusion of a variety of voices is essential to this process as described by Denzin and Lincoln.

Qualitative research is inherently multi-method in focus (Flick, 2002, pp. 226-227). However, the use of multiple methods or triangulation reflected an attempt to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question. Objective reality can never be captured. We know a thing only through its representations. Triangulation is not a tool or a strategy of validation, but an alternative to validation (Flick, 2002, p. 227). The combination of multiple methodological practices, empirical materials, perspectives, and observers in a single study is best understood, then as a strategy that adds rigor, breadth, complexity, richness, and depth to any inquiry. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005 p. 5)

This work contains perspectives from a wide range of actors and it is my intention to develop a rich understanding of my experiences by juxtaposing my reflections with those of Others.

Personal Academic Writing

My own academic papers provide the majority of data used to gain an understanding of how hegemony shaped my thinking about curricula. The earliest selection is from a sixth grade journal, but the vast majority of papers I used were written in college and graduate school. My scope remained narrow as I mined these papers for data that revealed thinking consistent with themes that emerged from the semi-structured interview (see below). I focused on identifying trends in my thinking that would have led me to place the burden of change onto my students without critically reflecting on my own positionality. I have written many papers over my academic life and my thoughts about education are a moving target. But, to accomplish my goal of better understanding myself in relation to Others, I had to start somewhere. This source of data provides for greater understanding through the honing in on particular forms of information.

Otherwise, I would have been lost in the wilderness of my own words and significance would have escaped me. It is important to note that selections² used in this auto|ethnography are representative of patterns of thought. There were a few samples in my writing that were outliers, meaning they did not represent patterns of thought

² I refer to my own words as selections throughout this auto|ethnography-- meaning selected paragraphs from my own writing.

established in other selections. I contemplated how and if to include these selections because I was interested in retracing trends in my thinking rather than focusing on isolated thoughts that appeared random. In the end, I considered these relevant sources if they added a layer of understanding to my story or offered a counterpoint worthy of considering.

I spent months searching for writing samples at my childhood home, my current home, and in archived computer files. All of the data was entered into a Google™ blog so it could be queried and tagged. I cut and pasted digital work directly into the blog and I hand-typed work that was found in paper form. I was careful to copy the work word for word, making sure to remain consistent with its original form (errors and all). I added titles to papers that lacked them for the purpose of identifying the source of data. In total, 75 entries were added to the blog and these entries were read and coded numerous times to identify patterns and trends in my own personal thoughts.

Semi-structured Interview

The semi-structured interview with seven of my former students was held in the spring of 2010 and lasted about one and a half hours. We met in a small room provided by the students' high school. A semi-structured interview required me to prepare questions ahead of time but I also left room for the conversation to emerge organically. The discussion was recorded for video/audio and I took field notes. I opted to use video to facilitate the ease of transcription and to identify non-verbal communication within the

group. I transcribed the video recordings and notes, after which, I coded and analyzed them.

Because these students were under the age of eighteen, they qualified as a “vulnerable population”. To maintain confidentiality, the names of the students are not used in this auto|ethnography. The names of the schools they attend and attended have not been included, and the names of people that surfaced in the semi-structured interviews were changed. The students were not the primary focus of this study, and the data they provided was used as a catalyst for reflection at various points in this dissertation. I took careful measures to ensure the students clearly understood their rights as research participants. I built in time at the beginning of the semi-structured interview to talk with the students about their decision to participate and the students were encouraged to talk with their parents and/or guardians about the project. The students ate pizza provided by me and were given small-value gift cards to local retailers to thank them for their participation.

All seven of the students in the semi-structured interview were in my social studies class for two years. I left the school district for my first position as an assistant principal at the same time this cohort moved on to high school. This is relevant because I believe it may have freed them up to talk more candidly about their experiences. Four students are Black, one is White, one is Latino, and one is Korean.

Interviewing allows adolescents the opportunity to “give voice to their own interpretations and thoughts rather than rely solely on our adult interpretations of their lives” (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003 p. 33). It was necessary for me to construct a safe and structured environment for my former students to speak openly and honestly. Children have a lower status than teachers in our society and some advocates have even argued they should be given special minority status (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003). Children tend to always be the “researched” and never the “researchers” when it comes to academic research (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003). My questions asked my former students to reflect on their own understanding of culture in relation to the school we all attended and to compare their worldview to the worldviews of others in the group. Although it was impossible to completely deconstruct the power dynamics between my former students and myself, I attempted to create a more level playing field where all ideas expressed were valued and I tried to not let my own thoughts carry more authority than theirs.

I intentionally kept the group small to help create a “natural context” because young people tend to relax more when “in the company of their peers and are more comfortable knowing that they outnumber the adults in the setting” (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003 p. 35). This approach made it less likely that I forced my language and interpretations onto a dialogue because the students were able to engage in peer talk (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003). The semi-structured interview allowed the students to construct meaning collectively and build on the ideas of their peers. The seven participants in this study had been classmates for multiple years, and so I believe the

semi-structured discussion came close to replicating a natural context for them. This helped me obtain better information because the discussion was “grounded in the discourse of those being interviewed” (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003 p. 36). My job as the researcher was to spark a discussion but then try and remove my words from the discourse. In this way, I was a facilitator of a discussion rather than a more traditional interviewer. Holstein and Gubrium (2003) believe “The best interview emerges from a state of egalitarian cooperation in which both the researcher and respondents form the discourse” (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003 p. 36). I was not concerned with obtaining specific answers to my questions and I remained more interested in understanding the perspectives of my former students. By constructing non-directed, open, and inclusive questions, the students were more likely to introduce related topics, collaborate, and build upon the statements of others (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003). I frequently stressed that there were no “known answers” to the questions with the hope that this allowed the students to speculate, hypothesize, and take risks (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003 p. 36).

Authenticity Criteria

My study is rooted in the constructivist paradigm and therefore, traditional criteria for assessing its quality are ineffective. Positivist approaches to authenticity evaluation operate under the assumption that educational research can be conducted objectively. The *Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation* developed standards in the 1970s to guide the evaluation process after questions arose about how to judge the quality of educational research, how to hold researchers accountable, and how to develop

public credibility for educational evaluation (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Subsequent efforts were initiated to combine these standards with those produced by the *Evaluation Research Society* in an attempt to codify practices regarding quality assurance. Although the recommendations provided by these committees offer valuable insights to quality control, they are too often ineffective for constructivist research, or what Guba and Lincoln (1989) call *Fourth Generation Evaluation*. Since constructivist researchers (like myself) believe reality is open to unlimited interpretations, attempts to *standardize, sample, replicate, validate, and develop cause and effect relationships* (as suggested in the positivist standards for quality control) are irrelevant. Instead, I turned to the work of Yvonna Lincoln and Egon Guba and their book titled *Fourth Generation Evaluation* (1989) for a set of standards to ensure my study is meaningful, authentic, and fair.

To maintain *fairness*, I needed to ensure that all participants' constructions of reality were "solicited and honored" (Guba & Lincoln, 1989 p. 245). I included various viewpoints throughout the data collection and analysis to ensure that the disparate constructions of the world were "presented, verified, checked, and taken into account in a balanced and evenhanded way" (Guba & Lincoln, 1989 p. 245). During the semi-structured interview students were provided the opportunity to clarify their opinions in a manner satisfactory to them. The students were informed through conversations and the consent letter that they could check the information they shared, clarify their points, offer suggestions for data collection, and comment on the fairness of the study. In short, the entire research process has remained open, I did not operate secretly, deceitfully, nor did

I manipulate data to satisfy a preconceived hypothesis. The study will stand up to an *inquiry audit* (Guba & Lincoln, 1989) and discussions about the process were open for review and suggestions.

Ontological authenticity occurs when individuals experience growth, maturity, a deeper level of sophistication, and an enhanced worldview as a result of the research process. *Educative authenticity* “represents the extent to which individual respondents’ understanding of and appreciation for the constructions of *others* outside their stake holding group are enhanced” (Guba & Lincoln, 1989 p. 245). Both of these criteria were achieved through a critical analysis of my own personal beliefs as they appeared in my writing. My former students were also given the opportunity to experience growth as they engaged in a discussion about their schooling experience in the context of race, culture and power. I deconstructed my words to derive understanding, and throughout the data analysis process, I operated with the assumption that Others think differently than me. The semi-structured interview with my former students provided a catalyst for reflection on my own thoughts and the institution I supported and maintained. I experienced new kinds of understanding, and with that, new levels of maturity and sophistication as I closely reviewed the words spoken by students whose cultural orientation is significantly different from my own. I constantly assessed my “own experience-seeing how it is the same as or different from the experience of others” with the ultimate goal of enhancing my “own awareness of the context in which” I found myself (Guba & Lincoln, 1989 p. 245).

Catalytic authenticity is defined as “the extent to which action is stimulated and facilitated by the evaluation processes” and *Tactical authenticity* “refers to the degree to which stakeholders and participants are empowered to act” (Guba & Lincoln, 1989 p. 245). Both of these criteria have been met as indicated by my desire and willingness to take action as a school leader. The process of writing this auto|ethnography has radically changed my view on urban schools and urban school reform in particular. My findings have made me more skeptical and critical of reforms marketed as transformative. I am more skilled at analyzing reforms from multiple theoretical frameworks, and I can better ascertain how and why a reform may be adopted or rejected by the dominant culture. I am not pretending to have all the answers about urban school reform as a result of this auto|ethnography; that goal was never a part of this research process. I do, however, feel incredibly empowered to take action as a school leader with regards to critiquing and advocating for or against reform initiatives. I am not defining action as simply labeling an urban school reform initiative as “good” or “bad”. Rather, I am now more inclined to seek the perspective of Others and to recognize that understanding about reforms may be dependent upon a person’s socio-cultural orientation. In this way, both catalytic and tactical authenticity criteria have been met.

Conclusion

This critical self-examination is coming at an opportune time. My thinking about urban schools has changed significantly in only a few years and it is sometimes hard to know what I believe. My current position as a school administrator means I am

constantly evaluating and making decisions about curricula that are marketed as transformative. This dissertation represents an enactment of my desire to increase my understanding of myself in relation to Others within the context of an urban school reform by exploring my evolution of thought with an array of theoretical tools at my disposal. I aim to increase my level of understanding about how various curricula can place the burden for change onto students of color while their teachers have the privilege of remaining the same. My ultimate goal is to have greater understanding so I am better positioned to make ethical decisions as I work to create more equitable urban schools.

CHAPTER III

FORCING CHANGE WITH THE HIDDEN CURRICULUM

Introduction

Yanick: I feel like you guys punish more of the black people.... I don't know. I felt like black people would like get in trouble a lot in middle school more than the White people and that is the reason why you would act like that.

Assad: You know how like Mr. Harrison would like clash with everyone?

Matt: Yeah.

Assad: There are like two different teachers. Usually there is like the teacher that comes in that teaches the class he is supposed to teach then goes home. There is a difference. Mr. Harrison wasn't like the average teacher. Mr. Harrison was the teacher... he wants to like bring the best out of you. Sometimes when he like sent you out of class it was probably not to get someone mad or because he didn't like something...he was probably trying to challenge you.

Matt: How were Mr. Harrison's actions or interactions with White kids or Asian kids different than with black kids?

Assad: It was the same as how we feel about...like 'those White kids show you guys off, you guys'. I can actually say that cuz having mad conversations with Mr. Harrison it used to be fun toward the end; he would say 'they are not making you look good'. I can sense the difference, he was harder on us but he was harder on us because he cared more about us and he was kind of easy on them and when I brought that up to Mr. [assistant principal] to tell when I talked to Mr. Harrison one-on-one he would explain to me how he feels about African American and how we have to like learn how to step up our game....it is always a competition.

I experience pain reading this dialogue over and over again. Mr. Harrison died the summer before I sat down with my former students to have this discussion. The pain

comes from reflecting on how wrong my perception was of the only African American teacher in our urban school. I had been frustrated with him for not adhering to the same reform initiative I once subscribed to and eagerly endorsed. The affectionate words my former students chose to describe Mr. Harrison demonstrate their high regard for him, but ironically, I once thought this same teacher was doing a disservice to them because he failed to follow our “whole school” social and emotional learning procedures. The following writing selection highlights my concerns.

There is one teacher who seems to be inconsistent with his practice. In fact, I heard that early on the school year he engaged in a heated, head to head shouting match with a 12 year old seventh grader; an approach to discipline clearly not supported by the Developmental Design model. This teacher would not change his behavior if I approached him in a manner that he perceived to be condescending. In fact, he displays a heightened sense of sensitivity to what he deems as “know it all young kids”. He frequently tells us that, in his mind, he has always “incorporated the elements of Developmental Designs.” In our cluster meetings, he tells us that he is “always speaking to community” or encouraging student to act with dignity. (Intern Reflection Log, Dr. Kress’s Class, November 25, 2007)

After listening to my recorded conversation with my students, I have a deeper understanding for the late Mr. Harrison and I sympathize with his concerns; he was able to connect with and push students in a way I could not. In retrospect, I believe Mr. Harrison distinguished himself from my other colleagues because he engaged in an earnest dialogue with students like Assad and Yanick and his room was a familiar place where I speculate the *hidden curriculum* that governed my classroom may have faded. While I cannot know this for sure, there may have been less of a burden on African American students to change their way of being in Mr. Harrison’s classroom compared to

mine. I related well and developed meaningful teacher-student relationships with my students but in the first year of teaching in an urban school, it was harder to find common ground with students who I perceived to be different. Because I did not critically examine my positionality or engage in a critical dialogue with my students in the context of classroom expectations, I maintained a hidden curriculum that favored some and attempted to deculturalize others.

In my struggle to gain footing as an urban teacher and improve my classroom “management” skills, I simply ratcheted up the consequences and with the hope that increased consequences would pull students towards my way of thinking. Although I knew and respected Terrell’s different cultural orientation, I did not recognize culture as “lived antagonistic relations” (Giroux, 1994 p. 26) and I did not appreciate that my classroom was a politically charged space where various agents were operating on a structure built and maintained by White hegemony. Boykin wrote “classrooms are not culturally neutral terrains,” and he and his colleagues cited studies that documented how urban public schools were historically designed in part “to bring the values and behaviors of certain immigrant children in conformity with an Anglo cultural ethos” (Boykin et al., 2005 p. 524). Minority children like Yanick, Assad and Terrell have traditionally been expected to conform to hidden curriculum that values “individual autonomy, materialism, the priority of cognition over affect, etc.” (Boykin et al., 2005 p. 524). The cultural expectations laid out by my former urban school, therefore, went beyond academics as

my colleagues and I attempted to change the manner in which students of color conducted themselves without realizing that we may need to change as well.

Unpacking the Hidden Curriculum

Assad: The one thing I learned about teachers is that everything you do in their classes... like all the work you do; your grade is not always just your work. It is more like the relationship you have with the teacher.

Assad acknowledged that relationships are an essential component of school success and the grade you get is linked to “everything you do in your classes.” I can think of few students I sent to the office more than Assad and I now wonder if this had to do with Assad resisting the hidden curriculum. According to Monroe and Obidah (2004), African American students dress differently, speak differently, and engage in “forms of nonverbal communication” (Monroe & Obidah, 2004 p. 259) that are different from their White teachers. Research supports the theory that the manner in which school culture is constructed creates a *hidden curriculum* accessible to those with similar cultural attributes to those in charge (Monroe & Obidah, 2004). The hidden curriculum in my classroom included the nuances of my teaching style, the messages transmitted to students through body language, the various levels of expectations I placed on individual students, and all the other “tacit ways in which knowledge and behavior” (McLaren, 2003 p. 212) were constructed and enforced. The hidden curriculum in Mr. Harrison’s classroom may have been significantly different than mine because his own cultural

experiences were different. The existence of a hidden curriculum implies that conflicts with some of my students were fueled in part by dissimilar worldviews and my failure to share the burden for change with my students.

Many researchers acknowledge that African Americans have a unique cultural orientation that stems from African traditions. Examples include beliefs about spirituality, displays of emotion, physical movement, and individuality. (Monroe & Obidah, 2004 p. 259)

My White, middle-class perspective and my deep-rooted understandings about what constitutes appropriate student behavior may not have validated some cultural differences. As a member of the politically, economically, and numerically dominant sect of society, I established classroom norms based on my own position in society. The fact that I held significantly more power in the school than Assad meant the burden was on him to first understand the subtleties of my expectations and then alter his cultural practices to favor mine. Students that connected with me culturally were also expected to change to meet my expectations but they were not burdened with the added responsibility of switching values consistent with their cultural norms. Educational theorists debate how the hidden curriculum operates in schools, but in general, it is agreed that the hidden curriculum distributes the norms, values and attitudes of the dominant culture in classrooms as a necessary means to reproduce and perpetuate the power of the dominant class (Giroux, 1984).

Students were required to attend my social studies class, and I frequently operated as an agent of the Western paradigm and exalted certain types of knowledge above others. The learning standards I taught Assad delivered knowledge socially constructed

and classified as important by the political, social and economic classes that hold power. The manner in which students accessed this curriculum in a classroom where my authority was paramount, also contained socially constructed rules for behavior. The hidden curriculum speaks to the subtleties in language, behavior expectations, the manner in which I called on students, dismissed them from the room, acknowledged their participation or lack of participation, and all the particulars involved in the negotiation of the social relationships between myself, the classroom as a whole, and individual students. The following sections contain examples of how the hidden curriculum played out in my teaching experiences.

A Suburban Hidden Curriculum in an Urban School

Assad: Something like it might not happen as much in middle school something that happens more in high school I think like...you know they think the White kid should succeed and like, like, Asian kids- the stereotypes- but actually for Black kids, African American studentsthey kind of like push the kids along...like 'alright he is failing so why don't we give him a "D" so he can go to the next grade...let him get out of my hands. I don't want to keep him next year they don't set him up with the skills he needs to be successful in life.

Matt: Why?

Assad: For example, not to put you on the spot, but remember when I was in 8th grade? I think and I had a "D" or something and it was like the day before grades came out and I wrote a few make up homework and somehow my grade because like a "B". I didn't earn a "B" that quarter but somehow it came out as a "B".

Matt: So somehow you did the bare minimum and boom!

Assad: and yeah and it came out as a "B".

I was hired as a seventh and eighth grade social studies teacher in 2004 and although I had five years of professional teaching experience, I was starting all over again. I switched from teaching in a mostly White and affluent school in the San Francisco Bay suburbs to teaching in a city outside of Boston. Although classroom management is a tough skill to master in any public school classroom, I experienced a gigantic and stressful transition as I tried to establish myself in a very diverse school where White students were the minority. I always prided myself on being a teacher that develops personal relationships with my students but I found it difficult to connect with many kids in my new class. I was overwhelmed within the first two weeks as I tried to “manage” some of my students whose style of interaction was so radically different than the kids I worked with the five previous years. I self-identified as an urban teacher “stuck in the suburbs” for years even though I was born, educated, and trained in the suburbs and suburban culture is what I knew best. Like many “progressive minded” educators out to make the world a better place for the poor and disenfranchised, I felt drawn to urban education and discounted suburban problems as trivial. I was tired of parent complaints over B- grades and what I considered to be entitled children fighting for their spot at Harvard (in reality, this is a drastic oversimplification of suburban problems, but at the time, it was my perception of my suburban reality). The real game was in the city schools--complete with its fights, poverty, crime, and the full human condition on display. I felt trapped like a soldier stuck on laundry duty when he yearned for a chance at combat.

I worked in two wealthy suburban school districts in California because, I convinced myself, the suburbs hired me before San Francisco and Oakland Unified returned my calls. At a deep, unspoken level I was relieved to be protected by the suburban schools because the suburban part of my identity was scared to work with urban kids. I had to act upon my years of rhetoric, however, so I applied only to urban schools when I returned to the East Coast in 2004. The television show *Boston Public* had added glamour to urban teaching and HBO's *The Wire* provocatively exposed urban school issues and cast teachers as social heroes. Urban teaching became not only a way for me to give back, but also a way to elevate my status. It was time to cash in on the street cred urban teaching could offer me in the "progressive circles" I socialized in. I was an outspoken liberal in college and frequently got into social justice arguments with family and acquaintances. I considered my employment to be a liability to my credibility as a liberal because I felt susceptible to the following retort: *What do you know, you teach in the richest public school in California?*

I was hired to teach middle school social studies in a public kindergarten through eighth grade school located in a city outside Boston, Massachusetts. During the 2007-2008 school year, 370 students attended the school, 116 of those students were considered middle school students (grades 6-8) (*Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education, 2008*). The student body of the school at the time was .5 % Native American, 4.1% multi-race/ Non-Hispanic, 8.9% Hispanic, 31.4% African American, and 45.7% White (*Massachusetts Department of Elementary &*

Secondary Education, 2008). Thirty-four percent of the students came from low income households, 16% of the students resided in homes where English was not the first language, and 17.3% of the students receive special education services (*Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education*, 2008). The number of minority students in the middle school grades tended to be higher than in the lower grades due to many affluent and White parents enrolling their children in private schools as they approached seventh grade. Colleagues used to note that the classrooms got “darker as the kids got older” hinting that racial differences among students played a role in the school’s identity.³

The dialogue that opens this section indicates that Assad, a Black student with Somali roots, figured out how to play this hidden curriculum of low expectations to his own advantage. He was my student for two full school years and knew he could blow off an assignment, learn little and still pull the “B” with one week’s worth of effort. He may have benefited in the short term but Molly arguably benefited in the long term because I would not accept mediocre work from her; I kept pushing her to do better. Although Molly is also a member of the dominant White culture, her socially constructed worldview is different than mine. She attends urban schools and is friends with students from a multitude of cultural backgrounds. Both the students were able to recognize that

³ While it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to examine white flight and its impact on public schools in this city, according to research conducted by Fairlie & Resch, this phenomenon is entirely plausible but the factors that may cause it are still heavily debated (Fairlie & Resch, 2002).

in 7th grade, I was treating Molly differently than Assad, Terrell, or Yanick. She identified different expectations placed on her and felt she didn't deserve a voice more powerful than her friends (*I wanted them to hear too what Terrell had to say and I felt like they just expected me to succeed and almost looking for a chance to not have them succeed sometimes*). But with my own cultural perspective and my interest in preserving the feeling of competence I enjoyed in the suburbs, I treated Molly like a Harvard bound student and unknowingly afforded her special attention I did not bestow on others.

UMass Amherst professor of education Sonia Nieto points out:

Students from socially and culturally dominant groups generally begin school with the kind of knowledge that will place them at an advantage to learn in that setting; they have more of the cultural capital that it will take to succeed in school. (Nieto, 1999 p. 6)

The hidden curriculum definitely favored the agency of Molly over students from subordinated cultures but Molly knew she possessed certain privileges. She recognized a hidden curriculum in our classroom because she operated within the margins of it; she transitioned between various cultural fields throughout her school days and was discomforted by her teacher setting a higher standard for her than for her friends. She may not have welcomed it but she undoubtedly benefited from special attention because I recognized myself more in her than I did in Terrell or Assad. Students of color are surely able to access the same institutions I easily joined if they become “familiar with the ‘code’ used to decipher and utilize capital within a particular system of meaning” (Tobin & Roth, 2005 p. 133). But, they must first prove that they want to “change” by achieving the standards for success established by the White world. There is always pressure on

kids to subscribe to adult standards—school is after all, crucial for society to endure generation to generation. But, as I reflect on my transition from suburban to urban teaching, I recognize subtle practices that gave some students an edge over others. White students like Molly and myself, enter the classroom with the privilege of positive assumptions and are not shouldered with the additional burden of changing their cultural practices to please their White teacher.

Hidden Curriculum and White Identity

Tomorrow I am going to my cousin's barmistpha in Boston and Sunday my uncles and aunts are coming over for the day to celebrate Christmas. (Sixth Grade Writing Journal, December 18, 1987)

I did not really understand what cultural groups I have membership in until I started this self-examination; I never considered my Whiteness to be a distinct culture. It is this lack of a critical self-examination, I believe that caused me to place the burden for change onto my students rather than share the responsibility. My mother is Jewish (but she curbed this identity), my father's parents came from Scotland by way of Nova Scotia a few generations back (the Scottish part of my identity stops at my last name and with the bagpipe performer at my wedding) and these contributing factors played a role, for sure, in my identity development. The quote above from my 6th grade classroom journal illustrates the confused nature of my cultural experiences in a single weekend. I was raised middle class in a historic New England suburban town that borders Hartford, immersed in White people--despite the fact that Hartford is a minority-majority city. I

was a public school student, a swimmer, and my family joined a private swim club (but that was a financial stretch). My best friend lived in the “projects” (subsidized housing) and I spent significant parts of my early life playing with “poorer” kids. I was elected to school government, my family vacationed on Cape Cod, my parents paid for my undergraduate education, etc., etc., etc. So, who am I and who am I not? It seems impossible to declare myself as part of one culture but the above list does group me with America’s most dominant culture: The culture of middle class Whiteness. It is this murky and imprecise White identity that influenced the hidden curriculum I maintained in my urban classroom. Membership in this mostly unobserved racial grouping encouraged me to view urban students through a deficit mindset and therefore place the burden for change onto my students.

Even after conducting a critical self-reflection, however, I am unable to provide my readers specifics about my White identity. Kincheloe and Steinberg make the point that:

There are many ways to be White, as whiteness interacts with class, gender and a range of other race-related and cultural dynamics” (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998a p. 8).

All of the life experiences I listed above may assist in defining my White identity but in reality, a person of any race can experience Cape Cod, bagpipes and a swim-club. People of any race have diverse political beliefs, cultural practices and financial profiles but there are commonalities across groups that are socially significant. Learning about the historical roots of White identity has strengthened my reflective powers and affords me

the opportunity to better dissect the hidden curriculum in my classroom in an effort to understand why I placed an unnecessary burden for change onto my students.

Whiteness and the Hidden Curriculum

In the chapter “Addressing the Crisis of Whiteness” (1998a) from the book *White Reign: Deploying Whiteness in America*, Joe Kincheloe and Shirley Steinberg trace the emergence of a White identity to the Enlightenment where rationalism and scientific reason began to suppress other ways of knowing such as “passion, bodily sensations, and tactile understanding” in favor of intellectual reasoning (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998a p. 5). Although the start of White identity can be marked within a few centuries and trends can be tracked, it is still difficult to clearly define what it means to be White.

While no one knows exactly what constitutes whiteness, we can historicize the concept and offer some general statements about the dynamics it signifies. Even this process is difficult, as whiteness as a sociohistorical construct is constantly shifting in light of new circumstances and changing interactions with various manifestations of power. (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998a p. 5)

During the age of European exploration, settlement and colonization, Whiteness became associated with order, self-control, and civility as White Europeans set out to dominate non-Whites for economic, political and territorial gain (Kincheloe, Steinberg, Rodriguez, & Chennault, 2000). Although race is commonly connected to the color of a person’s skin, racial identity has been more of a social construct rather than a biological one. Noel Ignatiev (2008) argues this point in his book *How the Irish Became White*.

No biologist has ever been able to provide a satisfactory definition of “race”—that is, a definition that includes all members of a given race and excludes all others. Attempts to give the term a biological foundation lead to absurdities: parents and children of different races, or the well-known phenomenon that a white woman can give birth to a black child, but a black woman can never give birth to a white child. The only logical conclusion is that people are members of different races because they have been assigned to them.

Outside these labels and the racial oppression that accompanies them, the only race is the human. (Ignatiev, 2008 p. 1)

Despite the lack of biological evidence, during the eighteen and nineteenth centuries, race became seen as biologically grounded, and along with skin color, people passed down their intellectual skills along racial lines (Kendall, 2006). White people shifted towards constructing a hierarchy amongst races and assigned more positive qualities to lighter skinned races as contact with nonwhites became more common (Kendall, 2006). Frances Kendall (2006) argues that as White people increasingly defined themselves in relation to others, the role of education in interracial affairs gained prominence.

There was consensus among the white men in power that people were genetically programmed to lead or to follow, to be the decision makers or those about whom decisions were made. While there was a range of thinking about the impact of genetic inferiority—some white people believed that Black people could be brought up to white standards through education and training, while others argued that their situation was hopeless—there was fairly solid agreement that Black people were genetically inferior to whites. (Kendall, 2006, p. 42)

This sense of control over the knowing of what is best for non-Whites led to a paradigm of a *White Man's Burden*, that is alive and well in contemporary urban schools.

Focusing on what the Other lacked helped further define White identity as White people saw it as their responsibility—or burden--to civilize non-Whites (Kincheloe, Steinberg, Rodriguez, & Chennault, 2000). The identity of a White suburban man entering an urban

school to save minorities from themselves is a recurrent theme in this auto|ethnography because despite my tendency to identify myself as progressive, the data suggests that my identity includes attitudes and beliefs that perpetuate the archetype of the *White Man's Burden* that expects people of color to change while White people have the privilege to remain the same (Ogbu, 2004).

Although there were hundreds if not thousands of different cultural fields interacting in my urban school, it was the Western, White, middle class culture (even if poorly defined) that was consistently the dominant culture that established the hidden curriculum and the forms of capital needed to gain access. Ironically, even though it was the White culture that set the terms for success, it was also the one culture that was rarely, if ever, talked about at my former school. Pierre Bourdieu conceptualized culture as a form of capital with specific laws of accumulation, exchange, and exercise (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1998). He extended the idea of capital to include all forms of power such as cultural, social, and symbolic⁴. I subconsciously acquired these forms of capital in day-to-day experiences throughout my life.

According to Bourdieu, I, as an individual, am not separate from society. My White identity and the civilization I am a part of “are two dimensions of the same social reality” (Swartz, 1997 p. 96). Power is at the center of all my human relations and in

⁴ Cultural capital is the knowledge, skills, education and advantages that a person has which give them status in a particular society. Social Capital is the resources accumulated through group membership, relationships and social networks. Symbolic Capital are the resources obtained through personal honor, prestige, or recognition.

order to feel legitimate in my new teaching environment; I exercised power in a manner that I thought exalted my status amongst my colleagues; culture became a means to express my “political content” (Swartz, 1997 p. 7). The capital I valued was intricately linked with my Whiteness and thus determined how I interacted with my students (Nieto, 1999). The way I spoke, socialized, dressed, and behaved as well as the things I valued became part of the hidden curriculum I maintained in my classroom. My focus was on solidifying my own status in my new teaching environment and not on learning about the cultural, social, and symbolic capital that Others valued. I did not set out to oppress students but my lack of reflection on the hidden curriculum put pressure on students that wanted to succeed in this context to act in a manner that pleased me. Societal standards put pressure on me, as a middle school teacher, to hold students accountable for off task behaviors; this in itself is not unethical or racist. But a reflection on the hidden curriculum suggests that certain forms of cultural capital were exalted above others implying that kids that participated cultural fields similar to mine had an automatic advantage and did not have the extra burden of switching (or resisting) cultural practices.

Hidden Curriculum and Resistance

Just because the hidden curriculum exists and is arguably powerful, does not mean that it goes unchecked. “Resistance is related not only to ethnic cultural differences, but also to power differentials between students, their teachers, and the institution of school” (Nieto, 1999 p. 43). Yanick, Terrell, and Assad were skilled students, but I remember perceiving that they and other students were failing to

participate in their own learning. Much of the “bad behavior” resulted from students resisting teachers they perceived to be attacking their cultural identities (Nieto, 1999).

Wade Boykin found that African American students may exhibit behavior consistent with values and traditions influenced by West African culture and students that are encouraged to practice their culture are more likely to have positive school and learning experiences (Tyler, Boykin, Miller, & Hurley, 2006). The hidden curriculum impedes on these students ability to practice their own culture and are therefore being set up for failure. Boykin’s early work focused on the experiences of students like Assad in schools and argued that as African Americans, they face a “triple quandary”:

They are incompletely socialized to the Euro-American cultural system; they are victimized by racial and economic oppression; they participate in a culture that is sharply at odds with mainstream ideology. (Boykin, 1986 p. 66)

The triple quandary encourages coping strategies that may help block enculturation but may also further complicate school experiences for minority students. For example, students may “protect their own integrity” (Boykin, Tyler, & Miller, 2005 p. 78) by attempting to undermine the teachers who have established rules contrary to their own cultural values. Echoing this sentiment, Schwartz writes:

Students may engage in certain challenging behaviors common to the African American male adolescent community, not because they want to disrupt the classroom but because they want to demonstrate their rebellion against what they consider a teacher’s ‘power tripping’; lessons they consider irrelevant, racist, or too simplistic; their perception that teachers believe them incapable of

achievement; or their inability to keep up with White classmates because of learning or developmental differences. (Schwartz, 2001 p. 4)

Terrell, Assad and Yanick were in frequent trouble because they pushed the limits like many middle school students due in school. But unlike students from the dominant culture, these three had the additional calling to resist the hidden curriculum that exalted certain cultural capital over theirs (McLaren, 2003). The pattern of rebellious behaviors persisted because they recognized, either consciously or subconsciously, that their cultural, social, and symbolic capital was undervalued by the hidden curriculum and they were reacting to added pressures to change. A student can resist deculturalization in a variety of ways. One reaction may be to “prove them wrong’ by developing a fierce determination to excel in school or go to college” (Nieto, 1999 p. 43). Another reaction may be to suffer through demerits rather than conform to White cultural standards that were objectionable to them. If I viewed apathetic or rebellious behavior as laziness or not caring, a resistance interpretation turns this theory on its head. Students were not giving up because they lacked skills or interest. Rather, they were resisting a White teacher that expected them to make cultural changes on top of the behavioral changes that were expected from all students.

Hidden Curriculum and Deficit Thinking

Yanick: I saw it like, teachers at the school they always...I felt like they always thought that Black people were really bad and like White people were like innocent and could never do anything wrong.

My inability to put my positionality front and center led me to psychologize what I perceived to be the failures of my students. Peter McLaren points to the tendency of educators from the dominant culture to subscribe to the *deficit model of student failure* that allows them to describe away a student's "lack of motivation or low self-concept" on psychological factors (McLaren, 2003 p. 236). When I first transitioned to urban teaching, I lacked understanding of how my attitudes about education and learning influenced a hidden curriculum that positioned me to focus on what was wrong with certain students (Ladson-Billings, 2000) and therefore seek methods to change them to become more like me. Gloria Ladson-Billings (2000) found the deficit model to be prevalent in the literature (with regards to African American students in particular) suggesting it is an excuse commonly used by the dominant culture. She found,

references to the educational needs of African American students are folded into a discourse of deprivation. Searches of the literature base indicate that when one uses the descriptor, "Black education," one is directed to see, "culturally deprived" and "culturally disadvantaged." Thus, the educational research literature, when it considers African American learners at all, has constructed all African American children, regardless of economic or social circumstance, within the deficit paradigm. (Ladson-Billings, 2000 p. 206)

Ladson-Billing's words resonate with me as I reflect upon my data. My data suggests I used *Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs* as a diagnostic tool to assess just how needy my urban students were. I was introduced to the Hierarchy of Needs numerous times between high school and college and Abraham Maslow's theoretical vantage point meshed nicely with the vantage point of a suburban teacher that looked out at a classroom of urban kids that refused to follow directions. The universalism of Maslow's Hierarchy

of Needs is up for critique as some scholars recognize it as a theoretical framework born out of American values of individualism and lacking a socio-cultural component. Granted, there is a tendency for complicated theories to be reduced and overly simplified when put into practice so arguably my critique on Maslow is more on the popular understanding of his theory rather than his full intention. A participant in a research study titled “Motivation: That’s Maslow, isn’t it?” (1996) shared a story that explains how I carried a simplified understanding of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs with me from my high school sociology class.

You know when you are studying you like to find things that you will easily remember for the exam. If there is a simple little diagram, then that’s really good. It helps you remember the theory. The theories that don’t have nice little pictures get forgotten. (Watson, 1996 p. 457)

The reductionist interpretation of Maslow that I relied on was filtered through the same hegemonic forces that influenced my easy adoption of the deficit model for student failure.

Clearly, Yanick’s words that opened this section indicate that she felt as if she was being described and treated differently than her White peers—and the fact that she was disciplined and suspended numerous times suggests she was right. At the time I transitioned from suburban to urban teaching, I was lost in an urban world I did not understand and it was much easier for me as a new urban teacher to rely on a popular (albeit reductionist) interpretation of a positivist theory to justify blaming Others and putting the burden on some of my students to change their cultural practices. In the

context where I hyper focused on deficits, it makes sense that Yannick interpreted her own behaviors as being “bad.”

The following selection provides evidence that I had a mindset that supported a hidden curriculum that puts added pressure on students like Yanick to make cultural changes. This data was written for an organizational theory class and reveals a strong reliance on the deficit model of urban student failure and on Maslow.

The causes behind the unruly behavior were also external because the difficulty of the task would be hard even for a veteran urban educator. This particular group of seventh graders is considered by many professionals in the building to be the toughest in recent history. Many of the students have volatile home lives and the majority of the students seemed to care little about academic success. Furthermore, many of the students transitioned into the school last year and spent much of their days with a first-year teacher who failed at classroom management. These factors resulted in a chaotic school year and class social norms defined by shouting, refusing to follow directions and disrespectful verbal attacks. Maslow would argue that the students are unable to explore higher levels of thinking because their physiological, safety and security needs are not met (Hoy & Miskel, 2005, p. 128). In short, the task of reconstituting this class into an operational learning group appeared complex and unpromising. I was left with feelings of hopelessness, apathy and resignation; a true sign of a teacher struggling with failure caused by stable, external factors. (Hoy & Miskel 2005, p. 142) (Order to Chaos: The Attribution Theory, March 2006)

A hidden curriculum infused with assumptions that Yanick had a *volatile home life, cared little about academic success* and was *unable to explore higher levels of thinking*, would cause her to internalize negative feelings about herself. This selection finds me attempting to piece together all the home, institutional, behavioral, and psychological factors that could cause a student like Yanick to disrupt my teaching. I did not understand that my reliance on a reductionist interpretation of Maslow and my inability

to recognize the role of the hidden curriculum I maintained could have a significant role in making learning difficult for her.

My inability to make quick connections to some of my urban students was a new feeling for me as a teacher so I made assumptions that students like Yanick participated in a culture that was sharply at odds with my own; I assumed this culture perpetuated deficits and therefore needed to change. During the peak of my frustration after transitioning from a suburban school, I wrote:

Students bring their problems to school. After seven years of teaching experience, I have accumulated enough data to conclude that unmet human needs can lead to negative behavior at school. Children who do not have their physiological, safety, security, belonging and love needs met will most likely experience elevated levels of anxiety. This anxiety will pour into the classroom environment. A student whose parents are constantly fighting over a divorce will be unlikely to remain focused on schoolwork. Attempts to keep students who are struggling with love and belonging issues on task during social studies may result in conflict.
(Random Writings about Race, July 2006)

Students, I thought, misbehaved in school because their parents do not teach them proper values, they do not value formal education, and their needs (as laid out by Maslow) are not being met. I am not sure what *data* I had *accumulated* to make the above conclusion but I guess my membership in a doctoral program provided me the authority to make declarations. Blaming parents for failing to meet their child's needs as laid out by Maslow was consistent with the tendency for teachers from the dominant culture to "send very disturbing messages" (Milner, 2012 p. 4) about race in their writing. This selection may not represent a full spectrum of my belief system but because I wrote them at times of frustration, they do provide insights into some of my deeper thoughts.

Professor H. Richard Milner (2012) reports on research that “found that the academic literature painted a very negative and inadequate portrait of African Americans and of urban education” (Milner, 2012 p. 3). He points to research on language in academic databases that were:

inundated with descriptors such as ‘disadvantaged,’ ‘marginalized,’ ‘oppressed,’ and ‘at risk.’ Such terms were used as adjectives to describe students themselves rather than the inequitable and unequal institutional, systemic, and structural realities of students—many of which are far outside of the control of students. (Milner, 2012 p .4)

Milner argues that the “discursive patterns” used in words and writing are “potentially powerful” and “reinforce stereotypes that those in society and education have about African Americans, unfairly place an individual or a group of people in a negative light, or to tell an incomplete account of the life experiences of a group of people” and “seduce and subconsciously force us to believe underdeveloped, under- conceptualized, and inaccurate information about Black students” (Milner, 2012).

I have used discursive patterns in my own writing when describing students from subordinated cultures. The following data provides an example.

Many students from Apple School come from families from lower levels of socio-economics. As stated in the profile, 38.6% of the students come from “low income” families. Twenty-two point four percent of the students reside in homes where English is not the primary language. These numbers do not imply that students from these demographics will exhibit negative behavior, but they may indicate that students reside in homes that do not have access to resources that help with academic success in the dominant culture. Furthermore, the fact that one quarter of the students live in homes where English is not the primary

language suggests that their families are recent immigrants. Many immigrant families struggle with challenges that heighten the levels of stress in their children. These children may enter school with high level of anxiety that manifests itself in negative behavior. (Random Writings about Race, July 24th 2006)

The data suggests that soon after transitioning to urban teaching, I sorted students based on race, language and money and linked students from demographics that did not match mine to “negative behavior”—a tendency that Yanick clearly internalized as indicated in the dialogue above. The fact that I conclude this paragraph with *These children may enter school with high level of anxiety that manifests itself in negative behavior* clearly suggests that I was seeking a method to change this. Milner teaches me that these words have consequences:

At the heart of what gets taken up and expanded upon in educational discourse are questions that critical theorists and critical race theorists have considered for decades: whose knowledge and knowing is accurate? Who decides what is acceptable and unacceptable? What roles do power, race, and class play in the ways in which discourses are shaped about African Americans in education and other oppressed groups. (Milner, 2012 p. 4)

The data suggests that my tendency to sort people into acceptable and unacceptable categories implies that some were ok but Others needed to change. I am not insinuating that I entered the schoolhouse daily with the stated desire to make my Black students White. But I have learned through a close and critical read of my own academic work that I contained some unchecked prejudices that infused my hidden curriculum and may have therefore put added pressure on some students and not others. Yanick shares her feeling that teachers just focus on her mistakes rather than listen to her side of the story. Based on my analysis, her feelings are justified.

The advisor to this paper and University of Massachusetts, Boston professor Tricia Kress pushed me out of my comfortable *place-the blame-elsewhere* worldview by forcing me to question my own thinking (i.e. *Maslow would argue that the students are unable to explore higher levels of thinking because their physiological, safety and security needs are not met*). In a critical metalogue on Maslow's hierarchy Professor Kress published with my fellow classmates, she criticizes the popular reliance on Maslow to explain away problems in urban schools.

For 2 years, I have noticed many students gravitating towards Maslow's (1943) *Hierarchy of Human Needs* to explain what happens in urban schools. I cringe when they select Maslow because his theory can be used superficially, reducing human experience to a cause-and-effect equation that reads: *IF students' needs are met THEN learning can occur. Conversely, IF students' needs are NOT met THEN learning can NOT occur*. While this might not have been Maslow's intent, reductionist tendencies are embedded in his theory. In response, I questioned: Who decides what "needs" means? Who decides in what order humans can experience needs? What does it mean to be self-actualized; says who? Are needs only intrinsic/individualist? Do women and minorities experience needs differently than a White male? I wanted to (re)theorize Maslow's theory to include other voices; thereby opening it up to multiple interpretations with discarding it or (re)theorizing in a singular voice that would erase the multiplicity I hoped to include. (Lenses, Kress, Aviles, Taylor, & Winchell, 2011 p. 135- 136)

As Professor Kress highlights, my reliance on an overly simplified interpretation of Maslow to analyze the behavior of my urban students was fundamentally dependent on my old worldview. A meaningful dialogue to learn about a student's life experiences is more transformative than assigning him or her to a fixed position on a pyramid. In the data selections above, the causes for bad behavior included a particularly bad class of seventh graders, volatile home lives, caring little about academic success, and

experiences with a bad first year teacher the year before. Not one of these causes had to do with my own attitudes, values, race, culture or boring teaching. Applying a theory like Maslow is not fundamentally wrong. But, a tendency to look only at the Other and not at yourself can only ever reveal part of the story.

In “Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth”, (2005) Tara Yosso argues from a critical race perspective that “one of the most prevalent forms of contemporary racism in US schools is deficit thinking” (Yosso, 2005 p. 75).

Deficit thinking takes the position that minority students and families are at fault for poor academic performance because: (a) students enter school without the normative cultural knowledge and skills; and (b) parents neither value nor support their child’s education. These racialized assumptions about Communities of Color most often leads schools to default to the banking method of education critiqued by Paulo Freire (1973). As a result, schooling efforts usually aim to fill up supposedly passive students with forms of cultural knowledge deemed valuable by dominant society. (Yosso, 2005 p. 75)

I overgeneralized about family backgrounds and my failure to recognize my own positionality caused me to use the hidden curriculum to place the expectation for change solely on students and their families without understanding how my racial and cultural identity also impacted learning (Yosso, 2005).

In many cases, students present behavior challenges can be attributed to deficits in care or mistakes in parenting. Moreover, students disrupt lessons because they are kids and, at times, would rather play than learn. But, the problem is that many educators makes assumptions based on perceptions and cultural experiences rather than from

information obtained through open dialogue. The hidden curriculum assists in the sorting of students. I connected behavior that irked me to psychological deficiencies brought about through a deficit in love and belonging. My “language is not an innocent reflection of how [I] think” (Milner, 2012 p. 4) and therefore I can make an assumption that the labeling and categorizing included in my writing reflected the hidden curriculum I established as a classroom teacher. Listening rather than assuming I understood the causes of behaviors would better position me to take steps to address them. Yanick may have still faced punishment for disruptive behavior but her self-deprecating feelings may have been diminished if she felt heard. Instead of going directly to the student to solve complicated behavior issues, however, I instead consulted with like-minded colleagues that would be less likely to offer insights into a worldview different than their own.

Hidden Curriculum and Like Minded Colleagues

Assad: I have had a reputation for getting in trouble or whatever. I used to get in trouble a lot so I think that teachers are waiting for me to do one little thing so they can catch me.

Matt: So your reputation is a big deal?

Yanick: I feel like they pay attention on like one student. Like when I used to get into trouble a lot for like stupid reasons and I realize the stuff that I did, but I felt like every time I tried to explain why I did it, it kept becoming negative they just keep focusing on me and my mistakes.

The hidden curriculum I constructed in my classroom when I transitioned to urban teaching remained hidden to me because I relied on the advice of like minded colleagues

rather than engage in dialogue with people from different races, cultures and socio-economic standing. In the dialogue above, Yanick express her frustration that teachers do not allow her explain herself and just focus on her mistakes. I was not influenced to listen to her side of the story or to share the burden for change with her because my interpretation of her behaviors was rooted in the paradigms of the dominant culture. Mr. Harrison, (the only Black teacher on staff) had a management style that was so foreign to me that I never thought to seek help from him. Instead, I relied on the advice of my colleagues (who, with the exception of Mr. Harrison were White and middle class). The following personal reflection was written in the first research methods class I took.

I teach social studies, but in reality, I spend significantly more time managing behavior than I do planning lessons. During a meeting to discuss our discipline program at the beginning of this school year, my principal said, “until America figures out the behavior piece, our schools will continue to suffer.” These words stuck with me as I reflected upon my own practice. Not enough emphasis is placed on classroom management techniques in teacher training courses. Furthermore, schools are not adequately staffed with professionals skilled in working with children who exhibit persistent disruptive behavior. In my personal experience, one student does have the power to negatively impact the learning environment for an entire class. If educational professionals focus on how to address the specific needs of these students and if schools develop comprehensive plans to manage behavior more effectively, schools will become more powerful learning institutions. (Personal Reflection on Team Action Research Process, December 2005)

Classroom management was a skill, I surmised, that could help teachers by giving them techniques to make their students change.

Over the past year, I have reflected much on student behavior because I do believe it is a topic too often ignored in teacher preparation programs. Many

argue that classroom management cannot be taught, it has to be learned through experience. I agree that experience is the best teacher but there are many lessons and discussions that “soon to be” new teachers could engage in the safety of the college level classroom. I do not remember taking one class on managing classroom behavior and how children from different cultures may respond to teacher management styles. I do remember feeling helpless and frustrated during and after my first year of teaching. (Managing Negative Behavior: One Teacher’s Search for Answers, Summer 2006)

The word “management” appears in both these selections and offers insight into my thought process at the time. I was a new, struggling urban teacher, and I blamed my woes on disruptive kids and a lack of “management” skills that someone, somewhere should have taught me. I understood that cultural difference may have influenced the problems I was having (i.e. *I do not remember taking one class on managing classroom behavior and how children from different cultures may respond to teacher management styles*), but without recognizing how my own White identity perpetuated a hidden curriculum, I was stuck seeking only tips and strategies from colleagues rather than from the people about whom I lacked understanding. I discussed practicing management techniques *in the safety of a college level classroom* indicating that an inclination was to hibernate with like-minded peers in an effort to figure out the Others. The answers were to be found amongst my classmates who, at the University of New Hampshire, were 99% White (the lack of diversity and the fact that only sixty-four Black students attended our college of 11,000 was frequently discussed in my White progressive circles). This data suggests that I at times conceptualized urban teaching as deploying *best practices* acquired in academic institutions and it reveals the narrowness of perspectives I valued; I

sought answers from people like me in an effort to learn about people I perceived to be different from me.

In the chapter “Barriers to Clarity” in the book *Understanding White Privilege*, (2006) Frances E. Kendall offers insights as to why I was more comfortable consulting with people like me. She argues that as a White person, I “have very little awareness of social structures as separate from individuals, so it is hard to see ourselves both as individuals and as a member of a societal group at the same time” (Kendall, 2006 p. 81). Kendall argues that not only is my perception different, but I attach value judgments to my viewpoint and develop beliefs based on them. In searching for a way to stop the disruptive student mentioned above from dismantling the whole lesson, I assumed that my view, and the view of others like me, was sufficient to understand the situation. As Kendall points out: “We are so removed from the Others’ reality that we are kept from seeing the racism and classism involved in our assumptions” (Kendall, 2006 p. 82). From this perspective, I didn’t need to understand the underlying factors that may have caused the “disruption” because my assumptions sufficed. I just needed tips on how to change the behavior of kids so they could better match my expectations. Kendall argues that being a member of the White group comes with certain conveniences that allow us to disregard experiences of the Other:

I believe that not seeing social structures is part of our anesthetizing ourselves. If I don’t see patterns or structures or things beyond my personal experience, I don’t have to deal with any of that. I don’t have the responsibility to pay attention or to act. (Kendall, 2006 p. 81)

My recommendation that teacher-training courses offer more strategies to deal with the predicament of behaviour came after I experienced disruption in my urban classroom. I retreated to the safety of my academic world for understanding about students from cultures that were new to me. There is definitely much to learn from experienced educators but I was in a situation where I should have placed more importance on listening to the families whose students I would be teaching. I did not recalibrate my expectations based on the diverse population I was working with and therefore I placed additional burdens on students of color to engage in academics consistent with my understanding of formal education. My inability to reflect on my positionality meant I missed wisdom or insights from students because they were not presented in a way I was prepared to formally assess. I assumed my way of conducting a classroom was consistent with a universal norm so there was no urgent pressure on me to stop and critically reflect on how my positionality impacted the hidden curriculum.

In a 2005 reflection about the development of a discipline program in my school, I wrote

Looking back, I would have asked for a meeting with the administration, parents and students to negotiate the action research plan. When I finally implemented the plan, I faced numerous complaints by parents who said the discipline program was “medieval.” One parent said, ‘who is this California guy coming in and telling us how to discipline our kids?’ (Personal Reflection on Team Action Research Process, December, 2005)

As this passage suggests, the people whose lives were directly impacted by my discipline system also felt I was ignoring relevant voices as the plan was developed. The parents who referred to me as the “California Guy” lacked trust in me because they were closed

off from participating in significant changes in their own school. I speculate that I did not seek out parental input because at a deep level, I lacked trust in the parents and blamed them for their unruly kids. The hidden curriculum in my classroom was indeed hidden because, as Kendall argues, I was unable to see structures beyond my personal experiences and assumed that students that did not care about learning came from parents that do not care about learning. And although the hidden curriculum was unseen by me, this data suggests that parents recognized a strong disconnect between the values I attempted to ingrain into policy and values they held. My failure to seek parental input when developing the discipline program may have fueled student resistance because whole families, not just students, cast me as an elitist trying to change cultural behaviors I condemned.

I met with parents during conferences and mingled at literacy and multicultural events but the conversations did not reach the depth I needed in order to learn from them, meaning the hegemonic school structures, the hidden curriculum, and my own biases faced little scrutiny. My attitudes about some of the families I served, therefore, were largely based on snippets of information I glued together to fit nicely into pre-determined biases that were constructed through my lived experiences.

This tendency to put Others into a clearly defined box can be seen in this selection from a paper I wrote in an undergraduate education course.

More often than not, children from poor families come to school ill-prepared to deal with every day challenges. Many lack motivation, have extremely short attention spans and are missing vital background knowledge children from more

prosperous households receive. This phenomenon not only hurt the underprivileged child but also his or her peers since they are all contained in a single educational atmosphere. My mother is a Reading Recovery teacher in a poor, inner-city community. Through her experiences, I think I have developed a general understanding of the situation even though I grew up in a more prosperous, middle class school district. (The Underprivileged, February 1997)

The arrogance of assuming that I understand the “inner-city community” because my mother was a reading teacher in an urban district would be comical if it wasn’t so harmful. In fact, my White undergraduate professor that read this paper responded in the margins to my qualifier *more often than not, children from poor families come to school ill-prepared...* with the comment “In fact, most of the time”. Beverly Tatum (1992) described how preconceived judgments like mine (and apparently my former professor’s) cause real harm to students from subordinated cultures.

Prejudice, defined as a ‘preconceived judgment or opinion, often based on limited information,’ is clearly distinguished from racism. I assume that all of us may have prejudices as a result of the various cultural stereotypes to which we have been exposed. Even when these preconceived ideas have positive associations (such as “Asian students are good in math”) they have negative effects because they deny a person’s individuality. These attitudes may influence the individual behaviors of people of color as well as of Whites, and may affect intergroup as well as intragroup interaction. However, a distinction must be made between the negative racial attitudes held by individuals of color and White individuals, because it is only the attitudes of Whites that routinely carry with them the social power inherent in the systematic cultural reinforcement and institutionalization of those racial prejudices. To distinguish the prejudices of students of color from the racism of White students is not to say that the former is acceptable and the latter is not; both are clearly problematic. The distinction is important, however, to identify the power differential between members of dominant and subordinate groups. (Tatum, 1992 p. 3)

The preconceived judgments I pieced together about urban education as a kid impacted the hidden curriculum I maintained and how I related to my urban students years later. I entered the classroom with prejudices and these biases were bolstered by my membership in a group that dominates public institutions. The fact that my professor allegedly reinforced my approach to looking at urban kids through a deficit lens suggests that Tatum's argument that "limited information" can be as detrimental as racism describes my experience well. My interest in changing urban kids to make them more like me is a prejudice that was developed over time, woven into the hidden curriculum, and nurtured with the help of others. Paulo Freire's words below highlight the transformative potential of dialogue:

Yes, dialogue is a challenge to existing domination. Also, with such a way of understanding dialogue, the object to be known is *not* an exclusive possession of *one* of the subjects doing the knowing; one of the people in the dialogue. In our case of education, knowledge of the object to be known is not the sole possession of the teacher; who gives knowledge to the students in a gracious gesture. Instead of this cordial gift of information to students, the object to be known mediates the two cognitive subjects. In other words, the object to be known is put on the table *between* the two subjects of knowing; They meet around it and through it for mutual inquiry. (Shor & Freire, 1987 p. 99)

If my students and/or their families "mutually inquired" about the acts of resistance that complicated my teaching, I would have been better able to share the burden for change and co-create a classroom whose hidden curriculum is less hidden and more just. Instead, I put emphasis on the deficits of my students and sought ways to make them change so I would not have to.

Hidden Curriculum and the Model Minority

Matt: So how are Asian kids viewed?

Kwan: They are like the quiet kids that sit in the corner and like reads his book.

Matt: And what do you think about that stereotype?

Kwan: Well for one thing, someone just comes up to me and is like ‘you are not Asian,’ I am like ‘ok... that is nice’. And then they are like, ‘you break Asian stereotypes’ and they are like...

Matt: What Asian stereotypes do you break?

Kwan: I don’t know...they just say those things and I am like, ‘that is nice’... because stereotypical Asian is like dorky, very quiet and like to himself and stuff.

Matt: What do you feel about that stereotype?

Kwan: I don’t really mind cuz I don’t think it applies to me much...besides smart.

Student laughter

If my writing suggests that the hidden curriculum put added pressure on African American students to change, did the hidden curriculum impact my Asian students that are frequently labeled as the “model minority”? Did I expect my Asian students to change in the same way as Terrell, Assad and Yanick? Stereotypes of the “model minority” have been used to disprove the concept of hegemony, deculturalization, and the disenfranchisement of certain minority groups. Critics may argue that hegemony does not exist if certain minority groups are able to achieve success in a White dominated society. Research has shown, however, that the label of the *model minority* is unfounded

and does not accurately describe the experiences of minority groups in the United States, particularly in contemporary times. Jamie Lew of Rutgers University (2004) studied Korean American students who dropped out of high school. He found that successful Korean American students benefited from a strong network of family and friends with common traditions and experiences. In other words, the students were successful when hegemonic and deculturalization forces were mitigated by validated social capital.

Once this network eroded as subsequent generations were displaced due to worsening economic conditions, the social capital became less validated and many more Korean American students dropped out of school. Those that did not complete school shared feelings of isolation and low self-esteem. Lew found:

Most of the school dropouts in this study grew up in working-class families while attending neighborhood urban high schools populated primarily by poor minorities and immigrants. In the context of low socioeconomic backgrounds, limited coethnic network support, and poor urban schools, these Korean American high school dropouts face various structural barriers at home, in school, and within their ethnic communities. (Lew, 2004 p. 304)

Lew's research discredits the label of model minorities and highlights the forces of hegemony and deculturalization by showing how "the process of identity construction is integrally connected to changing social and economic status" (Lew, 2004, p. 304). The popular model of immigrant assimilation is based on assumptions that immigrant families will improve their social status with each generation. Research shows that since 1965, this trend has changed with the economic structure of the American economy (Lew,

2004). With the decline in manufacturing jobs and the increase in demand for educated workers, the fate of many immigrant minorities has been altered. Lew found that a large factor behind the success of minority immigrant families is whether or not they are “immersed in their first generation ethnic enclaves” (Lew, 2004 p. 306). Students that are immersed in their native culture are more likely to achieve “academic success and social mobility” because the social capital they possess is validated and they have support networks that prevent them from being fully deculturalized and from assimilating “to the culture of low socio-economic status” (Lew, 2004 p. 306). In short, students with a strong cultural network are less likely to be changed by or actively resist the hidden curriculum established by White middle class educators like myself.

According to Lew (2004), Korean students that attend poor urban schools and are separated from a tight network of first generation Korean immigrants often feel isolated and find academic success difficult. The Korean high school dropouts he interviewed associated

‘successful’ Asians and Koreans with Whiteness, whereas they align their own experiences, marked by poverty and racism, with other racial minorities that have suffered under hegemony and deculturalization. (Lew, 2004 p. 306)

If minority groups maintain tight social bonds that encourage and support academic success, students can achieve. If groups are fragmented by economic realities or if the communities are historically rooted in disenfranchised populations, such as the inheritors of America’s slavery legacy, the social capital necessary to seek favor in the hidden curriculum is lost. The label “model minority” quickly evaporates as the dispossessed

youth establish a contrary stance and do not live up to the label or expectations laced throughout the hidden curriculum maintained by the dominant culture in schools.

There is data in my own writing that suggests I labeled Asian students into a superior category when contrasted with my viewpoints on African American students. In the following selection, I wrote about the “novelty” of living as a minority in an Asian community.

I moved to San Francisco during the height of the dot.com boom. Finding an apartment was a nearly impossible task. I eventually found a place in the Sunset district- a primarily Asian section of San Francisco close to Ocean Beach. There were very few Caucasians living in my neighborhood. The vast majority of the businesses had Mandarin signs and as I walked through the markets, the English language was rarely heard. I felt isolated in this neighborhood. I felt disconnected from the rest of the city which breed strong feelings of loneliness. Intellectually, I enjoyed the experience of being a minority for the first time. That novelty soon wore off and I was left with a feeling of being outside the loop. (Summer Reflection, circa 2006-2007)

I described the experience of living in an Asian community as “intellectually” enjoyable. The stress I experienced had more to do with feeling lonely in a new city than in being a victim of racism. I had, as part of my White privilege, the choice of experiencing life as a minority and it was a novelty rather than a lived experience complete with the disadvantages. Being a “temporary” minority was something I could brag to my White suburban friends about but throughout this adventure, my White privilege remained intact. The data above also lacks evidence of me trying to reach out to my Asian neighbors and this tendency to disregard Asian culture may have unfortunately persisted when I returned East. Kwan, a former student that is Korean American spoke about the

experience of being a model minority. Despite his distaste of being categorized, he was willing to accept some of the stereotypes placed upon him such as “smart”. But, Kwan was also a student that always reminded me that I left Asian people out of my discussions in social studies class.

Matt: Kwan, just to put you on the spot, you can again answer this or not. I remember a time when I was like speaking to the class about race or something and I said something like ‘Black, White, Latino’. And you said to me ‘you never talk about Asians.’ You said that like under your breath. I mean, like, what were you thinking? Is that true?

Kwan: It is just that you always mentioned Black, White, or Latino and I was just like... ‘oh he was leaving someone out’. And I am like the only Asian kid.

The omission Kwan speaks about may reveal more than my written words could. The fact that Kwan took note of how frequently I omitted Asians from my discussion in social studies may reveal I categorized Asians as something different from Blacks or Latinos and therefore placed less pressure on him to change. Kwan’s words cause me to ponder whether or not my habit of not mentioning Asian students in my discussions also translated into the hidden curriculum. Where did Kwan fit in? Data pertaining to Asian students specifically is sparse in my writing but there is evidence from my semi-formal interview that is revealing.

Matt: Do you have to code switch? Do you have to act different ways in school?

Kwan: Not really cuz basically, honestly, Asian is pretty much White in people’s eyes. And like I don’t have to code switch I am like the same person all day.

Bic Ngo (2008) describes Kwan’s movement in identity as the space *in-between* culture and identity. My apparent dismissal of Kwan’s race as significantly different from my

White students and his notion that Asians are “pretty much White in people’s eyes” suggests a tendency to classify culture and identity as “good/bad, traditional/modern, us/them” (Ngo, 2008 p. 5).

In the double movement of identity, our identities are not exclusively determined by dominant discourses of other people. Because culture and identity are shaped within social relationships (Hall, 1996), the work of identity construction is fraught with tensions and disagreements that are belied by notions of identity construction and negotiation that allude to a trouble-free process (West, 2002). At the same time that others use discourses to identify us, we also draw on discourses to make meaning for ourselves. In the *in-between* (Bhabha, 1994) of culture and identity, expectations from others of who we are or should be may collide and conflict with how we want to identify ourselves. (Ngo, 2008 p. 8)

Kwan’s apparent identification with other White students may make it “trouble free” for teachers like myself to categorize Asian students in a manner consistent with the model minority fallacy but it can also lead to tension between Kwan, his family, and his peers. Kwan has to negotiate the identity put onto him at the same time he is trying to create an identity for himself and this process can be wrought with conflict. Ngo’s research found that a student from a Lao cultural background was pulled in conflicting directions as a result of her identifying with Hmong students.

I found that the tensions that arose in students’ identity work came from expectations by non-Lao students, as well as family members and Lao peers. For example, in Mindy’s case, her association with the Hmong students at the school was problematic to her identity as Lao. As she shared: “I think my friends are getting mad at me ’cause I’m hanging out with too many Hmong people: “I think that they think I’m becoming one of them.” Friends as well as family accused her of wanting to be Hmong. According to Mindy, her parents asked, “Why you

trying to be like Hmong people, dying your hair and stuff like that?” Her parents particularly worried that she would “turn out bad.” (Ngo, 2008 p. 8)

In his effort to construct his own identity Kwan, had to consider the schooling expectations of his family, friends, and dominant culture (which may have encouraged him to *lean White*). But, as Stacy Lee (1996) found in her research on Asian high school students from various cultural backgrounds, Korean identified students may also be taught to position themselves as something separate.

Korean-identified students assume that through education they would achieve social mobility, which in turn would elevate their social and political status in the United States. Although hopeful about their prospects for success in the United States, Korean-identified students seemed to understand that Koreans would not be able to usurp the position of whites, and thus they chose to adapt the strategy of accommodation without assimilation in relation to the dominant culture (Gibson, 1988). They were aware of racism, but believed it could be overcome through hard work and accommodations to the dominant culture. Thus, their decision to acculturate to white middle-class norms was strategic. (Lee, 1996 p. 123)

In the *in-between* world Kwan negotiated, he recognized a difference between the treatment of Asian kids and Black kids and suggests that Asian kids have an easier time managing the hidden curriculum. He described Asians as “pretty much White in people’s eyes” and I am left wondering if I viewed Kwan as a model minority. Did I categorized him with the White students because of biases within myself or because he positioned himself to be identified with White students? If I apply Ngo and Lee’s analysis to Kwan’s words, then his answer to my code-switching question becomes significantly

more complicated to understand. He stated he does not have to code switch but this may have been his way of handling the hidden curriculum. Another possibility was that Kwan may not have needed to code switch because in the in-between world of culture and identity that he negotiated, he found that his cultural expectations for behavior and participation were already closely aligned with those of his White teacher. Or, perhaps code switching was taught at home and Kwan may not recognize the strategic adjustments his Korean-identified family made to help him achieve success. It is tough, therefore, to conclude if I put pressure on Kwan to change his ways to match mine or if the social dynamics in his family and culture set him up to navigate the hidden curriculum astutely.

Hidden Curriculum and Mr. Harrison

Terrell: There was a little problem going on with me and Mr. Harrison. Towards the beginning of the year...we would like argue and stuff. I would last like 30 seconds in his class.

Matt: I remember that.

Students laugh

Terrell: And so there were these times where like I don't know if I did something, but, now...that is a person I can't say I did everything, I deserved everything because he really sent me out for nothing. I deserved everything I was sent out for.

Matt: Why do you think he would do that to you and not someone else?

Terrell: That is another thing I wrote a paper on it. I wrote a paper on it. If I were me now then, I would probably never have gotten as mad because I understand why he was sending me out of class... because I am a young African American man and things aren't going to be easy for me in life... and I am going

to have to deal with problems in a better way rather than argue. Some things you have to let go.

Matt: Did that connect with you?

Terrell: Yeah, but not at the time.

Matt: So Mr. Harrison talking to you... so did it make more sense than Mr. Montgomery or myself?

Terrell: Yeah

Matt: Why?

Terrell: Because we can kind of like relate to each other. I can relate to you guys but you guys probably grew up in New Hampshire.

Students laugh

All students in my classroom, regardless of their cultural orientation, were pressured to follow a set of unspoken rules. A natural part of growing up includes managing the burden of changing to meet the complex expectations of institutions. But this critical analysis of my own practices is interested in ascertaining if students of color had an added burden of change by suppressing their own cultural practices to increase their chances for success. Based on my students' testimony that started this chapter, one might surmise Mr. Harrison's cultural connections afforded a classroom culture that was more germane to some of my students' cultures.

Assad: It was the same as how we feel about...like 'those White kids show you guys off, you guys'. I can actually say that cuz having mad conversations with Mr. Harrison it used to be fun toward the end; he would say 'they are not making you look good'. I can sense the difference, he was harder on us but he was harder on us because he cared more about us...

Black students in Mr. Harrison's room were better able to navigate the hidden curriculum because access was not dependent upon them changing. The hidden curriculum did not include the concealed expectation of learning cultural practices. American educationalist and author Lisa Delpit (2006) argues in her book *Other People's Children*

we should strive to make our teaching force diverse, for teachers who share the ethnic and cultural backgrounds of our increasingly diverse student bodies may serve, along with parents and other community members, to provide insights that might otherwise remain hidden. (Delpit, 2006 p. 410)

As Delpit suggests, the fact that Mr. Harrison was one of very few teachers of color in my school and I did not seek to understand his teaching practices when I worked with him suggests that insights into what my students were experiencing may remain hidden to me.

When I first transitioned to urban teaching, I failed to understand at a deep level the cultural connection my Black students had with the late Mr. Harrison and I was very critical of how he disciplined the students we shared. In hindsight, Mr. Harrison refused to acknowledge that Black students acting like Black students is a "mistake". Evidence from my students indicates that Mr. Harrison recognized the disproportionate burden placed on students of color to change to match his colleagues' cultural expectations. Terrell and I did not live far from each other with regards to physical distance, but the differences in the social, cultural, and political capital that separated this White teacher from his Black students made for significant enough cultural differences to be noticeable by an 8th grader. I was not yet seriously contemplating the impact of my Whiteness on the hidden curriculum when Terrell was a student in my class; I had this privilege. Terrell

lacked this luxury and in our discussion he was quick to label me a White guy from New Hampshire--I did not grow up in New Hampshire but I went to college and trained to be a teacher there. Residents of New England know that New Hampshire is predominantly White and Terrell, who lives in a predominantly Black neighborhood, may have associated New Hampshire with Whiteness in the same way White people see Boston's Dorchester neighborhood as Black (New Hampshire rates 44th and, Massachusetts rates 26th for the population of Black people in the US (Census.gov.2013)).

I was concerned with how Mr. Harrison disciplined Terrell when we both shared him as a student; I didn't recognize his "in your face approach" in my own experiences and it certainly didn't mesh with the natural consequences, social contract and the *look, sound and feel* exercises I was using at the time (I must have assumed sending him to the office was less harsh). The affection Terrell and other students held for this man repeatedly surfaced during our discussion and suggests to me that racial dynamics afforded a closer relationship than I understood at the time. I described Terrell's social studies classroom as multicultural with its posters of Nelson Mandela, Gandhi, and Martin Luther King Jr. draping from the wall but was the hidden curriculum laced with inconsistencies and injustices that favored relationships with "my own kind" and put Terrell at a disadvantage? Could my self-envisioned brand of liberal, multicultural, "progressive" and "anti-racist" teaching ever replace the deep connections shared by Terrell and Mr. Harrison whose experiences as Black men in a White dominated school fostered a connection I did not understand; a connection built over generations (Bourdieu

& Passeron, 1998) and nurtured by oppression, politics and sadly, education (Spring, 2005)? Was my multicultural pedagogy superficial because I was teaching the popular packaged version of MLK Jr. and Nelson Mandela and my own failure to understand White privilege prevented an authentic class-wide examination of race?

Mr. Harrison, as my former students tell it, did not focus on the deficits of his Black students, and his own “Blackness” may have cultivated a hidden curriculum absent of fear and mistrust and more in-tune with the values of Black students. At the time, I saw some aspects of his approach as having a negative influence because he rejected a research based student management system. But after listening carefully to the voices of my former students, I realize that my approach to discipline, which will be examined in the next chapter, altered interactions at the surface level, but had little to no influence on the hidden curriculum that influence the lived experiences of many students in my school. I still approached some of my students with a deficit mindset. Lisa Delpit (2006) explains why this may have been the case.

Teacher education usually focuses on research that links failure and socioeconomic status, failure and cultural difference, and failure and single parent households. It is hard to believe that these children can possibly be successful after their teachers have been so thoroughly exposed to so much negative indoctrination. When teachers receive that kind of education, there is a tendency to assume deficits in students rather than to locate and teach strengths. (Delpit, 2006 p. 391 ebook)

Mr. Harrison instructed his Black students to “*step up their game*” because he recognized that Black students need to work harder to compete with their White classmates.

Testimony from the Black students I interviewed suggests that Black students may have gotten a reprieve from a wounding hidden curriculum in Mr. Harrison's class because Black identity was a major component of his discussions as indicated by the following words spoken by Terrell:

Terrell: I would say I am not going to say it is the right way. Every teacher has their own unique way of teaching. I mean some teachers want to connect to student and kinda of use their life experiences as an example to kind of like guide and help you. But, I think that me growing up from you growing up and going to your school you just like and kind of like just take notes. Its kind of different for me cuz like in my school I went to before that..it was like when I was younger, it was one of those we are all going to talk, we are going to have group discussions. That often happened in Mr. Harrison's class. The thing about Mr. Harrison is he had points where he just wanted to have silence, no talking. Talk and you're out! But, he also gave us time...I knew how to like skip a whole class with Mr. Harrison. Just go in there and say 'Kujichagulia!' and he would go on and on...that was what I loved about Mr. Harrison.

It is impossible for me to reconstruct a complex classroom culture that existed many years ago, but if some Black students were judged differently in Mr. Harrison's room than in my room, they may have felt more at ease because Mr. Harrison did not add the pressure of cultural change to the pressures of school.

The hidden curriculum that governed social interactions in my classroom may have created unspoken boundaries that choked the possibility for an honest examination of power and privilege. The research conducted by Nasir, McKinney De Royston, Givens, and Bryant (2013) focused on the "nature of disciplinary practices in an all Black, all-male manhood development class" (Nasir, Ross, Mckinney de Royston,

Givens, & Bryant, 2013 p. 489). The teacher, “Brother P,” reframed the meaning and purpose of discipline to be more relevant and meaningful to the African American students he taught.

Brother P believed that in order for genuine learning to occur, he needed to create a space where Black males could feel comfortable—without the normalized understanding of themselves as “discipline worthy” or the threat of being subjected to the educational [Repressive State Apparatus]. In interviews, he identified his classroom as a place where students should feel safe: “I really like having my house set up as being a place where I can just let my guard down, you know? So the classroom should be the same way. Otherwise, nothing else is gonna—nothing conducive to learning is going to happen, you know?” He drew an analogy between the home and the school: a Black male student may be hailed as a “thug” on the street or as “disruptive” in his classroom, but he may also be hailed as “son” or “child” or someone’s loved one when he enters his home. (Nasir, Ross, Mckinney de Royston, Givens, & Bryant, 2013 p. 502)

In the dialogue that opened this chapter, Assad made some profound revelations about Mr. Harrison that point to a hidden curriculum that played to his strengths:

Assad: There are like two different teachers. Usually there is like the teacher that comes in that teaches the class he is supposed to teach than goes home. There is a difference. Mr. Harrison wasn’t like the average teacher. Mr. Harrison was the teacher... he wants to like bring the best out of you. Sometimes when he like sent you out of class it was probably not to get someone mad or because he didn’t like something...he was probably trying to challenge you.

Black students trusted Mr. Harrison because, like Brother P, he “offered an alternative vision of what constitutes a productive classroom environment and what discipline can be within such an environment” (Nasir, Ross, Mckinney de Royston, Givens, & Bryant, 2013 p. 507). My hidden curriculum used punishment solely as a tool to alter behavior to meet my expectations rather than push students to more sophisticated levels of awareness. In the dialogue above, I was the “average teacher” and Mr. Harrison was the

teacher that brought out the best in Assad. Again, according to Delpit, this may be attributed to some of my training.

Education that relies upon name calling and labeling (“disadvantaged,” “at-risk,” “learning disabled,” “the under-class”) to explain its failures, and calls upon research study after research study to inform teachers that school achievement is intimately and inevitably linked with socioeconomic status. Teacher candidates are told that “culturally different” children are mismatched to the school setting and therefore cannot be expected to achieve as well as white, middle-class children. They are told that children of poverty are developmentally slower than other children. (Delpit, 2006 p. 403 ebook)

I was not prepared to bring out the best in Assad, Terrell or Yanick because my instinct as a new urban teacher was to approach them as a “disadvantaged”, “at-risk” demographic that needed to change. Terrell shares an example of how I treated him differently:

Matt: Do you think in general people were treated fairly or were certain people being treated better than others?

Terrell: It is never going to seem fair, there is never like a fair time, it is always going to be different perspectives from teachers than from students. I know if I threw something, you would be going to the office, but if Molly threw something or Amelia threw something, I mean like Molly was like your favorite student.

The hidden curriculum was oriented towards repairing him rather than recognizing his strengths. In the article “Learning to Teach Science in Urban Schools” (2001) Tobin, Roth and Zimmermann argue:

Teachers often have little or no knowledge of what to expect from students who have lived part or all of their lives in circumstances of poverty (Barton, 2001). To

teach successfully in an urban school in ways that are potentially transformative, teachers have to learn how to identify and connect with the social and cultural resources of their students. (Tobin, Roth, & Zimmermann, 2001)

At times, I viewed the behavior exhibited by my Black or Latino students as not appropriate for success in the world as I experienced it. My approach included changing them as opposed to changing my approach to working with them. I did not seek out or connect with their “social and cultural resources” so my attempts proved shallow, misguided, and placed the full responsibility for change onto the kids. Students that met my standards and expectations were rewarded with a positive relationship that helped foster academic and social success. I did not intentionally shut out students from different cultural backgrounds but my hidden curriculum placed them at a disadvantage in comparison to many of their peers. Student that were unable or unwilling to “switch” had to negotiate additional stresses.

Terrell, the African American student that I sent to the office numerous times over the two years I taught him but I have come to recognize as extremely insightful, reminds me how Others may perceive the hidden curriculum.

Matt: so is there more of a burden on minority kids than on White kids?

Terrell: Yes, for us you need to learn how to be kind of formal, kind of whitish and you know... but for them they can just be themselves.

Terrell’s answer to my question indicates that he understood the added responsibility placed on students that expressed culture differently from their teacher.

The hidden curriculum may have funneled dangerous and dominant assumptions about minority students into the classroom's social dynamic. In the study "Dirt on My Record: Rethinking Disciplinary Practices in an All-Black, All-Male Alternative Class," (2013) researchers summarize this tendency in their literature review.

African American boys are often keenly aware of their disproportionate encounters with school discipline. More significantly, they may perceive those who exercise disciplinary power, be they teachers or administrators, as disrespectful, rude, and out of control (Noguera, 1996; Ferguson, 2000). Both Ferguson (2000) and Noguera (1995) turn to Foucault's (1979) concept of the "juridico-political" function of discipline to understand how power works through punishment. Noguera asserts that in the context of the school, Black male bodies represent the ultimate threat to authority and that the disciplining of Black boys can be understood as the definitive reinforcement of security and order. This dynamic, by some accounts, is heightened by the ways in which we do and don't talk about race in schools. Some have argued that conversations about race are increasingly taboo in what has been called the "color-blind era," in which we assume that race no longer matters. Ferguson, in particular, understands discipline in the era of purported color blindness as a new mode of domination that creates individual identities for Black boys, as "bad" or "troubled," that reproduce old racist stereotypes in newer, subtler forms and then presents them as natural rather than the product of power relations. (Nasir, Ross, McKinney de Royston, Givens, & Bryant, 2013 p. 491)

If I, as the authority figure, injected fear or mistrust into the hidden curriculum and refused to openly acknowledge my feelings with colleagues and students, then I fostered a classroom culture where trust was forged with some students but not Others. This dynamic in a "color-blind era" shuts down dialogue, which can make students like Terrell feel unwelcome or feel pressure to switch how they enact culture.

Lisa Delpit (2006) explains that there are "codes or rules for participating in power; that is, there is a 'culture of power'" (Delpit, 2006 p. 85).

The codes or rules I'm speaking of relate to linguistic forms, communicative strategies, and presentation of self; that is; ways of talking, ways of writing, ways of dressing, and ways of interacting. (Delpit, 2006 p. 85)

It is too simplistic to assume that ignorance of the rules that govern the culture of power is always behind disruptive behavior (i.e. kids just don't know how to act in a manner pleasing to the dominant power). Delpit does go on to argue "being told explicitly the rules of that culture makes acquiring power easier" (Delpit, 2006 p. 86). Based on what I learned from my former students, however, they may have understood the linguistic forms or the "proper" way to present themselves, but they chose to ignore or actively resist because the rules were set by people they saw as oppressive.

Matt: It is called code switching...when you have one way of acting at home and a different way you have to act in front of...

Terrell: I learned how to talk to all the teachers, I didn't get the best grades but I think I never did my homework in your class. I ended up with a "B" every time. I knew how to switch.

Simply teaching the rules of the culture of power or how to switch behaviors and language between different cultural fields is effective but it is not be enough. There must be an expectation on the educator to share the responsibility for change to better facilitate student success. Today, I look for evidence of a hidden curriculum in my work as an assistant principal and how it may place the burden for change onto the students. This increased level of criticality did not just happen but is the result of listening carefully to the words of my students like Assad and Terrell and critically reflecting upon the challenges I faced when I transitioned from suburban to urban teaching.

Forcing Change Through Punishment

Unfortunately, I hit bottom and sought more harsh methods to force compliance. The lowest point came when, in my most severe authoritarian teacher voice, I commanded a fifteen-year-old Latino boy to sit down and stop disrupting the class. Instead of acquiescing to my demands, the boy stood up, leaned over his desk, and replied with a firm and collected voice, “And what are you going to do about it?” This incident left me crying in the principal’s office and contemplating whether or not I should press charges for being threatened. My reaction was consistent with the findings of researchers Vavrus and Cole: poor and minority students are not suspended for blatant acts of violence or rebellion (Vavrus & Cole, 2002). Instead, they are excluded from school for behaviors described as disruptive or insubordinate. Student suspension, they argue:

Frequently occurs as the result of violations of the particular normalized and authorized discursive code of a classroom, a code to which African-American and Latina students may not have as much access as their Anglo-American classmates. Disruptions that are interpreted by teachers as events worthy of suspension are often violations of these unspoken and unwritten rules of linguistic conduct that cannot be neatly delineated in school discipline policy. (Vavrus & Cole, 2002 p. 91)

Pedro Noguera (1995) also believes that “a teacher who fears the student that she or he teaches is more likely to resort to some form of discipline when challenged” (Noguera, 1995 p. 204). Fear motivated me to seek assistance from the school’s centralized authority but I felt like my cries (literal cries) for help were not being heard. My sense of

fear was not lost on this student and he may have used it to his advantage (Noguera, 1995).

It is plausible to think that if this Latino eighth grader was disengaged from the academic curriculum and recognized the hidden curriculum that governed my relations put a burden on him to change. He may have found more pleasure resisting the hidden curriculum by playing me like a marionette. And once fear became the norm in this student-teacher relationship, “teaching becomes almost impossible, and concerns about safety and control [took] precedence over concerns about teaching” (Noguera, 1995 p. 204). The following quote from Noguera says it best and holds truth in the situation I found myself in: “fear and ignorance can serve as a barrier greater than any fence, and can be more insulating than any security system” (Noguera, 1995 p. 204).

There were many White students that partook in disruptive behaviors but my cultural connection to them, the fact that the hidden curriculum favored them, and the absence of fear made it less likely that they would suffer severe consequences or weigh on my conscience. Researcher Wendy Schwartz (2001) believes that “the bad conduct of a White male student is likely to be excused as a one-time slip while an African American youth who similarly misbehaves is labeled a perpetual troublemaker and severely punished” (Schwartz, 2001 p. 2). I speculate that I would have dismissed this “threat” if the student was White because I would have been better able to place the behavior into a cultural context I understood.

Strengthening the Hidden Curriculum with Demerits

My answer to the struggles with student behavior was to take the lead on reforming our school discipline program in an effort to make it more consistent and predictable. In other words, I sought new and better ways to punish the kids in an effort to make some of them more like me. Moreover, I wanted to show my cohort members at UMass and my colleagues at school that I was skilled in designing and implementing meaningful reforms in an urban school. In my own writing selections, I articulated that disruptive student behavior was caused by complex factors, my first solution, however, was dependent upon the simple teaching of rules and responding to behavior problems with punishment, not reflection. In essence, I sought techniques to intensify consequences in an effort to pacify resistance. Reflection on my own practice did occur but my mental energy was focused on finding different ways to maintain order rather than share the responsibility for change. The following selection provides a snapshot into this thinking at the time.

The classroom behavior problems I struggle with may be caused in part by my failure to define and teach the behaviors I expect. I may falsely assume that the students are walking into my classroom with an understanding of how to conform to the standards and expectations I establish. This coming school year, I will need to spend more time unpacking my expectations and make sure the students are clear about what the rules are and why they exist in the first place. (Managing Negative Behavior: One Teacher's Search for Answers, Summer 2006)

I convinced my colleagues that a codified and consistent approach to discipline that measured and tracked student behavior would finally allow us all to teach something;

I was acting out of desperation and using positivist tools to solve complex socio-cultural problems I did not fully understand. The committee I led developed a discipline program we fool heartedly referred to as *the demerit system*. As I look back at the development of this program, it is clear that I was motivated to find ways to force students to change to match my understanding of school behavior without recognizing that the hidden curriculum played a significant role in the conflicts I experienced.

My instinct was to strengthen the hidden curriculum by force and mandate conformity to my view of a structured classroom without ascertaining how the hidden curriculum impacted the school experience for my students of color. I was asked in the first session of every course what my dissertation topic might be, and I always replied without hesitation: “student behavior.” The following paragraph was cut and pasted into many of my papers and offers insights into how student behavior impacted my thinking about schools as I worked to implement the demerit system.

On Sunday afternoons, nervousness creeps into my gut, as I think about the unpredictability of the behaviors I may face in the coming week. As a social studies teacher, about half of my professional time is used for curriculum development and the other half is soaked up by managing behavior issues. Veteran teachers have informed me that the behavior problems they manage today are more acute, persistent and frequently impossible to solve. The most significant issues at my school revolve around negative student behavior. Staff meetings tend to be dominated by discussions of how individual students are constantly being disruptive or unmanageable. A constant phrase echoed at my school is, “I feel like I am always fighting the battles but losing the war.” In my personal experience, persistent negative behavior tends to shatter the learning environment, lower morale and promote an atmosphere of unpredictability and

chaos. (Managing Negative Behavior: One Teacher's Search for Answers
Summer, 2006)

I was a new urban teacher contemplating why students were not listening to my lectures like my suburbs students did. The fact that this selection lacks mention or understanding that a hidden curriculum could be influencing behaviors is in itself telling. The use of war rhetoric to describe my classroom hints at a colonist forcing his *subjects* to assimilate. Absent any meaningful theoretical context or understanding about the hidden curriculum to understand why a student might “shatter” a learning environment that is monotonous and repetitive, I resorted back to my Western, middle class understanding of the world and assumed this student must be lacking something and therefore needed help to change. Discipline, detentions and suspensions are important tools for maintaining order, safety and learning. But because I ratcheted up the punitive approaches to reduce resistance without first understanding the nature of it lead to unintended consequences. I was under pressure as a newly hired teacher to establish order so I dismissed some of my nuanced approaches in favor of a clear and firm punishment system. I was not yet open to the idea that a hidden curriculum needed to be examined and that the burden for change needed to be shared.

The Failure of the Demerit System

The demerit system was a disaster because it strengthened the hidden curriculum in favor of my White students, fueled resistance and perpetuated an institutionalized system of punishment that I feel unfairly targeted minority students. Three demerits led to an afterschool detention; four or more demerits in a week led to two detentions plus the

possible loss of privileges (basketball, dances, etc.). As I walked from one end of the hallway to the other, I would hear “DEMERIT!” echo off the walls in every direction. Each teacher had their own understanding of what type of behavior warranted a demerit, and it appeared to me that more demerits were issued to minority students than White students (although records are not available to support this observation). I was responsible for processing the demerits and frequently, I would have to issue detentions to students even though my rational side thought punishment would be counter-productive.

The demerit system was reminiscent of zero-tolerance policies (policies that force school administrators to exact suspension or expulsions without regard to extenuating circumstances) that are designed to send a “clear message” (Bloomfield, 2008 para. 11) that the school is tough and serious about behavior. Although zero-tolerance policies can send this message, they also “come with their own set of unintended consequences. One obvious consequence is that suspension and expulsion puts children right back on the streets” (Bloomfield, 2008 para. 11). My efforts to control and change certain students were frequently met with escalating consequences, including suspensions, as if punishment alone would improve our school climate. Researchers Laura McMahon and Erin Sharpe make the argument that:

Suspensions are not necessarily the best disciplinary method anyway, with alienated students becoming more alienated and falling further behind once they return to school. But, in our hyper-legalistic society, there is great institutional and popular attractiveness to clear punishment following from clearly defined

procedures. If it's morally satisfying on TV, why not in school? (McMahon & Sharpe, 2006 p. 26)

I believed at the time that demerits and the detentions and suspensions that followed, would improve student behavior because it associated a negative consequence with negative behavior (and for some kids, it worked). I was following positivist behaviorist philosophies that are based on the premise that suspended students would reflect on their behavior, face consequences from parents, and avoid similar behavior in an effort to avoid shame. However, suspension may only reinforce for some urban students of color that school is not a place where they are understood or accepted. Nichols (2004) concluded what many other researchers have found regarding urban students of color and suspension: “several researchers suggest that out-of-school suspension may be linked to several negative educational outcomes including continued academic failure, grade retention, negative school attitudes, and increased dropout rates” (Nichols, 2004 p. 409).

The role of the hidden curriculum began to surface as I discussed earned demerits with my students. They expressed frustration and confusion for earning demerits for behavior they did not perceive to be improper and wondered why White students did not get demerits for similar behavior. Kids complained: “It’s because I’m Black!” in more than one conference. I tried to dismiss these comments as just another example of middle school kids shifting blame away from themselves but in moments of clarity, when I was away from the intensity of the school day, the accusations weighed on me as I juxtaposed them with what I learned about the hidden curriculum. Paulo Freire (1993) reminds me that my self-imposed identity of a progressive educator is flawed because my instinct was

to “liberate” the oppressed without working alongside them, and I made assumptions that punishment could accomplish this. He states,

Denial of communion in the revolutionary process, avoidance of dialogue with the people under the pretext of organizing them, of strengthening revolutionary power, or of ensuring a united front, is really a fear of freedom. (Freire, 1993 p. 110)

Spending month after month of perfecting my behavior classification system without consulting with the people I was classifying, points more to domination than liberation.

Freire continues:

The dominant elites, on the other hand, can—and do—think without the people—although they do not permit themselves the luxury of failing to think *about* the people in order to know them better and thus dominate them more efficiently. Consequently, any apparent dialogue or communication between the elites and the masses is really the depositing of “communiqués,” whose contents are intended to exercise a domesticating influence. (Freire, 1993 p. 112)

Not only did my approach to behavior management perpetuate deculturalization and oppression for some of my students, it also delayed my own liberation, as I remained confined to an intellectual cage believing my own knowledge of the world was universal and students needed to change their ways of being to please me.

Conclusion

White culture reigns supreme in urban public schools and hegemony determines (or try to determine) the capital that will be valued (McLaren, 2003). This dynamic creates a situation where some are powerful and others are disenfranchised in the very institutions they are mandated by law to attend. Lisa Delpit wrote:

...I have come to understand that power plays a critical role in our society and in our educational system. The worldviews of those with privileged positions are taken as the only reality, while the worldviews of those less powerful are dismissed as inconsequential. Indeed, in the educational institutions of this country, the possibilities for poor people and for people of color to define themselves, to determine the self each should be, involve a power that lies outside of the self. It is others who determine how they should act, how they are to be judged. When one “we” gets to determine standards for all “wes,” then some “wes” are in trouble! (Delpit, 2006 p. 40 ebook edition)

This power dynamic that Delpit illustrates is reproduced as White people recreate the same power structure and rules for success with each subsequent generation. In the classroom, this translates into a hidden curriculum that pressures students of color to conform to White cultural practices. The demerit system and its ambiguous implementation proved worse than no system at all for many kids because it used punishment to force allegiance to a repressive hidden curriculum. Although one of the intentions of the demerit program was to curb our high suspension rate, it failed to prevent escalating behavior because the hidden curriculum was left unexamined. It was common to see teachers in my urban public school attempt to force compliance by yelling at students only to find the students yelling back. An aggravated student would eventually capitulate or be suspended for insubordination. A negative culture permeated our classrooms and halls and the positive relationship with students that was the bedrock of my love for teaching was wounded as I was forced to play warden.

The demerit program was a personal failure because looking back, I now recognize that much of the strife can be attributed to a hidden curriculum that I had some control over but I did not alter. As an assistant principal, I punish students daily using a

variety of tools and punishment is an important part in schooling. But when I first transitioned to urban teaching, I lacked perspective that could explain the wide variety of catalysts for discipline worthy behavior. Freire wrote, “To affirm that men and women are persons and as persons should be free, and yet to do nothing tangible to make affirmation a reality, is a farce” (Freire, 1993 p. 32). Thankfully, the demerit system was abandoned but because I did not critically examine the hidden curriculum in the context of my positionality, I replaced it with a program that still placed added pressures on some kids to change. As I move along the road of critical consciousness—or praxis—I aim to bring forth more complex and nuanced thinking into my understanding of urban education (Roth, 2005). I now recognize that replacing one system that shuts down dialogue between myself and my students with another system that did the same, only perpetuates a hidden curriculum where the burden for change remains with the students. Through this journey towards increased criticality, I remain mindful of Freire’s forewarning:

One of the gravest obstacles to the achievement of liberation is that oppressive reality absorbs those within it and thereby acts to submerge human beings’ consciousness. (Freire, 1993 p. 33)

This auto|ethnography finds me poking holes through the oppressive reality my students and I experienced as I search for ways to shoulder some of the burden for change.

CHAPTER IV

FORCING CHANGE WITH SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING

Introduction

Matt: But in Mr. Harrison's room, who is a Black teacher; he expected silence, didn't he?

Jalen: Yeah but he showed it more respectfully. If I said something Ms. Walsh said something like Jalen 'shut up' ... not shut up but 'be quiet'. But Mr. Harrison he looked at me and I was like ok, I got to stop. He did it respectfully.

Assad: He would joke and say...

All the kids together: "as I was saying before I was so rudely interrupted!"

Jalen: He made it comfortable for kids to be in his class. Other teachers were so strict.

My transition to urban education was complicated by a lack of understanding about the political nature of knowledge and the hidden curriculum my White privileges constructed. Freire has since taught me that

Liberatory education is fundamentally a situation where the teacher and the students *both* have to be learners; *both* have to be cognitive subjects, in spite of being different. This for me is the first test of liberating education, for teachers and students both to be critical agents in the act of knowing. (Shor & Freire, 1987 p. 33)

The collapse of the demerit system did not, unfortunately, encourage me to break down the barriers that separated myself from some of my students of color and I did not become “a critical agent in the act of knowing”. I instead aligned myself with the principles of a social emotional learning program that I initially saw as radically transformative but later deemed incapable of achieving significant improvements for some of my students as the burden for change remained on them. In this chapter, I explore my experience with a social and emotional learning program and how my positionality may have influenced me to use this program as a tool to change my students to be more like me. My experiences with social and emotional learning (SEL) and the reflection is an important milestone in my journey towards increased criticality or what Freire describes as *a critical agent in the act of knowing* (Shor & Freire, 1987). When I was first introduced to social and emotional learning after an intense year of strife, it resonated with me because its focus on providing students with social skills was uncomplicated and provided a pathway to change my students’ behavior. Even though I thought SEL was something new, the fact that its principles were born out of cultural practices very familiar to me appealed to my positionality. SEL could help me steer my resistant students toward my way of being by explicitly teaching them the language they need to operate successfully in the world as I knew it. Terrell too could go to Yale and become an engineer, I surmised, if the social and emotional learning program could fill his deficits.

The Definition of Social and Emotional Learning Curriculum

My principal recognized the destructive nature of the demerit program and sought solutions from outside our building walls. She investigated social and emotional learning programs that would train teachers in techniques to help foster a more nurturing and less punitive middle school. She allocated thousands of dollars for two summer workshops and for consultants to meet with my colleagues and me multiple times throughout the school years. She chose the *Developmental Designs*[™] social emotional learning program because it was closely linked to *Responsive Classroom*[™], a social and emotional learning program already in place in many of our district's elementary schools. The following six principles guide the *Developmental Designs*[™] program.

1. *Social learning is as important to success as academic learning.*
2. *We learn best by constructing our own understanding through exploration, discovery, practicing, and applying what we have learned, both socially and academically.*
3. *The greatest cognitive growth occurs through social interactions within a supportive community.*
4. *There is a set of personal/social skills that students need to learn and practice in order to be successful socially and academically: COOPERATION, ASSERTION, RESPONSIBILITY, EMPATHY, SELF-CONTROL*
5. *Knowing the physical, emotional, social, and intellectual needs of the students we teach is as important as knowing the content we teach.*
6. *Trust among adults is a fundamental necessity for academic and social success in a learning community. (Crawford & Tyink, 2006 p. 2)*

The program centered on morning classroom meetings called the *Circle of Power and Respect* (Crawford & Tyink, 2006). During these twenty-minute sessions, the students and I attempted to build community through games, teamwork initiatives, and student-to-

student acknowledgments for positive behavior. I was expected to explicitly teach positive interaction by modeling important classroom and common space routines. The idea was that I could build a common classroom culture that worked to counter the deficits students entered the building with. I modeled and had the students practice classroom behavior expectations and rituals, and I was trained to operate under the philosophy that student misbehavior may be just a simple mistake in following routines. My class and I “discussed” and practiced everything from entering the classroom, to sharpening a pencil, to lining up for dismissal.

Social and emotional learning as a type of positivist reform plays a key role in my professional story because my enthusiastic adoption of *Developmental Designs*TM illuminates a synchrony between my cultural beliefs and dispositions and this discipline-based school reform. Through an examination of the literature and analysis of my data, I have come to see the contemporary push to inject formal programming in social and emotional learning into schools as another example of educators relying on positivist methods to bring about social change. The Commonwealth of Massachusetts mandated in its 2010 law, An Act Relative to Bullying in Schools, that the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education publish guidelines for the implementation of social and emotional learning curricula in kindergarten to grade eight as part of its response to school bullying (Department of Elementary and Secondary Education: Guidelines for the Implementation of Social and Emotional Learning curricula K-12, 2011). Advocacy for social and emotional learning programs is increasing because proponents believe them to

be capable of leveling the playing field between urban and suburban students (CASEL: Collaboration for academic, social, and emotional learning.2013; Edutopia: social and emotional learning.2013).

The website *Edutopia.org* (2013) relies on Rutgers University professor and head of the social and emotional learning lab, Maurice Elias,' definition of social and emotional learning. Elias describes SEL as a process “through which we learn to recognize and manage emotions, care about others, make good decisions, behave ethically and responsibly, develop positive relationships, and avoid negative behaviors” (edutopia.org/social-emotional-learning-history, accessed 8/5/12). There are many components to social and emotional learning, and organizations approach instruction differently, but, in general, social and emotional learning involves the explicit teaching of social skills that, supporters argue, are essential for success in life and academics. *Developmental Design*TM, the program I was trained in, paid much attention to directly teaching school and classroom routines and behavior expectations with the understanding that “teaching and learning are weakened by misbehavior, lack of a safe, inclusive community, and student apathy” (originonline.org/developmental-designs/about-approach#how-it-works, 8/5/2012).

A key component of the *Developmental Designs*TM program is directing the students to brainstorm what a certain school experience *looks*, *sounds*, and *feels* like. For example, before practicing a transition from classroom to classroom, I wrote, “looks, sounds, feels” on the board and asked the kids to generate a list of expectations for each.

I would then ask students to reflect upon the modeling and practicing experience and to judge for themselves whether they lived up to our own preconceived expectations. I constantly polled the class and asked for thumbs up if we did a great job, thumbs to side if it was mixed, and thumbs down if we failed as a class and needed more practice. Rather than get frustrated with misbehavior, I was trained to recognize it as a sign that some basic need (as outlined by Abraham Maslow) was not being satisfied (Crawford & Tyink, 2006). The basic human need for attention, for example, could be better met through individual acknowledgments during our *circle of power and respect*. I tried to issue logical and immediate consequences (i.e. staying late if tardy to make up the time) instead of detentions and suspensions to teach students how their mistakes impacted others. Students were expected to fix these “mistakes” through apologies of action.

*Developmental Designs*TM did make our school a friendlier place. The morning meetings, team building games, and reflections were far superior to a program based solely on punishment. Kids were less pissed off as immediate and “logical” consequences replaced detentions. I avoided long disciplinary lectures because the trainers convinced me that adults can never win an argument with a seventh grader. Disruptive students were asked to “take a break” in a break chair at the back of the room and they were allowed to return once they decided they had regained “self-control”. If I felt the disruptive behavior was continuing, I asked the student to take a second break and this time, the student could not return until after a mini-conference. If the disruptions persisted, I sent the student to the “buddy” room where he or she filled out a “fix-it” sheet

to explain his loss of self-control and how he or she would repair the behavior. My partner teacher, or “buddy” would have a quick conference to assess whether or not the student learned from his or her mistake and if he or she did, the student was permitted to return to class. Students who were disruptive despite these classroom interventions were sent to the office. We taught the students that the break system provided many opportunities to regain self-control, and if they failed to take advantage, they were at the mercy of adults who had to impose control.

I was once a strong advocate for social and emotional learning and believed it to be transformative only a few years ago. I was optimistic that the program would bring order and predictability through the use of more positive and friendly language than the barking and harassment heard with the demerit system. But after two years of practice combined with a deep analysis using a collection of theories, my understanding of social and emotional learning has become more nuanced. I am not interested in rejecting social and emotional learning as a valuable tool in urban public schools. Many SEL programs reduce suspension rates and improve test scores through the explicit teaching of the social skills deemed essential for academic success (Social and emotional learning.; What is SEL?; Payton et al., 2008; Rimm-Kaufman, Fan, Chiu, & You, 2007). I continue to implement SEL programming in my role as an assistant principal at the same time that I am highlighting some of its major flaws in this auto|ethnography.

My road to increased criticality does not end with a belief in anarchy or even a classroom guided by ultra-libertarian philosophies that grant free will to all adolescents.

Middle school kids need boundaries, discipline and lessons in civility and teachers need tools and methods to maintain order in their classrooms. SEL can be a step in the right direction for many urban schools if it helps take the punishing bite out of school wide discipline practices. I have come to believe, however, that SEL is incapable of being the panacea I once took it for. The concern I have is that the paradigms that underpin SEL curricula are frequently unexamined and can therefore perpetuate a status quo where students of color remain at a disadvantage because their cultural capital is undervalued. I question if students that do not easily adhere to the expectations laid out in SEL are being manipulated into being something different from which they are while educators like myself are exempt from the responsibility for change.

The Literature that Supports the Deficit Model Foundation for SEL Instruction

I feel my criticism of social and emotional learning will be unpopular since a vast mountain of research supports this push and it is gaining in popularity. But my experience with implementing, rejecting (and eventually accepting again...to a limited degree) SEL programming is a parallel story that provides the structure for my own growth as an educational thinker. It is essential, therefore, that I unpack beliefs around SEL, the reasons it is gaining in popularity across the nation, and why I believe it perpetuates and institutionalizes the deficit model for urban student failure. The intention of this particular section of my auto|ethnography is to lay out the arguments supporters of social and emotional learning propagate.

The Case for Social and Emotional Learning

Both CASEL (The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning) and PBIS (Positive Behavior Intervention and Support) are national leaders in designing, implementing and accessing social and emotional learning programs in schools. Both organizations consist of policy makers and academics and both have ties to larger organizations (CASEL is affiliated with the University of Illinois at Chicago and PBIS is affiliated with the U.S. Department of Education) (CASEL.org, PBIS.org). Both organizations have missions to promote “pro-social” behaviors through the explicit teaching of social and emotional skills. An excerpt from a report sponsored by CASEL (2008) provides information consistent with much of the literature on social and emotional learning:

SEL programs yielded multiple benefits in each review and were effective in both school and after-school settings and for students with and without behavioral and emotional problems. They were also effective across the K-8 grade range and for racially and ethnically diverse students from urban, rural, and suburban settings. SEL programs improved students’ social-emotional skills, attitudes about self and others, connection to school, positive social behavior, and academic performance; they also reduced students’ conduct problems and emotional distress. Comparing results from these reviews to findings obtained in reviews of interventions by other research teams suggests that SEL programs are among the most successful youth-development programs offered to school-age youth. Furthermore, school staff (e.g., teachers, student support staff) carried out SEL programs effectively, indicating that they can be incorporated into routine educational practice. In addition, SEL programming improved students’ achievement test scores by 11 to 17 percentile points, indicating that they offer students a practical educational benefit. Given these positive findings, we recommend that federal, state, and local policies and practices encourage the broad implementation of well-designed, evidence-based SEL programs during and after school. (Payton et al., 2008 p. 3)

Hints of the deficit understanding for student failure creep into the above report as student test scores are reported to have jumped by “11 to 17” percent. This is indeed a positive trend but the report does not reflect on how the knowledge, the social emotional skills being promoted, and the “routine educational practice[s]” are reflective of the dominant culture’s attitude about learning and maintain a status quo that defines success in limited terms.

SEL and Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs

Much of the literature on social emotional learning reveals thinking consistent with the deficit model for student failure. The same CASEL report goes on to justify SEL programming.

Twenty-first century schools serve socio-culturally diverse students with varied abilities and motivations for learning (Learning First Alliance, 2001). While some students are academically engaged and participate energetically in class and extracurricular activities, others are less engaged and achieve poorly (Blum & Libbey, 2004). Many students become more disengaged from school as they progress from elementary to middle to high school. It is estimated that 40 to 60 percent of urban, suburban, and rural high school students become chronically disengaged from school — not counting those who already dropped out (Klem & Connell, 2004). Approximately 30 percent of high school students participate in or experience multiple high-risk behaviors (e.g., substance use, sex, violence, depression, attempted suicide) that interfere with school performance and jeopardize their potential for life success (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2008; Dryfoos, 1997). Furthermore, large percentages of students lack social-emotional competence, believe their teachers do not care about them, and disrupt the educational experiences of classmates. (Payton et al., 2008 p. 3)

SEL is needed, this report argues, because at-risk behaviors and the “lack of social-emotional competence” are negatively impacting student achievement. The foundation of SEL therefore, is based on the premise that schools need to repair deficits by teaching

students skills they are not learning in their home environments. The SEL program I was trained in was heavily influenced by academics from the field of psychology (Kwame-Ross, Linda Crawford, & Erin Klug, 2011) and is lacking a discussion on how race and power impact schooling. Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs has been referred to on the *Developmental Designs*TM web page and was discussed numerous times throughout the training sessions. Maslow's hierarchy is accepted as a foundational philosophy and the practices are structured around fulfilling needs (Kwame-Ross, Crawford, & Klug, 2011). Proponents argue that SEL programs can fulfill some of the basic human needs within the school day and thereby reduce conflicts.

A "New" Approach to School Discipline

A core belief advocates for social and emotional learning have about traditional school discipline practices is that they further exacerbate and contribute to "children's and youths' patterns of challenging behavior" and that

high rates of antisocial behavior in school are associated with punitive disciplinary strategies, lack of clarity about rules, expectations, and consequences, lack of staff support, and failure to consider and accommodate individual differences. (Lewis et al., 1998 p. 447)

A common theme behind SEL is the idea that punishment is less effective than teaching and student *misbehavior* should be addressed more therapeutically. Researcher Wendy Schwartz (2001) makes the point that school discipline programs should be designed to teach students how to behave properly, not hurt them through illogical consequences that fail to alter behavior. The ultimate goal is to teach students how to be successful in

society. By having consequences relate specifically to the infraction, schools can help teach and model behavior expectations. She writes,

The goals of discipline, once the need for it is determined, should be to help students accept personal responsibility for their actions, understand why a behavior change is necessary, and commit themselves to change. The discipline measure should model good behavior, not retribution and humiliation, and students should have some control over its nature. Students can help determine discipline policies in general, but specific punishments should be customized. (Schwartz, 2001 p. 4)

Proponents of social and emotional learning believe that discipline should be rooted in helping each student learn the rules of their environment and a one size fits all policy, which most schools practice, will not achieve this end. “Punishment for misbehavior should fit both the infraction and the student’s self-esteem, academic and personal development needs” (Schwartz, 2001 p. 4). Based on this model, she argues, punishment may be as simple as cleaning up if a student makes a mess or apologizing to a teacher after making a rude comment. She includes as an example the following consequences that may serve to correct the behavior of many students:

A student who is disrespectful to a teacher should be helped to understand why an apology is necessary and devise a personal way of expressing regret. A student who fails to do a homework assignment should be given an opportunity to explain why and develop a plan with his teacher for doing the work as soon as possible. (Schwartz, 2001 p. 4)

Proponents of SEL believe that teaching students about the routines and practices of an institution can replace harsh approaches to student behavior management.

SEL and the “Coercive Family Cycle”

Leaders in social and emotional learning research, Russ Skiba and Reece Peterson (2003) argue that most students come into school with the ability to read and manage different situations and expectations. Students that grow up in “coercive family cycles” (Skiba & Peterson, 2003 p. 68), however, approach their school environment in a different manner. These children “act out in order to understand the limits of their environment” since they are constantly having to negotiate new rules and situations at home (Skiba & Peterson, 2003 p. 68). Dr. George Sugai is a national director of PBIS and a leader in social and emotional learning (and is ironically working with me in my current school district to establish PBIS practices). PBIS favors a tiered system of student support with social and emotional learning becoming an essential component of each tier. Sugai writes, “Given that children may come to school with a learning history that sets them up for further behavioral problems, schools must respond proactively and consistently” (Lewis, Sugai, & Colvin, 1998 p. 447). In his view, schools need to first recognize that children enter school buildings with behaviors established at home. Rather than wasting time lamenting about the behavior patterns that kids already have, it is more beneficial to establish a plan to alter this behavior in a positive and effective manner. Sugai believes that schools must recognize that all children do not come to school with appropriate models and feedback to ensure they acquire positive behavior practices. He writes, “for some children, social experiences are best characterized as reactive, aversive, infrequent, haphazard, and trial-and-error learning experiences” (Lewis & Sugai, 1999 p. 3).

Skiba and Peterson argue that most students come to school with the social skills necessary to adapt and adjust to differing classroom cultures.

For students who exhibit behavior problems, however, learning the social curriculum is by no means an automatic process. These students come into the classroom with perceptions and beliefs that have grown out of their experience that may leave them less capable of recognizing and responding to the typical social curriculum of schools. (Skiba & Peterson, 2003 p. 68)

In many circumstances, therefore, students may be punished for rules they do not understand or have never been taught. These students in particular can benefit in the short term from explicit instruction in the social curriculum because it better equips them to navigate the structure of the school day. Sugai and his coauthors (1999) argue for the need to break down the hidden curriculum early in a child's academic career. They have found that if early intervention is not offered, more severe behavior problems can occur down the road and there may not be a way to effectively alter the behavior. To ensure that a child is given the opportunity to be successful in school, children need to have behavior expectations modeled for them. He writes, "Success is associated with having appropriate models available, having their actions monitored regularly, having regular opportunities for academic and social success, and having access to meaningful feedback that guides their behavior" (Lewis & Sugai, 1999 p. 2). Sugai believes that schools that set out to proactively teach social rules and school expectations, can level the playing field for children that are left out of the "proper" school socialization process. Skiba and Peterson argue that these approaches hold "greater promise for teaching students appropriate pro-social behavior" (Skiba & Peterson, 2003 p. 70).

SEL and Code Switching

Norma L. Day-Vines, professor at John Hopkins School of Education and Beth O. Day Hairston, associate professor at Winston-Salem State University (2005), believe that social curriculum instruction can self-empower urban African American students by teaching them how to behave. African American students are expected to *code switch* as they move from their home culture to their school culture. These two cultures may be “diametrically opposed” and students “may not realize that different sets of expectations govern behavior when students move between cultural contexts” (Day-Vines & Day-Hairston, 2005 p. 241). If schools want African American students to avoid certain behaviors, Day-Vines and Day-Hairston argue, they must offer replacement behaviors in order to ensure success. Students without proper instruction on coping with daily challenges that arise in school, the authors believe, will manage them in self-destructive ways. School counselors can help students succeed by explicitly teaching them to develop goals for success, “identify strategies for appropriate management of feelings and behavior, consider consequences associated with personal choices, and praise themselves for engaging in appropriate problem-solving strategies” (Day-Vines & Day-Hairston, 2005 p. 240).

The Missing Pieces

In my own reading experience, some articles advocating for SEL mention cultural differences between teachers and urban students but most do not. Both my eager acceptance and my previous belief that SEL was on the cutting edge of urban school

reform provides insight into how I understood and approached urban students. Professor Sugai is currently working with my school district to implement practices to reduce office referrals. I challenge some of the theoretical foundations he subscribes to despite the fact that I recognize him as a sincere advocate for students in my own experiences with him.

It is troubling for me to assume, for example, that misbehavior in students is a result of “coercive family cycles” before I investigate socio-cultural realities and how they interact with the structure of most urban public schools. And although Sugai, Skiba, Peterson and other advocates recognize structural challenges that interfere with student success, there is little in their writing that pushes teachers to reflect on their positionality. For example, in the research article “The color of discipline: Sources of racial and gender disproportionality in school punishment” Skiba, Michael, Nardo and Peterson (2002) report in their findings that race plays a role in the disproportionate punishment of students of color: “In summary, the data from this investigation describe a robust pattern in which black students are suspended disproportionately due primarily to a higher rate of office referral” (Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002). But in their implications section, they ask schools and teachers to focus on finding new ways to reach students but stop short at asking teachers to explore their own positionality. The authors believe cultural and racial disparities can be addressed using the following approaches:

Appropriate training in classroom management, appropriate rules adequately communicated to students, and the support of mental health staff and administration can all assist in developing a more supportive classroom environment.

In particular, effective teacher training will focus on culturally competent practices that enable new teachers to address the needs of a diverse classroom. Townsend (2000) suggests a number of important components that may reduce cultural discontinuity and enhance the educational experience of African-American students, including relationship-building strategies, knowledge of linguistic or dialectic patterns of African-American youth, increased opportunity for participation in a range of school activities, and family and community partnerships. Finally, effective preparation for teaching diverse students goes beyond “feel-good” or single-issue approaches to teaching tolerance (Banks, 1996; Nieto, 1994) to include a range of skill instruction and experiences. For example, Leavell, Cowart and Wilhelm (1999) describe a multicomponent training program to enhance the multicultural awareness of pre-service teachers in the Dallas Public Schools, focusing on pedagogical and community awareness, exposure to diverse communities, instructional practice and experiences that challenge students to examine previously held assumptions. (Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002 p. 336)

All of these above suggestions are valid and would arguably lead to improvements in the school experience for students of color. It is the item listed almost as an afterthought that needs to be front and central in education reform -*instructional practice and experiences that challenge students to examine previously held assumptions*. Advocates for social and emotional learning are pushing schools away from overly punitive discipline policies; they are therefore pushing school leaders in the right direction, but it is not enough. Without examining the elements of Western thought, the role of the hidden curriculum, the impact of White privileges on students of color, and the ways certain forms of knowledge and ways of being are elevated above others, SEL presents itself as yet another manifestation of the *Great White Hope*. The practices SEL supporters advocate continue the tradition of putting the burden on students of color to learn the ways of the dominant culture rather than encouraging Western oriented educators to

deconstruct their own identities and create classroom communities safe for cultural expression.

Social and Emotional Learning and the Deficit Model for Student Failure

When I get out of Yale (ha ha), I would like to be either an civil or mechanical engineer. I love engineering my father is a civil engineer. (Sixth Grade Writing Journal, November 4th, 1987)

My sixth grade journal entry indicates that I knew at a young age that ivy-league universities held a special position in the White culture field I participated in and to attend a school like Yale meant success. I recognized that a brand of college was connected to identity and at twelve I selected schools that held symbolic and economic capital in the society I identified with. The only obstacle to attending a school like Yale was hard work, connections, and maybe money, but my race was never considered an obstacle. Both my parents received advanced degrees at a state university and I was raised in a town where the vast majority of my classmates had college-educated parents. Talk of college started early and the possibility of not going was never entertained. Instead, discussions focused on the type of college or the cost of college and how it would be paid for. It is not just the color of my skin that provided an advantage in higher education; it is the fact that I had the financial and cultural resources needed to write the application essay that met the standards of those who control admissions (News and views: New emphasis on the application essay; college-bound blacks face an admissions disadvantage.2002). The sense of individualism nurtured in the suburban cultural fields

I participated in was free of biases, obstacles and oppression and personal financial success was there if I sought it. This positionality influenced how I understood education and the type of reforms I would eventually be attracted to.

My initial enthusiasm and dedication to SEL was so noticeable that central office administrators asked me to sell it to all the middle school teachers during our opening day professional development meeting. I wrote about this experience in an internship paper.

The most intense experience was presenting information about Developmental Designs to roughly 125 middle school teachers during a district professional developmental workshop on school climate. The workshop consisted of all the middle school teachers in the district that did not participate in the summer program. I was asked to present "one teacher's experience". This part I was fine with since I had some experience at the open house. The part that made me nervous was the fact that Scott strongly encouraged me to offer a piece of the program to the teachers. He believed it best to have the teachers experience what a Developmental Designs activity looks like. I had never facilitated an activity in front of such a large group. In fact, I tend to be the teacher that hates it when workshop leaders make me get up and walk around. I usually prefer to favor blanking out and staring into space. I spoke for about 20 minutes about how the Developmental Designs program has helped transform our school culture and has helped empower me as a teacher by empowering the children. I engaged the teachers in a short activity in an effort to model the basic principles of the program. I discussed the daily structure of the program and then responded to questions. Upon sitting down, a colleague whispered to me, "what, are they paying you?" I guess my enthusiasm is apparent. The lesson I am learning is that it is easy to lead if you believe in the program. (Professor Kress Internship Paper, November 2007)

This selection is revealing because it marks the point of my total buy in to SEL instruction. I not only gobbled it all up as a classroom teacher but I was so impressed, I felt it important to share my experience with all the middle school teachers in the district.

But as I dig into this enthusiasm, I better recognize why certain aspects of social and emotional learning resonated with me as I struggled to change some of my urban students without reflecting on my own positionality.

The White suburbs nurtured the belief that others who lacked the capital I valued were inferior. When I transitioned to urban teaching my outlook on my students was grounded in identifying what some of them lacked rather than recognizing the social and cultural capital they possessed. Some evidence suggests that when I first adopted the SEL program, I taught with the assumption that my students lacked certain skills and were “suffering from some psychological disorder or cultural inferiority” and social and emotional learning could help repair these disorders (Nieto 1999 p. 15). The underlying philosophy resonated with me because it reinforced this deficit outlook and validated my tendency to place the responsibility for change solely onto my students. If kids lack community at home, as I assumed the kids that caused me problems did, then I could offer them a community at school. My morning meetings (the *circle of power and respect*) could repair a student’s need for attention and a sense of love and belonging.

I found data in an undergraduate essay that offers insights into my deficit infused outlook on the world at one particular point in time.

We are all in danger. Our future looks desolate. The threat is so real and powerful, we may be helpless. The point of no return may have already passed. The signs and symptoms of eventual doom become more apparent everyday. The danger here is not nuclear warfare or a return of the bubonic plague. Is a danger that remains relatively undetected but we see it everywhere. The danger is an uneducated society. As society progresses into the future, the quality of people

decline. Tolerance and dignity are disappearing. Crime and pettiness are on the rise. Television has contributed to societal ills by trivializing education, spiritual enlightenment and taking time away from childhood experiences. Once innocent high school fights now end in murder. Fathers bring guns to little league games to make sure their sons get to play. Mothers kill their sons to please their boyfriends. Parents leave infant and school-age children home alone while they vacation. Baby-sitters pour alcohol down the throats of crying infants they are hired to protect. Men father children and then vanish. Fifth and sixth graders drink heavily and have sex. Lack of education leads to these societal ills. These once extreme examples occur more frequently today. (Television's role in Societal Decline, February 15, 1995)

This selection from my college Freshman English class represents thinking as I transitioned from high school to the University of New Hampshire. People that lacked the cultural capital I recognized fueled my sense of cultural superiority and my dark outlook on the world. I must have been watching hours of local news at the time but to declare that the quality of people is declining, sin is rampant, and the world is bleak and falling apart indicates a young coed grappling with the experience of clashing with multiple cultural fields. It also highlights that at an earlier age, I positioned myself as “right” and Others needed to change to match my definition of right.

At the heart of my argument is that people are turning their backs on education and this sentiment illustrates the sense of power I attributed to schools. If I retooled some of the words, it could easily pass for a fire and brimstone sermon with the word “school” replacing church. It is strikingly clear that I was valuing only one form of knowledge—knowledge that is delivered in a formal institution that provides for learning that leads to participation in my own cultural spheres. The world was split between the educated and uneducated—the privileged and the non-privileged-- and the data above

suggests my socially constructed worldview and the cultural capital that I valued defined what education should be and those that did not share this outlook had a responsibility to change. Years later, even after I evolved out of this darkness, this outlook most likely nurtured my attraction to a social and emotional learning program because I saw it as a tool that could change Others by repairing deficits.

It was easier and more convenient for me as a “progressive” educator to dismiss race as a factor in student behavior problems because in the liberal teaching circles I identified with, race is too charged of an issue to open for a dialectical investigation. And I, as a White man from the upper middle class, had the luxury of steering conversations away from race during our morning meetings; I didn’t want to risk upsetting students or their parents. Frances Kendall (2006) argues that choosing when and when not to explore issues of race is one of the privileges White people can take for granted.

Understanding racism or whiteness is often an intellectual exercise for us, something we can work at for a while and then move on, rather than its being central to or survival. (Kendall, 2006 p. 65)

Discussing classroom behavior problems and constructing a classroom social contract that incorporates a discussion of race would be walking a fine line and risk exposing myself to being called a racist (the most horrific word a White, “progressive” teacher could be called) so it was better to tap into my privilege and leave race out of the equation all together. It was less problematic to discuss behavior problems in the context of *they just don’t know any better* and social and emotional learning enabled me to focus on my students’ deficits without complicating it with talk of race and culture or turning

the critical mirror onto myself. In her article “Talking about Race, Learning about Racism: The Application of Racial Identity Development Theory in the Classroom”, Beverly Daniel Tatum (1992) explores reasons discussions about race are avoided in college courses. She writes:

When asked to reflect on their earliest race-related memories and the feelings associated with them, both White students and students of color often report feelings of confusion, anxiety, and/or fear. Students of color often have early memories of name-calling or other negative interactions with other children, and sometimes with adults. They also report having had questions that went both unasked and unanswered. In addition, many students have had uncomfortable interchanges around race-related topics as adults. When asked at the beginning of the semester, ‘How many of you have had difficult, perhaps heated conversations with someone on a race-related topic?’ routinely almost everyone in the class raises his or her hand. It should come as no surprise then that students often approach the topic of race and/or racism with both curiosity and trepidation. (Tatum, 1992 p. 5)

I found evidence in my own writing that demonstrates I grappled with similar tensions.

As a social studies teacher, race is always an extremely complex issue to discuss; especially when teaching an incredibly diverse student population. As a white man, it is difficult to discuss the emotionally charged questions such as: Why is there a high percentage of African Americans in prison?, Why does the African American population experience more poverty? Why can't white people use the “n” word when it is present in popular music and street culture? I fear that I will mess up in these discussions and leave the children with ideas I never intended. I fear that I will be perceived as a racist. I fear that I will be unable to explain the complexities of the issues and instead leave the children disjointed and more confused. I do know that it is impossible to wrap difficult conversations up into a neat package and complex, emotional issues are never easy to unpack. But, I fear that my black students will not validate my opinions or thoughts because they will think, “this guy has no idea what we go through.” I do persist with the discussions despite my anxiety, but I wish I had more confidence—I find I am a more powerful educator when I speak to the students from a position of confidence. (Contemporary Issues in Urban Schools Journals, July 2006)

To remove race and more specifically, the political nature of race and its relationship to knowledge, from the discussion on student behavior is like ignoring the role wood plays in a forest fire. By adhering to a program that completely avoided the topic of race and culture, I was narrowing the scope for discussion and exalting my values above all others. True liberatory civic education, on the contrary, must include the racism and many of the “isms” that cause dissidence.

Ideas that should be discussed from a broad scope include the definitions and concepts related to multiculturalism, pluralism, ethnocentrism, hegemony, inclusion, meritocracy, power, and privilege. These ideas will provide an umbrella for understanding the more detailed “ism’s” embedded in civics and social justice. Concepts that should be examined in an in-depth and comprehensive manner include race, ethnicity, gender, language, sexuality, socioeconomic class, religion, ability, and exceptionality. (Osanloo, 2011 p. 61)

Interestingly, it was the absence of the “isms” in the nomenclature of social and emotional learning that may have first sold it to me because, after all, *aren't all people the same?* I am a man who has benefited from White privilege and controlling or avoiding discussions on gender, sexuality, socioeconomic class and religion helps preserve my power. On the practical level, releasing the power of interpretation to my students threatened my ability to “control” them. At the subconscious level, permitting the critical exploration of these concepts threatened me because an honest examination would expose cracks in the hegemony that served me so well.

My perception of myself is of an educator on the side of the marginalized and even though I am finding examples that point to biases, they do not necessarily define me. Identity is complex and the conclusions that show me as oppressive need to be

balanced with evidence that point towards inclusive practices. Hegemony works on me in surreptitious ways, however, so despite my progressive and inclusive intentions, I may have been attracted to social and emotional learning because it did not expect me to share the burden of change with my students. In an examination of Whiteness as an academic sub-discipline, Kincheloe (1999) makes the observation that as an upper middle class White person, I may have been attracted to a program that “stifles” inquiry into social power because fostering an honest examination could threaten my privileges.

One of the most dramatic moments in teaching whiteness involves the effort to identify and make sense of white power. Such an identification process involves encouraging students to understand the white power bloc--the loose alignment of various social, political, educational, and economic agents and agencies who work in concert around particular issues to maintain white power. Without trying to elicit guilt and place blame, the attempt to teach students about white power involves the difficult task of tracing oppressive historical frameworks that continue in an ever-evolving form to structure everyday life of all peoples at the end of the twentieth century. Such a process will always be difficult simply because stifling information by which everyday people gain insight into the workings of power is central to the maintenance of power. Those who are privileged struggle to control representations of themselves; the white power bloc, thus, is not comfortable with the study of whiteness. In this context white students from middle/upper-middle class backgrounds will frequently resist a pedagogy of whiteness as a threat to their privilege. When such a pedagogy views the white power bloc from the perspective of the marginalized, palms sweat and blood pressures rise as connections and continuities between agents such as the governing board of Texaco, the publishers of many high school history textbooks, agribusiness leaders in southern California, the administrators of VMI, and Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray and the editors of *The Bell Curve* are highlighted. No secret Oliver Stone-like conspiracy exists between these agents--but they do work in concert at some tacit level for the protection of white and often male privilege. (Kincheloe, 1999 p. 183)

I don't think my palms sweat in the same way Kincheloe speculates those of the governing board of Texaco do when White power is examined. But, I do wonder if

hegemony pushed me towards a social and emotional learning program because at a deep, subconscious level, it was easier to focus on Others rather than “trace oppressive historical frameworks” that would direct attention towards the misgivings of myself and my school.

Social and Emotional Learning and Student Agency

Matt: So, Molly what do you think? Do certain kids have an easier time in school? Is it easier for a White kid, for example, to be successful in school than a Black kid?

Molly Here is what I think; with some teachers...with the White teacher my feeling was that they were always pushing me to succeed like it was expected of me.

Matt: Huh hum.

Molly: And because I sat with Isabel, Jalen and Terrell, and I know that Jalen and Terrell are three times more intellectual or smart than me and that is why it would even offend me when the teacher would expect me to get an “A” and expect me to try my hardest and expect me to want to go to Harvard because I didn’t think I earned that...and I didn’t think I deserved that and it made me upset because I would sit at the lunch table with everyone. I wanted them to hear too what Terrell had to say and I felt like they just expected *me* to succeed and almost looking for a chance to not have *them* succeed sometimes...and looking for ways around ...I don’t know.

Matt: Did I play a part in that? Be honest, be honest. Remember this is about me as a teacher too. I remember one time when I gave you a “C-“ .

Molly: I remember that too.

Matt: And I thought you were going to have a heart attack.

Molly: This is what I mean.

Matt: But I said to you because I know you are capable of much more. Do you think I would be more likely to give you a “C-“ cuz you’re a White kid and I got the same thing from a Black kid and give him like a B.

Terrell: I think you would.

Molly: Here is the thing... when I walked in 7th grade...I walked in 7th grade to Mr. [Montgomery’s] class and I felt like just because they knew my brother and they knew my brother was smart or whatever, they wrote me off as an “A” student and at that point in my life I was having so much trouble. I mean like I was getting tested for learning disabilities and I was having a lot of issues and that just made it worse for me because I felt like if I am expected to do that I have to do that and I didn’t feel like I was able to. I mean like yeah, but you were very different because I mean you did give me a “C-“ so obviously...

Matt: Yeah, but the question I have... I wonder if I saw you come into the class... I had your brother, I knew your parents. If I were to assume that because that you fit a certain type...that here is a kid that could be an “A” and if you passed in a paper that was junky it was because you didn’t try hard enough and maybe if I got the same paper from a different kid I would say this is an “A” because this is the best that you could have done. Do you feel like that kind of stuff happened?

Terrell: Yes.

Social and emotional learning was attractive to me because it favored my agency over Others and placed the responsibility on the students to negotiate the rigid structure of the school. When I transitioned to an urban school, it did not take me long to figure out the schema and resources that made up the professional structure of the school; they were very similar to those of other institutions I participated in. As Molly bravely points out, I made assumptions based on her positionality that she would work hard (as I defined it) to prove that she was a capable student. My assumptions impacted my expectations

and my approach to evaluating her. White people benefit from attending institutions that are designed to automatically favor their agency. Frances Kendall states,

White privilege is an institutional, rather than personal, set of benefits granted to those of us who, by race, resemble the people who hold the power positions in our institutions. One of the primary privileges is having greater access to power and resources than people of color do; in other words, purely on the basis of our skin color doors are open to us that are not open to other people. (Kendall, 2006 p. 63)

It is natural for me, as a human, to seek power in the cultural fields I participate in and my ability or disability to access advantage in schools and society is central to Bourdieu's conceptualization of culture and power (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1998; Swartz, 1997). But the biggest advantage I had was that my skin color and way of being, like Molly's, matched that of most of my teachers and administrators. I, like Molly, did not have to prove my worth, intelligence, or participate in a litmus test of morality on the first day of school each year. I did put pressure on Molly to change but only with regards to her study habits and writing skills; I did not ask her to change her culture and the structure of the school favored the agency I assumed she possessed.

Structure & Agency

In my own life, I have drawn upon a variety of cultural, social, and symbolic resources to sustain and strengthen my own positions in various cultural fields (Swartz, 1997) but my skin color has provided me with automatic privileges including my teachers' involuntary belief that I could be successful. Central to the discussion of culture, is the concept of structure. William H. Sewell of the University of Chicago (1992) defines structure as

sets of mutually sustaining schemas and resources⁵ that empower and constrain social action and that tend to be reproduced by that social action. (Sewell, 1992 p. 19)

Structures are dynamic and may be interpreted differently based on who is interacting with a particular structure. My schemas regarding the physical reality of the classroom (the building, classrooms, hallways, desks, texts, etc.) are similar to my parents that were born and raised in a similar culture. Agency is the ability or disability of a person to act with and against structures (Sewell, 1992). The structure of the public schools I have attended or work in favor my own agency because their structures matches closely the structures I was trained to negotiate. My own agency is based on my knowledge “of the schemas that inform social life” and my ability to access “some measure of human and nonhuman resources” (Sewell, 1992 p. 20). Agency can differ within a particular society and can be expanded or contracted based on an individual’s “gender, wealth, social prestige, class ethnicity, occupation, generation, sexual preference, or education” (Sewell, 1992 p. 21).

Yanick: I have a math class with Molly in geometry... like it is crazy, it is crazy but like, the thing is... but what I realized that the class is in the beginning of the day and beginning of when it started there are twenty-five students in the class and the class is filled with White people and I felt like wow! I don't belong in that class because maybe that they will think that I am Black that they will think that I am stupid but I knew Molly and I knew that she probably wouldn't think like that but I had a feeling that the other White kids in the school... like in the classroom would be like 'she doesn't belong here' and I just felt like I had to change, like...I

Socioculturalists define structure as the combination of “resources (e.g. an artifact) and schema (the way participants perceive and act toward the artifact)” (Tobin & Roth, 2005 p. 68).

had to be like someone else, like I had to, like oh I knew the question even though I didn't know it... I had to be quiet and like not talk.

History and politics may have shaped different schemas for Yanick. For example, I may have viewed the resources of my former school as a building block for students to access a better future. Yanick may have viewed the same resources as barriers to freedom of cultural expression. Being raised in a White affluent community afforded me the privileges of participating in institutions whose structures favored my agency. Yanick, on the other hand, is describing a situation where she lacked agency and therefore felt powerless within the structure of her classroom.

All humans have agency, but certain structures better afford a person's ability to act. Sewell argues:

Agency is formed by a specific range of cultural schemas and resources available in a person's particular social milieu. The specific forms that agency will take consequently vary enormously and are culturally and historically determined. But a capacity for agency is as much a given for humans as the capacity for respiration. (Sewell, 1992 p. 20)

A White person in an institution controlled by White people, has some "degree of control over the social relations in which one is enmeshed" and can "transform those social relations to some degree" (Sewell, 1992 p. 20). But, a student like Yanick is forced to interact with a structure where her own agency is tested so her power of self-determination is marginalized. Despite Yanick's natural intellect and the feeling that she could answer her teacher's question if asked, she was terrified of being classified as

“stupid” by the class that is “filled with White people.” My social and emotional learning infused classroom did not focus on eliminating the roadblocks to Yanick’s agency so as a result she found herself with numerous suspensions, possibly as a byproduct of seeking other ways to gain power.

The concepts and definitions of structure, agency and culture are widely debated in the social sciences. Theorists argue over the relative rigidity of structure and the power individuals have over culture and their own agency. For example, Hays (1994) argues below that individuals can make “creative” moves that foster increased agency in relation to social structures.

Social life is fundamentally structured. But social structures do make possible a whole range of choices in everyday life. Certain structural configurations of resources and constraints make it more or less possible for people to make larger or smaller "creative" moves. (Hays, 1994 p. 70)

The way Yanick interacted with her peers, laughed in the hallways and spoke bluntly to her teachers was a creative move she used to influence the structure that frowned on this type of expression. Schools need to maintain safe hallways and students are frequently punished when they cause disruption or talk back but evidence throughout this auto ethnography suggests that my Black students lived with the perception that their behavior was noticed first and more frequently. *Developmental Designs*[™] tried to help Yanick code switch by giving her a greater voice in the *Circle of Power and Respect* and the social contract. But the program did not train me to investigate why Yanick felt her sense of agency was diminished in her school and it did not push me to see what changes I

could make to accommodate her. Social and emotional learning programs do not encourage White educators to scrutinize their own experiences to identify why the behavior of certain students was critiqued more critically than others. *Developmental Designs™* continues the positivist tradition of trying to strengthen a student's agency by giving them—depositing in them—the capital needed to have greater agency in the White world. In essence, SEL instruction attempts to share the benefits of White privilege without even officially acknowledging that it exists.

Therefore, while Bourdieu's work sought to provide a structural critique of social and cultural reproduction, his theory of cultural capital has been used to assert that some communities are culturally wealthy while others are culturally poor. This interpretation of Bourdieu exposes White, middle class culture as the standard, and therefore all other forms and expressions of 'culture' are judged in comparison to this 'norm'. In other words, cultural capital is not just inherited or possessed by the middle class, but rather it refers to an accumulation of specific forms of knowledge, skills and abilities that are *valued* by privileged groups in society. (Yosso, 2005 p. 76)

The problem with trying to deposit cultural capital into students like Yanick is that she may not want or value it; she may, amongst other things, find it irrelevant, boring or oppressive. Yanick should have been punished when she disrupted the learning of others but her disruption was an expression of protest that could have been mitigated through dialogue and understanding. Without the opportunity to use her own cultural capital, Yanick's agency may have been weakened as the structure of the school stayed rigid.

The Critical Race Perceptive

Pierre Bourdieu's sociocultural theory taught that my own White culture bestowed privileges I could use to my advantage in school but my interest is not to share

access to institutions by filling the deficits and forcing change onto students from subordinated cultures. Rather, I take a *critical race* perspective that argues the cultural capital of communities of color is just as valuable but unrecognized and invalidated by the dominant White culture (Yosso, 2005). White people in the United States have, over generations, catapulted the cultural capital they share into prominence and have collectively worked to ensure that the White expression of culture defines the rules for access to political power in public institutions (Kendall, 2006). The cultural capital of people of color is delegitimized as White people focus on filing their deficits (McLaren, 2003) and maintain the institutional structures to favor particular kinds of agents.

Tara Yosso of the University of California argues in “Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth” (2005) that critical race theory offers a more textured analysis of cultural capital because it begins with the assumption that students from communities of color enter schools with strengths, not deficits.

CRT centers the research, pedagogy, and policy lens on Communities of Color and calls into question White middle class communities as the standard by which all others are judged. This shifting of the research lens allows critical race scholars to ‘see’ multiple forms of cultural wealth within Communities of Color. CRT identifies various indicators of capital that have rarely been acknowledged as cultural and social assets in Communities of Color (i.e., aspirational, social, navigational, linguistic, resistant and familial capital). These forms of capital draw on the knowledges Students of Color bring with them from their homes and communities into the classroom. They are not conceptualized for the purpose of finding new ways to co-opt or exploit the strengths of Communities of Color. Instead, community cultural wealth involves a commitment to conduct research, teach and develop schools that serve a larger purpose of struggling toward social and racial justice. (Yosso, 2005 p. 82)

My approach to education and reform shifts dramatically if I instead adopt Yosso's assumptions of "communities of wealth" and drop the deficit model for student failure as the defining framework for my personal educational philosophy. When I approach urban school reform from the wealth, rather than deficit mindset, I recognize that students like Yanick have tremendous agency and I must share in the responsibility for change with her by altering the structure of my classroom to favor it. I recognize that a more vibrant and open learning community with a hidden curriculum less "hidden" can be established if I share the responsibility for change.

Critics of critical race theory would argue that celebrating a community of wealth cannot make up for the pathology of poverty. Ruby Payne (2012) is a popular and controversial voice because she defends a deficit approach and argues that providing students with the capital of the dominant culture is what is needed to combat inequalities.

Most current studies describe poverty as a systemic problem involving racial/gender exploitation. Yes, this is a significant contributor to poverty. Such a *sole* approach, however, does not answer this question: If the system is to blame, why do some people make it out and others never do? Thirty percent of Americans born in the bottom quintile make it out of that quintile (Isaacs, Sawhill, & Haskings, n.d.). And furthermore, why is it that the first waves of political refugees who have come to the United States in abject poverty usually have re-created, within one generation, the asset base they left behind? They make it out because of human capital. Ignorance is just as oppressive as any systemic barrier. Human capital is developed through education, employment, the intergenerational transfer of knowledge, and social bridging capital. Money makes human capital development easier, but money alone does not develop human capital. Furthermore, any system in the world will oppress you if you are uneducated and unemployed. (Payne, 2012 p. 14)

Payne's argument contrasts the work of Yosso and other critical race theorists and needs to be considered as worthy for examination. Students that enter school with significant

language deficits, for example, will have a harder time developing the skills needed to become independent members of a society where economic production is essential. My critical self-examination has caused me to gravitate more towards critical theory but there are significant issues associated with poverty that are in need of pragmatic and positivist solutions in addition to post-constructivist elucidations. But, the deficit model for student failure is so pervasive that schools are using programs like SEL exclusively at the expense of a critical examination of power that could yield other solutions.

By examining structure and agency from a critical race perspective, the dialogue shifts from the banking concept to recognizing that Yanick comes from a “community of wealth” with cultural capital and other resources that empower her. Yanick’s parents were immigrants from Haiti so the knowledge they have from negotiating their former world and also transitioning to American society is vast and deep. But because I have the privilege of having my cultural capital automatically valued and considered the standard, I though social and emotional practices were sufficient because they aimed to fill Yanick’s deficits rather than encourage me to learn from the incredible wealth of knowledge her family and community possess.

A traditional view of cultural capital is narrowly defined by White, middle class values, and is more limited than wealth—one’s accumulated assets and resources. CRT expands this view. Centering the research lens on the experiences of People of Color in critical historical context reveals accumulated assets and resources in the histories and lives of Communities of Color. (Yosso, 2005 p. 77)

White institutions that approach multicultural education from the banking or deficit perspective can marginalize students like Yanick and exclude her from feeling safe and

wanted in her geometry class. As a student and teacher, I have had the privilege of peers and supervisors entering a relationship with me as an equal assuming that I was knowledgeable and I never felt “I had to be like someone else” as Yanick bravely shared in the dialogue. The social and emotional learning program I advocated for approached students of color from the banking perspective: they need to be taught how to act. If I spent more time listening to Yanick to better understand the motivation behind her actions, she may have faced less pressure to change (and less punishment) and I may have learned how I could share the responsibility for change with her.

Social and Emotional Learning and Language

Jalen: Yeah...Ms. Walsh one day, she thought that me and Terrell had like this secret different language cuz Terrell said... because we were talking about something and Terrell said ‘fish’ how it ‘stunk’ and so one day she came to talk to us and she was like, ‘I know what the slang word for fish is’.... and we were looking at her like...what? She thought we were speaking some different ghetto-slang-language and we were talking about fish stinking.

Teachers tend to be middle class and are more willing to validate White middle class language that is similar to their own. My four-year old daughter is already acquiring the language needed to gain privileges in the suburban schools she will attend. She will speak a language recognizable by her teachers and faces no threat of being accused of “ghetto speak” like Jalen was. Success in school may be more directly linked to a child’s ability to communicate in a manner recognized and appreciated by the White dominant culture rather than their own cognitive intelligence (McLaren, 2003). Social and emotional learning and its use of common language attempts to standardize the

language that is used—language that is valued in a workspace structured by White norms. I was attracted to SEL because it validated my habits of language, justified my tendency to place the burden on my students to change, and reinforced my sense of superiority. The trainers in *Developmental Designs*[™] never expected me to analyze the relationship between culture and language, but it provided me with tools to help me place the burden on my young students to learn a new form of communication if they aimed to be successful in my classroom.

Social and emotional learning offered me a way to better control the language of some of my students of color. Teachers corrected my vulgar language as a kid but they never dismissed or judged me by my speech patterns or dialect. Students from communities of color, on the other hand, frequently enter school speaking in a manner that places them at a disadvantage. In the dialogue above, Jalen shared an incident where his teacher misconstrued a simple conversation he had with another student. He anticipated consequences as he describes his teacher (and my colleague who was also trained in *Developmental Designs*[™]) looking at him with a mistrustful eye. Students like Jalen, who speak differently than their White teachers are sometimes diminished politically and can be pressured to change through the use of punishment because their speech is not recognized as legitimate. Mary Ginley (1999) argues:

Negative attitudes regarding languages and cultures that are different from officially sanctioned norms also can lead to educational inequality if such attitudes result in behaviors or in school policies and practices that restrict or discredit cultural and linguistic differences. That is, the pressure that schools

place on students to assimilate is itself an example of educational inequality. (Ginley, 1999 p. 33)

The manner in which I speak brings automatic privileges but Black students like Jalen are placed at an automatic disadvantage because many of my White colleagues categorize his speech as inferior. In *Life in Schools* (2003) Peter McLaren discusses Basil Bernstein's argument that working class students use restricted language codes whereas middle-class children use elaborated codes which "govern their choice and combination of words and sentence structures" (McLaren, 2003 p. 219).

Jalen and Terrell were at a disadvantage because White teachers considered their language inferior ("ghetto-slang-language") and chastised or punished them for speaking in a manner at odds with language deemed appropriate. They should have been punished if they were speaking vulgarly but they were not, and the teacher jumped to conclusions. I may have used use a variety of techniques including social and emotional learning to force students like Jalen into docility. By default, this positioned White students like Molly in a privileged position because her speech was classified as educated and she was not expected to change. The following selection written for a paper at UMass at the time I was implementing the demerit system hints at my bias against language used by students in my school.

The negative behavior is compounded by parents who provoke, ignore or are unable to manage the behaviors. It is often easy to spot the source of negative behaviors. A common, yet cynical phrase heard at Apple School is, "obviously, the apple doesn't fall from the tree." That phrase is typically uttered by teachers

after a phone call or conference with the parent of a student exhibiting negative behavior. Children who grow up in homes where aggressive language is used frequently use similar language in school. Parents have told me more than once that they expect their child to fight back if they are belittled or pushed by another student. The parent may believe they are offering their children valuable self-defense advice but, in reality, retaliation exacerbates problems and prevents reasonable solutions. (Random Writings about Race, July 24th 2006)

My belief that parents were setting their kids up for failure by using *aggressive language* reveals how I positioned myself culturally in relation to my students and their families. I understood what a *reasonable solution* was, and I assumed that the parents of my students did not. Language made it possible for me to *easily spot the source of negative behaviors* indicating that I could assign levels of worth simply by picking up the phone. Students that spoke aggressively would certainly be subjected to demerits or “natural consequences”. The social and emotional learning program did not account for the historical and political nature of language but still placed expectations on the students to change their speech patterns. This hypocrisy perpetuated a system where those that spoke in a manner favorable to me received privileges while others faced correction. The data suggests that at a previous time I marked an important difference between the students that spoke like me, and those that did not. By doing so, I perpetuated the following unfortunate scenario:

Some students reach the schoolhouse door with the officially sanctioned language, culture, and background experiences and they are therefore more privileged from the very outset to succeed in the school setting. This is an inherently unfair situation: It is not that these particular conditions are innately better, but rather that they position some students to benefit more from school. (Nieto, 1999 p.34)

A school that punishes individuals for speaking without first exploring the historical or political nature of language continues the long tradition of deculturalization (Nieto, 1999 p. 34). My use of social and emotional learning to alter language demonstrates my desire to pull certain students toward my culture rather than enhancing my understanding of theirs. Kendall makes the point that

One of the areas in which we have the greatest power and privilege is in shaping “appropriate” language for everyone. Since the early ‘90s on college campuses, I have watched politeness and “civility” used to silence faculty, staff, and students of color, and white activists. We use our white privilege to define the parameters of conversation and communication, keeping our culture, manners, and language central. (Kendall, 2006 p. 172)

My interest in social and emotional instruction was due in part to its interest in standardizing the language spoken with regards to discipline. I probably would not have referred to Jalen’s words as “ghetto-slang-language” but I classified certain patterns and words as inappropriate for school because I misinterpreted the intent. I had the privilege of White speak and I saw it is my duty to reinforce its authenticity to the students of color that were setting themselves up for failure if their speech went unrestrained. The following data from my own writing suggests I explored the relationship between language and discipline.

In my own experience, gaining an understanding of the perspectives the students bring into the classroom is a constant challenge and requires me to remain open to new information and to adjust my teaching methods frequently. Some of my students grow up in homes where negative behavior is explored through conversation and where punishment is deemed unnecessary. Others have parents who spank them. Some parents may cordially ask their child, “Do you think you should shut off the TV and go to bed?” while others may demand, “you better shut that TV off now.” Teachers at my school appear to be respectful of cultural

differences and value the opportunity to work with students from such wide backgrounds. But, difficulties arise as teachers, including myself attempt to manage and process behaviors with students from vastly different cultures. Messages are lost or students grow resentful as teachers attempt to correct behavior patterns the students do not recognize as disruptive. (Teaching, Learning, Curriculum Journal, Sept 2006)

I recognized various forms of discourse but the fact I state with unwavering confidence that: *Messages are lost or students grow resentful as teachers attempt to correct behavior patterns the students do not recognize as disruptive* reveals I was discrediting types of discourse. The students are at fault, I surmised, because they failed to recognize the teachers are simply out to correct or *manage* their faulty *behavior patterns*. The way I spoke and disciplined students was the legitimized norm and I was, as Kendall states, using my White privilege to keep my White standards for speech central. Many students benefited from their teachers using common language with regards to discipline but for Others, I speculate it sparked resistance. Paulo Freire recognized the political nature of language and the dominant classes' interest in maintaining it:

When did a certain form of grammar become 'correct' as the standard? They did, of course. But, why not call it 'upper-class dominating English' instead of 'Standard English.' That authentic naming would reveal, instead of obscure, the politics of power and language in society. The struggle against that kind of obscuring, to liberate people who are exploited, demands light on reality. (Shor & Freire, 1987 p. 45)

Combing through my writing from 2006 with a critical race perspective reveals that my White privilege perpetuated a desire to construct the meaning of language on my own terms. I had the power to classify language as disruptive or proper and despite my insistence that my colleagues and I were *respectful of cultural differences and value the*

opportunity to work with students from such wide backgrounds, a more accurate statement would be that my colleagues and I were interested in the opportunity to make Others more like us. When correcting students for the way they expressed ideas, I may not have been helping as much as steering students towards language that matched my cultural expectations.

SEL and Controlling Discourse

Assad: Yeah, I talked a lot without raising my hand, yeah.

Matt: Yeah, so for me as a White teacher up there, you are disruptive. But in your mind you were actually participating and learning, correct?

Terrell: Yes.

Assad: Yes.

If I once perceived positive participation to be quiet listening as my selection indicates and my African American students perceived positive participation to be active vocal involvement, then I poorly received the habitus of these students. Under the demerit system I punished students for engaging in discourse patterns natural to them. My willingness to abandon the demerit system for a social and emotional learning program was a step away from relying on punishment to force compliance to my hegemonic influenced understanding of “proper” learning, but it was not a whole sale abandonment of hegemonic principles.

The educational researcher Geneva Gay (2010) would not call me a blatant racist, but rather a *cultural hegemonist* for disciplining my students for participating in a manner inconsistent my expectations (Gay, 2010). She writes that teachers

expect all students to behave according to the school's cultural standards of normality. When students of color fail to comply, the teachers find them unlovable, problematic, and difficult to honor or embrace without equivocation. (Gay, 2010 p. 49)

Ironically, myself and other members of the school's power structure saw the manner in which my urban student expressed their enthusiasm as harmful to their chances of success in the real world; despite the fact that my students may have perceived their own speech as engaged in learning. As a middle school teacher I know that students "speak out of turn" for a variety of reasons and it is too simplistic to assume it is all due to cultural disconnections. The problem, however, is that the hidden curriculum in my classroom may have been geared toward assimilating all students to my norms causing all behaviors, whether a sign of engagement or disruption to be managed with punishment.

The *looks, sound, and feel* practice is an essential component of the *Developmental Designs*TM model and I think reveals how the control of discourse was used to perpetuate hegemonic principles. The *look, sound, and feel* protocol was used to pre-teach classroom expectations by priming students to provide descriptive words when reviewing, for example, what walking down the hall to math class should *look, sound, and feel* like. The rationale was that if the language comes from the students, they will better understand it and therefore buy in to it and change their behaviors. But, would I accept, "I think walking down the hall looks like a bunch of my boys pushing each other

into the ladies”)? The *look, sound, and feel* protocol was always an exercise in controlling the language of the students by remote control. The *proper* way to walk down the halls was never legitimately open for student review or input.

Yanick: Ok, I got suspended

Matt: This year?

Yanick: Yeah, not long ago.

Yanick: It was just because I was with....Ok.. yes, we got into trouble all the time.

Jalen: You have to find a new friend.

Yanick: I was just like in the hallway and I guess we were being loud and my homeroom teacher, she come out and tells us to go back to class and I tell her nicely, “ok we will go back to class” and she just starts yelling at me, and you know me Mr. McLean, if she yells at me, I am going to yell back. ‘But can you just wait please’, and she just grabbed my hand so I did that thing that I usually do, I cursed at her. She literally, if she didn’t grab me I would have never sworn at her like that. When I went to the office [the dean] didn’t really want to hear it, she was like ‘you are a bad person’. Wow! It was like my second time coming here.

Matt: Did she say you were a bad person or did she say you did something bad?

Yanick: She was like ‘wow, you did something bad’ and she didn’t want to hear my side of the story. She just like started yelling at me and I felt like, ‘wow, I never thought that’.

As Yanick learned, walking down the hall without White privileges and making noise could open up a pathway for heavy school discipline. The expectations for sound in the hallways were always going to be established by the dominant authority and the students were always going to be steered into following these expectations. In fact, the

discourse around the hallways was established generations before and are the byproduct of the dominant cultures interpretation of proper hallway behavior, not Yanick's interpretation. Hegemony and my White privileges influenced my understanding of school behavior (and most likely Yanick's dean, although this is an assumption) and therefore the *looks, sound, and feel* approach appealed to me because I never considered other legitimate opinions about hallway language existed. From the beginning the kids offered the adjectives I expected.

The *looks, sounds, and feels* component of SEL tired quickly. The same two to three students in each class would raise their hands as many others rolled their eyes as if to say, "not again". Either the same couple of kids were trying to suck up to me, or they were simply doing their classmates a favor by regurgitating the language I wanted to hear just to expedite dismissal from class. The same canned responses were repeated time and time again. For example, when I asked students what walking down the hall should look sound and feel like, the responses would include: *it looks like kids keeping their hands to themselves, its sounds quiet, it feels good to have order*. Kids would commonly fail to follow the same expectation they voiced just moments before. The *look, sound and feel* sessions was veiled teacher talk—my language was coming out of the kids' mouths, and yet it failed to convince them that walking quietly and in a straight line down the hallway was in their best interest. Pushing and swearing quickly reemerged in the hallway as the honeymoon wore off.

A critic of my work might argue that quiet halls are essential to a well functioning school and students that make in noise in the hall should be called on their behavior. To answer this anticipated critique, I provide this vignette from my first year as an assistant principal: A teacher screamed at a group of students from the Dominican Republic and threatened them with sexual harassment charges for loudly laughing and walking down the hall with their arms around each others' hips. Were the sounds that pulled the teacher into the hallway more threatening to the students or to the teacher's sense of appropriateness? There are certain behaviors that need to be called on and this auto|ethnography is not an attempt to excuse all disruptive school behaviors as cultural. But, the problem is students of color are being disproportionately disciplined in schools and unless the role of culture, the hidden curriculum and the reasons why the burden for change is not shared between teachers and students is explored, this phenomena will continue to be reproduced from generation to generation.

Call and Response

Matt: So traditionally, the churches I went to as a White kid growing up in the suburbs were very quiet. You sit there, you listen to the minister, you don't say a word at all. You're quiet.

Terrell: That ain't my church.

Matt: What is your church like?

Terrell: Oh Lord, Jesus!!! Hallejullah. Ohhhhhh!

Matt: Terrell do you go to church?

Terrell: Oh yeah.

Matt: And they're louder?

Terrell: I haven't been to church in a while, but I go to church occasionally and my church... and my church is way opposite of the churches on T.V. late night, like at 2 o'clock when it is like...

Matt: So, it is more interactive?

Terrell: We have one of those churches where it is like you go in there fat, you come out like sweating and 'praise be!'

Matt: When the minister says something, people respond to it. Let me bring it back to the classroom. When you got a White teacher in front of the classroom, do they expect the kids to act more like you would see in a White church? For example, when I was teaching you guys, I learned like half way through the year this thing...that Black kids in general tend to be more interactive with their teacher, and they want to talk and to them. They are showing them what they know...a teacher says something and they speak out. But, in the traditional White classroom, you can get in trouble for that right?

Terrell: Yeah, you just listen.

Jalen: Man, I never thought about that.

Matt: So, what do you think about that?

Assad: I think what you said is kind of true. Like the Black student, the teachers might not... 'oh, he doesn't know nothing, put him in the corner, give him a packet and tell him to turn it in at the end of the day'.

Matt: Yeah, and if you call out, your like a trouble maker.

Assad: Yeah, and I feel like what you are saying is true. I talk a lot in class and I try to participate to show the teacher I know what is going on.

Terrell: Exactly.

Matt: Yeah, like were like.

Assad: I am trying to show that I understand, I am not dumb, I know what is going on.

Matt: I was about to say.. that you were like the worst at that. But really what you are saying, is that you were like really good at that....you were showing you were interactive, you were involved in the lesson.

Wendy Schwartz (2001) highlights that “certain behaviors that African American students engage in may be seen as disruptive and rebellious when in fact, the student is engaging the material in a manner culturally relevant to him” (Schwartz, 2001 p. 2). She reports that African American students may be showing a strong interest in a lesson when they speak out loudly, interrupt a teacher, or argue a point. As a new urban teacher, I most likely interpreted this type of behavior as disrespectful and off task when in fact my students were engaged and responding in a positive manner to my questions (Schwartz, 2001). The approach I took as a social studies teacher to deliver content may have disengaged students like Assad and Terrell because my White preacher demeanor encouraged further disconnection between them and I. The White preacher approach worked in the wealthy suburbs of Silicon Valley but not for many of my students in my urban classroom who may have craved a livelier and more vocal interaction. The following data shows how I strictly categorized certain classroom discourse patters as negative and even un-American.

Thomas Jefferson believed an educated populace is essential for the survival of a democratic society. At the root of a comprehensive social studies education is the need to inform future voters on how to navigate their government and to become citizens that contribute to the greater good. I believe that schools are experiencing more difficult and complex behavior issues in part because as a nation, we have lost focus on the ideals of citizenship. Negative student behavior in schools is a symptom of the breakdown in citizenship. Students who sabotage lessons and impede the learning of others are failing to recognize (or do not care)

about the essential need of education to perpetuate democratic values. Yet, if you ask students about what they see as the most essential American value, I believe many would say it is the freedom of speech and expression. Much of the ideals of democratic freedoms are deeply rooted in students but they seem to pick and choose which values they outwardly express in their behavior. For example, many students willingly express their opinions- an essential principle in a democratic society. But, these same students may not remain quiet and respectful when it is time for another student to speak their mind. (Instructor O'Toole, First Draft of QPP, July 2006)

Clearly, I wrote this at a time when I was frustrated by being talked over during a history lecture. But what is troubling to me is how my failure to recognize cultural differences caused me to cast my students as traitors. I valued “quiet and respectful” and students that did not practice these traits during a history lesson where engaging in an act of “sabotage”. Researchers Carol Weinstein, Sandra Tomlinson-Clarke, and Mary Curran (2004) write that European American teachers are accustomed to a “passive-receptive” discourse pattern described as a classroom with students sitting quietly while the teacher speaks (Weinstein et al., 2004 p. 2). African American students on the other hand, may be more accustomed to an “active participatory pattern” frequently referred to as “call and response” (Weinstein et al., 2004 p. 2). There are many different styles of teaching and it is too simplistic to state that all White or Black teachers approach classroom discussions in a similar manner. Many argue, for example that learning best happens in quiet-passive receptive learning environment where distractions are kept to a minimum.

In my first two years of teaching in an urban school, my short lecture that started each class became the line of scrimmage and students could face punishment if I was spoken over. Terrell and Assad would be ejected from class during this phase of a lesson

because I interpreted their speaking out in a call and response manner as defiance. After learning about various styles of interchanges between students and teachers (such as a more active participatory pattern) I was able to loosen the structure and create a learning environment more conducive to a variety of styles. Once I was able to notice the learning that could still occur when conversations were more fluid, I used punishment less. Sharing the burden of change with students involves recognizing the learning that can occur in ways that may at first seem contradictory to a teacher's sense of appropriate practice.

Passive Resistance

Yanick: Like in my classes, sometime like I don't like to speak out because I don't want people to think that I am stupid or that I don't know what I am talking about. If the teacher just asks me what the story was about I am just going to keep my mouth shut like I am not going to say anything because I am more afraid of what other people might think about me if I get the answer wrong or something.

The lack of cultural synchronization between teachers and African American children may discourage students from trying. If I frequently had to use punishment to silence Assad and Terrel during classroom lectures, Yanick posed a different challenge; I frequently had a tough time getting her to speak up. Boykin, Tyler, Miller and Hurley (2005) argue in the article, "Cultural values in the home and school experiences of low-income African-American students" that Afrocentric "cultural themes, such as communalism, movement expressiveness, verve, and the coimportance of cognition and affect" are not validated in schools and "may be dismissed as contextually inappropriate"

even though research shows that validating the culture of African American youth can lead to improved academic performance (Boykin et al., 2005 p. 525). This form of passive resistance too often ends up being self-destructive since the world of school is just a microcosm of the larger world. Yanick's words above reveal she may have felt disconnected with her teachers and shut down rather than attempt to change the manner in which she spoke.

The renowned and controversial educational thinker and researcher, John Ogbu believes that poor relations between teachers and Black students result in disruptive behaviors and academic disengagement (Nichols, 2004). He believes the behaviors exhibited by many Black students result from forces of racial stratification that impacts Black students in three ways. First, Blacks have been denied "equal access to education through unequal resources, segregation, and the like" (Ogbu, 1994 p. 287). Second, Black students are treated differently in the schools they attend. They are more likely to be tracked, tested, misclassified, and represented poorly in academic texts. Third, and most complex, "Black people's own perceptions and responses to their schooling in the context of their overall experience of racial subordination" (Ogbu, 1994 p. 288) discourages school success. Ogbu believes that Black people have not been "helpless victims" of racial stratification and have responded to their minority status throughout history by developing "their own folk theory to explain how American society works differently for them compared with Whites" (Ogbu, 1994 p. 272). Yanick's declaration that she is going to "just keep her mouth shut" is consistent with Ogbu's assessment that

Black students feel disconnected from schooling because they don't recognize it as a vehicle for empowerment. Embedded in this folk theory, may be the understanding that formal education will not lead to advancement because racism will deny access to quality work.

Many have criticized the work of Ogbu for making sweeping and unsubstantiated generalizations about Black attitudes towards school. In one study, for example, researchers Ainsworth-Darnell and Downey (1998) found evidence that contradicts Ogbu's central argument that Black students have disproportionately negative attitudes about school. They sampled populations of White and Black students and found the White students were more likely to hold negative opinions.

Focusing only on those African Americans who dropped out of school between the eighth and tenth grades reveals a group of African Americans much like the ones Ogbu describes frustrated with their occupational chances, pessimistic about their futures, and resistant to school goals (results available from authors on request). Because the goal of the oppositional culture model is to explain societal racial differences in school performance (Ogbu 1978, 1991a), we contend that tests of the full range of African American students rather than those focusing only on the most discouraged are more appropriate. We agree that, under some conditions, African Americans may see little profit in continuing their educations, in part because they perceive limited opportunities in the labor market. Yet when we analyze a representative group of African Americans, we see patterns that contradict the oppositional culture model. It is important, therefore, not to misconstrue the problems of the most disadvantaged African Americans as necessarily characteristic of the experiences of all African Americans. (Ainsworth-Darnell & Downey, 1998 p. 547)

Regardless of whether or not Yanick's attitudes are reflective of Black students in the aggregate is less relevant than the fact that she is a student that felt obligated to shut up. Yanick would be more willing to actively participate if her way of communicating was

validated. An intention of SEL is to make students feel a sense of belonging, but because I was leveraging codified expectations for language to change students and make them believe it was for their own good, I was continuing the process of silencing voices that could broaden rather than curtail dialogue. Instead of acknowledging and rewarding expression, I shut it down as I used a variety of tools to change the way some kids spoke.

In the 1990's there was significant controversy regarding an Oakland Unified resolution acknowledging Ebonics as a dialect of English. Ogbu was also involved in this highly contentious debate because he recognized a difference in communication style between teachers and Black students.

In the case of Black Americans, the problem lies partly in miscommunication because students differ from their teachers in social meanings and usage of English. These sociolinguists remind us that Black children and their teachers learn different structural rules for their respective English dialects (i.e., grammar, phonology, and vocabulary of Black English and standard English) as well as different cultural rules for using those dialects in their respective speech communities. They point out that within their own speech community Black children do not have the kind of language problems associated with them at school, where they have to communicate with people from a standard English speech community. (Ogbu, 1999 p. 148)

Ogbu supported the resolution because he wanted to secure funding to teach Black students how to code switch their language in an effort to level the playing field in school. The Black linguist John McWhorter (1997) discredited this attempt and believed it “insults the intelligence” of Black students who, like Appalachian children, are capable of negotiating the “one-inch gap between their home dialect and standard English” (McWhorter, 1997 p. 2).

When I started teaching in an urban school, I believed SEL offered a sound research-based method to teach urban kids the real world language skills they needed to be successful. *Developmental Designs*TM used euphemisms (“a mistake in routine”) to correct language but the end result remained the same. The social and emotional learning program reinforced deculturalization by explicitly teaching some students how to talk. It is not inherently wrong to hold high expectations for language but a constant drumbeat of codifying language into right and wrong categories has the potential to send messages to students about how they express themselves. Students like Terrell, Assad and Yanick could eventually become confused or angry and may have refrained from participating academically as the rules and norms of the classroom environment punished them for speaking in accordance with their cultural capital.

Many components of social and emotional learning programs invite student input but students’ perspectives were only superficially sought, understood, and/or validated by school officials like myself. Superficial tricks designed to control student discourse could not alter the deep structures of culture so “positive” gains were short lived. I naively assumed that having students spit my own words back at me would be enough to thwart cultural practices more powerful than the tools I used to suppress them. In reality, my interest in using language to pacify and change students of color instead amplified the differences in culture as deculturalization was met with resistance in its many forms.

Social and Emotional Learning and Control

Matt: Seriously, this is the stuff I want to get to. So do you feel... So, this is the part of the conversation that can get a little uncomfortable. It's a safe place, I am not going to share what happens here, your name is going to change, but.... So, when you are getting disciplined... if you are an African American kid and you are getting disciplined from a White teacher, are you less likely to take it seriously?

Jalen: It don't matter for me. I don't really see things as Black or White... til one time, you remember. I looked around, you know!, you know! "BIB", usually that was just a joke.

Whole Group: *laughter*

Matt: What was that one time?

Jalen: I told you...when me Yanick, Ayida, Gia were down stairs, and she wouldn't like let any of us go upstairs with the rest of the class. And I was like, 'why not,' and I was joking when I said this...'because we are Black and they are not'. And we were like...and she said, 'yes, that is why'.

Matt: Was she being sarcastic?

Yanick: No, she was like being so serious. She looked us right in the eyes.

There is evidence in my writing that suggests that my interest in maintaining my White privileges encouraged me to control students from subordinated cultures rather than work to help liberate them. The data suggests that my attraction to social and emotional learning system could have been inspired by fear (crying in the principal's office about the scary Latino boy) and the positivist reaction to fear, the need to increase control. Social and emotional learning provided me the opportunity to feel as if I was an

agent for change while still comfortably resting in a blanket of White privilege. Writing explored early in this auto|ethnography suggests that my attitudes about urban students were shaped in part by popular media that frequently highlights criminal activity present in poor urban communities; neighborhoods I never lived in. (i.e. *We are all in danger. Our future looks desolate. The threat is so real and powerful, we may be helpless.*)

Pedro Noguera of the University of California at Berkeley (2001) writes:

Just as the threat of violent crime in society is characterized largely as a problem created by Black perpetrators, violence in schools is also equated with Black, and in some cases, Latino, students. (Noguera, 1995 p. 201)

The view I had of urban communities was brought into the classroom in the form of accusatory reactions to behavior that I may associate with violence and a breakdown of order. I reacted to behaviors from a law and order outlook because from my perspective, “the students often seem to embody the traits and exhibit the behavior of the hoodlums and thugs [I] have heard about or seen from afar” (Noguera, 1995 p. 204).

As a new urban teacher, I did not fully understand my place in the context of urban schools and I became focused on reestablishing order out of chaos by changing students to be more like me. Subconsciously, I may have viewed school discipline as a tool to perpetuate my own “symbols of power and authority” (Noguera, 1995 p. 198). The data shows I assumed poor behavior resulted, in part, from deficits that needed to be repaired. This justification provided me the excuse to place the burden of change onto some of my students. My enthusiastic adoption of a social and emotional learning program started after the demerit system failed (a system based on punishing students for

contrarian behaviors) and the feelings of control I felt in the suburbs continued to elude me. I sought new methods to exercise control over students that I perceived to have lost control (Noguera, 1995 p. 198).

The quote about our former librarian that opened this section exposes horrible racism playing in out in my former school. My first instinct was to double back on my White privileges and doubt my students by inquiring whether or not the teacher was being sarcastic, as if that makes a difference to young kids. The librarian admitted she was deliberately adding additional controls to students based on their race and most educators would agree (I hope) that her comments were atrocious. I would never admit to intentionally limiting a student's movement in the building because of his race. A critical review of my writing, however, suggests I was motivated to control urban students in a markedly different way than their suburban counterparts and in some ways, there may be little difference between the librarian and myself with regards to impact on some students of color. My interest in control is revealed in a paper I wrote using school crime data. I argued that schools are on the front lines of society and cannot be expected to manage the enormity of the problems they face.

Reporters frequently fail to report on the incredible obstacles and challenges schools face when attempting to fund schools that leave no child behind. In addition, popular media also largely ignores the question of whether high suspension rates are caused by behaviors influenced by factors that are largely outside the realm of what a school can control.

The popular misconception that schools are failing to take action to improve school safety is wrong. A more likely scenario is that the floodgates many urban schools have erected to stop criminal activity from threatening their schools are

simply not strong enough, or backed by enough resources, to hold back the tide. The popular media that criticize urban schools for not reducing school crime must include an analysis on the community the school is located in and discuss the capacity of the school to manage the often times extreme behaviors that enter the building each school day. After all, public schools are more of a mirror on society than any other institution that exists today. (Taking Action: Do schools with high suspension rates also have policies designed to reduce the behaviors that lead to out-of-school suspensions, 2007)

This data shows how I once perceived schools to be overwhelmed by students whose *criminal behavior* needed to be controlled. The *floodgates*, in my view, were collapsing under the deluge of urban blight and decay and without adequate reinforcements the urban school as an institution would collapse. A classical historian might compare this analysis to barbarians pushing into the Roman Empire and threatening the civilized order of things. In this context, the social and emotional reform initiative I adopted would be attractive because it offered methods to teach students how to control themselves.

The demerit system was based on the traditional premise that associating bad behavior with bad consequences would bring about positive behavior. Modifying behavior using a social and emotional learning program was perceived as a necessary step to push back against the tide of incivility. I know now that this approach, although helpful in removing some of the angst in the classroom, does not encourage teachers to share the responsibility for change. Moreover, the practice of empowering students towards “self-control” that *Developmental Designs*TM and other SEL programs advocate for deserves scrutiny (Origins: Developmental design "about the approach".2012). Can a

student from a subordinated culture truly achieve self-control in schools if hegemony has defined the cultural capital validated?

Social and emotional programs attempt to reduce conflict by creating a common school culture and by teaching all students how to operate in the defined space of a school building. Although *Developmental Designs*TM did help many kids, it also proved unable to be fully transformative because its reliance on “self-control” did not resonate with all the students. The *Developmental Designs*TM web page lays out “seven key social-emotional skills” that are practiced every day. They include “Cooperation, Communication, Assertion, Responsibility, Empathy, Engagement, and Self-control” (<http://www.originsonline.org/developmental-designs/about-approach#how-it-works> Accessed 10/7/12). I was trained by the facilitators to speak to students in terms of self-control (i.e. *your continued calling out shows me that you do not have self control, please take a break*). The problem, I have since learned, is that defining self-control, or the loss of it, can be subjective especially when cultural differences separate those in power from those without power. Researchers in the field of School Psychology, Pamela Fenning and Jennifer Rose (2007), have found that

the teacher’s perception of loss of control determines whether the misdeed will be handled within the classroom or deteriorates into a heated exchange between student and teacher, leading to the student’s removal from the classroom. (Fenning & Rose, 2007 p. 538)

These researchers argue that too often, poor and minority students are singled out for disciplinary infractions because school authority “perceive such individuals as ‘not fitting into the norm of the school’” (Fenning & Rose, 2007 p. 538). Schools have anxiety over

maintaining control over student behavior and will therefore label students perceived as outsiders as “dangerous” or “troublemakers” (Fenning & Rose, 2007 p. 538). My school administrators tended to support my perception of control and disciplinary consequences were directly tied to these perceptions. As a new urban teacher loaded up with White privileges and struggling with classroom management, I would have been quick to define all sorts of behavior as a loss of control and my students were punished based on the referrals I wrote. In retrospect, I recognize I was not trying to teach self-control, I was trying to pacify students to make them into something I feared less.

Conclusion

My love affair with social and emotional learning programs was intense but it was more of a summer romance than a long-term commitment. *Developmental Designs™* was superior to the demerit program I designed but I still approached discipline from the same positivist approach and I placed the responsibility for change onto the students without examining my own positionality. As the routines tired, I was left realizing that the foundation of this approach favored certain students over others due to its inability to get to the heart of the conflict between some students and teachers.

After using the program for two years, there were improvements, but I cannot say that the school was radically changed. The deep structures of the school still favored my own cultural, social, and political capital and students were still required to come around to my way of thinking even though other approaches could have worked better.

Developmental Designs[™] did reduce my use of punitive discipline, and that was progress, but, because the instructors did not encourage me to reflect on my own race and the values and privileges embedded in the hidden curriculum, the transformation was only superficial. The social and emotional learning program I used did not include a critical examination of the complexities of American urban social life and instead just offered new tricks with the flawed intention of repairing deficits. My intention is not to bash a program that has many redeemable qualities; unlike the demerit program and other more punitive punishment systems, *Developmental Designs*[™] did reduce some of the conflict that tainted the school environment. But, it did not achieve a meaningful transformation because for many students, change was still their responsibility. SEL can be one method but it cannot be the only one.

CHAPTER V

FORCING CHANGE WITH KNOWLEDGE AND ACADEMIC CURRICULUM

Introduction

I do have a lot of other ideas, like a lawyer, doctor or actor, but I sort of narrowed it down to lawyer or engineer. I would like to get married and have kids. (Sixth Grade Writing Journal, November 4th, 1987)

I left my own schooling believing that the only learning that mattered was learning that can be marked with a grade. My sixth grade journal provides data that at an early age, I was thinking about careers that were dependent upon formal degrees. When I became a social studies teacher, I taught curriculum that was representative of this hegemonic paradigm that values positivist approaches to education where knowledge is rational, efficient and can be measured (Giroux, 2001). The following analogy from Lisa Delpit (2006) best explains how the overreliance on this form of knowledge can actually lead to curriculum that can crush beauty.

I have often pondered that if we taught African-American children how to dance in school, by the time they had finished the first five workbooks on the topic, we would have a generation of remedial dancers! (Delpit, 2006 p. 393)

As a social studies teacher, I relied on curriculum I thought encouraged critical thinking, valued other ways of knowing, and nurtured independence. In retrospect, I recognize that the curriculum I taught had a similar impact as the hidden and social and emotional learning curricula: It put an additional burden for change onto my students while my interpretation of knowledge remained the same. Citizenship, for example, is socially constructed and its definition can vary widely across cultures.

Although it is generally agreed that social studies is about citizenship education, clearly both its content and methodologies have been much affected by social and political agendas. The question, of course, is whether social studies should promote a brand of citizenship that is adaptive to the status quo and interests of the socially powerful or whether it should promote citizenship aimed at transforming and reconstructing society—a question that has fueled debates since Jones first employed the term “social studies.” (Vinson & Ross, 2001 p. 42)

As with the hidden and social and emotional curricula, the academic curriculum I used was a product of cultural hegemony and, as Vinson and Ross state, was used as a tool to protect the socially powerful at the expense of some of my students of color. I did not select curriculum with the intention of suppressing Others but because I did not question the social and political forces that shaped it, I was omitting various world perspectives from the classroom. When I transitioned from suburban to urban teaching I did not change up my curriculum meaning students from a wide variety of cultural and socio-economic backgrounds were expected to learn someone else’s history that did not undergo a critical review.

Academic Curriculum: A Tool to Validate and Invalidate Knowledge

The marketing of knowledge as an objective truth rather than socially and politically constructed has kept communities of color at a disadvantage in the competitive game of “knowledge” accumulation. I did not question the social dimensions of the education I received as a young student, and I was privileged to be transmitted the knowledge of power in the dominant culture. I trusted the source of my knowledge and believed my “progressive” opinions sufficient to challenge conventional thinking. When I transitioned from suburban to urban teaching, I may have thought the curriculum I taught promoted critical thinking but because the curricula was a byproduct of hegemony, it served to reinforce my cultural values that may have put other ways of knowing at risk.

Henry Giroux (1981) defines hegemony as “a form of ideological control in which dominant beliefs, values, and social practices are produced and distributed throughout a whole range of institutions such as schools, the family, mass media and trade unions” (p. 94). Academic curricula, therefore, is a tool schools use to disseminate dominant beliefs, values, and social practices.

Education is deeply implicated in the politics of culture. The curriculum is never simply a neutral assemblage of knowledge, somehow appearing in the texts and classrooms of a nation. It is always part of a selective tradition, someone’s selection, some group’s vision of legitimate knowledge. It is produced out of the cultural, political, and economic conflicts, tensions, and compromises that organize and disorganize a-people. As I argue in *Ideology and Curriculum and Official Knowledge*, the decision to define some groups’ knowledge as the most legitimate, as official knowledge, while other groups’ knowledge hardly sees the light of day, says something extremely important about who has power in society. (Apple, 1993 p. 222)

The insidious nature of cultural hegemony is realized over time, as the oppressed lose consciousness of their oppression and even participate in their own domination. As forms of knowledge disappear from the “light of day,” the knowledge valued by the dominant culture becomes paramount and becomes reflected in the academic curricula with little scrutiny. Hegemony works by normalizing ideas of race and racial categories for both the oppressor and the oppressed (Williams, 2008). It elevates certain beliefs, values, and practices to a point where they are universal and unnoticed. A student (and teacher for that matter) that attends a public school from Kindergarten through high school will most likely not recognize how the academic curricula they are exposed to is a form of social control because he or she is completely engulfed in it.

Cultural hegemony has increasingly become the force used (consciously and subconsciously) by members of the White dominant class to subordinate cultures. Police forces and the military maintained social control through physical force, barriers, and overt intimidation before industrialization (Giroux, 1981). In the modern world, technical and scientific developments have allowed for populations of people to be controlled through an “elaborate system of social norms and imperatives” such as academic curricula (Giroux 1981, p. 39). Unlike a military checkpoint, which is located at a fixed time and space, social norms can more insidiously impact and transform all aspect of daily lives. They permeate culture completely and not only involve the transferring of ideas but also lived experiences (Giroux, 1981 p. 94). The social studies I taught and the

textbooks the students used as resources, therefore, espoused values consistent with the cultural hegemony of the dominant class.

In general, the authority figures in urban public schools are racially and culturally different from the students they serve. Forty-one percent of the student population in United States elementary and secondary schools are minorities but only 16.5% of teachers are minorities. The National Center for Educational Statistics (2013) reports that minority students are highly likely to attend schools with high minority populations.

In the 2004-05 school year, 24 percent of public elementary and secondary students attended schools where at least three-quarters of the students were minorities. Forty-two percent attended schools with less than a quarter minority enrollment. Minority groups differ in the extent to which they attend minority predominant schools. Some 52 percent of Black students and 58 percent of Hispanic students attended schools where 75 percent or more of students were minorities. Relatively small proportions of Black and Hispanic children attended schools with low minority enrollment. Nine percent of Black children and 8 percent of Hispanic children attended schools with less than 25 percent minority children. (Status and trends in the education of racial and ethnic minorities.2007)

The percentage of minority teachers clearly does not come close to matching the percentage of minority students. U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan highlighted this issue in 2010 by presenting statistics on African American representation in the classroom.

It is especially troubling that less than 2 percent of our nation's 3.2 million teachers are African-American males. On average, roughly 300,000 new teachers are hired a year in America — and just 4,500 of them are black males. It is not good for any of our country's children that only one in 50 teachers is a black man. (Burns, December 10, 2010)

The statistics overwhelmingly show that for most urban youth, their teachers do not share similar cultural or socio-economic backgrounds. I am one of these teachers (now administrator) that does not look like the children I serve. Because the demographics of the teaching profession is consistent with the demographics of the dominant American culture, various forms of knowledge are pushed to the sidelines as curricula born out of positivist rationales are ubiquitous. As I look back at my social studies teaching, I recognize that despite that I self-identified with progressive educators, I did little to shake up the curricula I taught to my extremely diverse class. Gloria Ladson-Billings (2003) shares her frustration as the only female, African American social studies teacher in her school.

The social studies profession should be the most overt of the school subjects to insist upon the recruitment, training, and retention of a diverse professional teaching force. My own experience as a social studies teacher is instructive as to the way schools as organizations actively discourage new professionals and their new perspectives. As the only woman and only African American in my department my views were regularly challenged. To some degree I chalked this up as my running counter to the "old boys network." However, by the time I became a part of the academy and was considered a scholar of some import, I thought that some of that might change. I am sad to report that at the college and university level, social studies education remains as frozen in its old paradigms as it was in the late 1960s. The governance, research agenda, knowledge production, and demographics of college level teaching in social studies education look very much like it looked more than 30 years ago when I was preparing to teach. Of course, some faculty have included "diversity" topics in their syllabi but much of it remains the same. Social studies educators continue to debate the definition of social studies. They continue to argue over the need for single discipline study versus integrated social sciences. They continue to fight about depth versus coverage. They pay almost no attention to their complete failure to nurture a new cadre of social studies educators who can move us past these old debates. (Ladson-Billings, 2003a p. 5)

I recognize myself in the educators she criticizes. I included diverse topics but mostly from my own perspective, and I remember getting hung up in the depth versus coverage debates. I did try to mix things up by bringing in guest speakers from a range of backgrounds but could this occasional experience counteract the hundreds of lessons that reinforced a narrow scope of knowledge production? In retrospect, I did not seek out diverse forms of knowledge in my first two years of urban teaching and as a result, I expected some of my students to cast off their ways of knowing in favor of mine.

My approach to teaching social studies involved projects, posters and plays, but on most days “learning” could not happen unless pen was in hand and paper was on desk. This manifestation of learning is linked to my Western cultural orientation and my adherence to the banking concept of education where information is deposited into students that passively await it. In the article “Letting in the Sun: Native Youth Transform their School with Murals” (2007), Alejandro Lopez and McClellan Hall note:

Above all else, Western education stressed the use of the written word, mathematical symbol, and a plethora of complex technologies. It also places a premium on listening, note taking, and the absorption of large amounts of information that only occasionally find their application outside the classroom. (Lopez & Hall, 2007 p. 31)

I would be doing my students a huge disservice if I did not emphasize writing but success in my classroom was exclusively linked to a student’s ability to express ideas effectively on paper. There are many ways knowledge can be assessed and the failure to loosen the structure of a grade book to allow for various forms of expression provides a barrier to success. Many of my students could have learned better through activities that nurtured

different forms of expression but my need to measure learning with grades and standardized assessments discouraged me from making these experiences the norm.

It is not hard to see how year after year of this kind of staid, repetitive activity results in growing levels of boredom and dissatisfaction among certain children. This is particularly true for those who are more visually, kinesthetically, or musically inclined, as is the case of many native youth, and for whom the experience of English, whether spoken, written or read for its own sake or at the service of teaching math or social studies, is not compelling enough to hold their interest for long. (Lopez & Hall, 2007 p.31)

These two authors were discussing Native students in mainstream schools, but, arguably, this style of knowledge transmission can rankle any student that is unconvinced of the knowledge being transmitted or the deliverer's legitimacy. My reliance on paper and pencil or more passive learning meant that students who learned differently were expected to change to meet my teaching style if they desired academic success.

Legitimate Knowledge

In the cultural fields I grew up in, a college diploma meant success and not receiving one meant failure. The status of the college a person attended helped determine his or her degree of success. I felt insecure when I applied solely to state universities and I apprehensively defended my choices to friends that bragged about their ivy and sub-ivy prospects. I realize retrospectively that regardless of the school I attended, I would have been exposed to academic curricula constructed, validated and reproduced by the dominant class and the knowledge I brought into college was automatically validated. My parents, community, and schools cultivated a "legitimate" knowledge and I worked to perpetuate this knowledge as both a student and teacher. I grew up believing that critical

thinking involved challenging ideas and political positions but I was privileged to not have to question how racism and culture constructed the very terms of the debate. In a published interview Lisa Delpit (1995) argues:

For the most part, one is not aware of one's culture. People, having grown up in a particular culture, believe that that's just the way the world is. Many teachers and educators don't realize that, first, they have a particular culture, and second, their culture, generally, is the culture of power. (Levine, Lowe, Peterson, & Tenorio, 1995 p. 141)

Today, I recognize the critical constructivist idea about knowledge: it does not emerge from "subjects nor from objects but from a dialectical relationship between the knower (subject) and the known (object)" (Kincheloe, 2008 p. 42). Giroux taught me that with regards to knowledge and its transmission,

The question to be analyzed is not so much *what* is considered legitimate knowledge as much as *how* is it that some knowledge is labeled legitimate and some is not. What is the source of legitimation? Or put another way, what is the relationship between school knowledge and the distribution of power and privileges in the larger society? (Giroux, 1984 p. 75)

My early college writing reveals that I did not question how the knowledge I taught was selected for legitimation. I was concerned more with delivery than content because consistent with Freire's banking concept, knowledge is something I was charged to give to someone else, not question (Freire, 1993).

The following data reveals how I accepted a clear line between the educated and uneducated—or those that possessed my knowledge and those that lacked it. I perceived social problems as clutter that interfered with the transmission of curriculum and I lacked

the ability to recognize that Others may possess valuable knowledge to make the curriculum more inclusive.

Instead of educating the children, teachers play the catch up game and try to bring students to the level they should be at before school begins. Educational standards are lower today than ever before. Instead of focusing on literature and history, schools spend much of their time dealing with societal problems like aids and teenage pregnancy, which can largely be avoided through education. (Televisions role in Societal Decline, February. 15, 1995)

The data suggests that I viewed an education as something separate from the social world with various “levels” of worth, and I advocated for people dropping their personal problems to better focus on acquiring knowledge. Because of my privileged class, race and gender position, I was “insulated from the benefits of the double consciousness of the subjugated and [was] estranged from a visceral appreciation of suffering” (Kincheloe, 2008 p. 144). I had the privilege to believe that “problems” were just diluting the core mission of school, which appeared to be filling students with certified knowledge contained within English and social studies curricula (Kincheloe, 2008). I continued:

The school system can't correct the problems because it is unable to deal with the quality of students. These children grow up into adults who raise their children with the same values. When society reintroduces education, spiritualism, and encourages children to experience the world, the circle will break. (Televisions role in Societal Decline, February. 15, 1995)

I recognized in the above data how culture is nurtured and reproduced with each generation, but only in the way that Other cultures were failing to meet my standards for decency. I was not naming the Other in terms of race, ethnicity, culture etc. Rather, I was just defining the Other in juxtaposition to my own, *superior* knowledge. I believed

that my knowledge and the curriculum I used to legitimize it could save the world. Parents that failed to teach their children to value what I valued, I surmised, were contributing to the decline of civilization. The sentence, *When society reintroduces education, spiritualism, and encourages children to experience the world, the circle will break* offers a clear window into my limited understanding about knowledge and how my status afforded me the privilege of thinking that Others are not successful simply because they turned their attention away from education and spiritualism. At the time, I did not understand the political dimensions of academic curricula and believed it “involved passing ‘certified truths’ along to passive students whose role was generally to commit such unexamined truths to memory” (Kincheloe, 2008 p. 18).

Critics of the constructivist approach I have grown to appreciate would argue that a society needs a common body of knowledge to foster a common identity. E.D. Hirsch’s (1995) push for cultural literacy is based on his premise that too much diversity and pluralism in academic curriculum threatens a common national discourse due to an erosion of cultural literacy.

The dominant symbol for the role of the school was the symbol of the melting pot. But from early times we have also resisted this narrow uniformity in our culture. The symbol of the melting pot was opposed by the symbol of the stew pot, where our national ingredients kept their individual characteristics and contributed to the flavor and vitality of the whole. That is the doctrine of pluralism. It has now become the dominant doctrine in our schools, especially in those subjects, English and history, that are closest to culture making. In math and science, by contrast, there is wide agreement about the contents of a common curriculum. But in English courses, diversity and pluralism now reign without challenge. I am persuaded that if we want to achieve a more literate culture than we now have, we shall need to restore the balance between these two equally American traditions of

unity and diversity. We shall need to restore certain common contents to the humanistic side of the school curriculum. But before we can make much headway in that direction, we shall also need to modify the now-dominant educational principle that holds that any suitable materials of instruction can be used to teach the skills of reading and writing. I call this the doctrine of educational formalism. (Hirsch, 1995 p. 160)

When I was first exposed to Hirsch as a graduate student, I remember having a visceral negative response because it sounded to me as a form of educational fascism. But, when I review my own writing from the same social studies methods course and sift it through the various theories I have employed, my own educational philosophy at the time was not far removed from his advocacy for a doctrine of educational formalism.

In February 1998, my social studies methods professor assigned a fictional letter home to the parents of our first social studies class. The manner in which I perceived social studies curriculum suggests I intended to use it as a tool for social control. I was selling curriculum as something that could enhance “social order”.

Your child will develop an objective understanding of their nation's place in the world and finally, your child will learn to see social studies as a living breathing discipline and will develop an appreciation for how world events and issues effect everything they will ever do.

The ability to synthesize information and come to conclusions is a life skill that will enhance their standard of living. It will also allow them to be conscientious citizens with an interest in preserving and enhancing social order. Obviously, there is no single lesson plan that can accomplish this goal. It must be done, rather, over time and through an understanding of the dynamics behind social and political issues. This course will help them because if nothing else, this course is designed to introduce the complexities behind world events. (Dynamics, February 1998)

The data suggests I recognized the value in understanding “the dynamics behind social and political issues” and I would encourage students to synthesis information to construct their own worldviews. I was not asking my future students, however, to holistically dissect the curriculum I provided or to assess how their own cultural capital and knowledge interacts with it. I sought to create “conscientious citizens” because I had a vested interest in maintaining the status quo and because I saw my students as being deficient in this area. I argued that social studies curriculum could be used to analyze the “complexities” of the world but my goal, like Hirsch’s, involved “preserving” not questioning social order. Rather than empowering students to recognize their position in society, I deemed it more important to deposit into them cultural capital that was more relevant to my world than theirs. McLaren writes how schools depreciate the capital of some students in favor of others.

Cultural capital is reflective of material capital and replaces it as a form of symbolic currency that enters into the exchange system of the school. Cultural capital is therefore symbolic of the social structure’s economic force and becomes in itself a productive force in the reproduction of social relations under capitalism. Academic performance represents, therefore not individual competence or the lack of ability on the part of disadvantaged students but the schools’ depreciation of their cultural capital (McLaren, 2003 p. 219).

As a White middle class kid with a parent funded undergraduate education, I liked the way the world operated, and I hoped to perpetuate and reproduce my own privileges and capital. My cultural capital sustained my lifestyle and I assumed that a good citizen is a person who is interested in “preserving and enhancing social order” despite the fact the same social order perpetuates the disenfranchisement of students from subordinated

cultures. Like Hirsch, I had the privilege of framing success in terms of possessing or lacking knowledge. I perpetuated a common assumption that poverty and disenfranchisement is an outgrowth of one's level of formal education and is not connected to hegemony, racism, or poverty. I depreciated the cultural capital of my students of color as I attempted to elevate my own through the use of a social studies curriculum.

I wrote about encouraging "objectivity" but without the intention of having my students dissect the political nature of knowledge or the curricula I used to deposit knowledge, this could not be accomplished. As Giroux points out,

Knowledge parading under the guise of objectivity, has for too long been used to legitimate belief and value systems that are at the core of bondage (Giroux, 1981 p. 131).

My privileged status allowed me to take comfort that the curriculum I delivered was a panacea for social ills. If, I believed, Others could only know what I know, their poverty and bad citizenship would vanish. Left unexamined, these dangerous ideologies propagate a form of bondage because I used my power as a teacher to force Others to become more like me. Proponents of formalized knowledge as a tool for social cohesion may disagree with my view that that a deeper and more just civilization can result from an honest and open critic of knowledge and the political and historical forces that shape it.

Academic Curriculum: A Tool for Social Control

Today I have a deeper understanding for how curriculum and the validation of certain types of knowledge over others can deculturalize students by placing the responsibility for change onto them. But, I did not understand this when I first transitioned from suburban to urban teaching. Four years into my doctoral research at the University of Massachusetts, Boston, all the readings, lectures, debates and real world experiences culminated into a sort of intellectual epiphany. Once my perspective on urban education shifted towards critical pedagogy, my understanding of teaching and learning radically changed, and I began to explore how my White identity influenced the curricula I taught and how I taught it. This following selection was written as a draft introduction to this autoethnography in 2010. It reflects a thinker aggressively pushing back against White ethnocentrism and immersed in newly felt critical theories.

Yonathan was sent to the office and I can see him through my window sitting in a chair, arms crossed and shaking his head as if to say, I can't believe I am here right now. The green referral slip, delivered by a trusted messenger boy, arrived a few minutes later and informs me that Yonathan was "loud, avoiding work, and was disrespectful despite numerous warnings". As an assistant principal in this Boston area middle school, I am the judge and the jury and I must dispense justice in this case. After years of studying urban education at the doctoral level, I have been radicalized. As my newfound theories swim through my head, my preferred and "enlightened" move would be to send Yonathan back to class and fire his teachers. Maybe not fire, but at least drag them into my office, label them deculturalizers (to be explained later), and then scold them for their racism and for crushing the spirits of the Latino students in their classes. I would then use our professional development money to book them passage to the Dominican Republic, Yonathan's country of origin, and tell them not to return until they have a deeper appreciation for DR culture and family life and they can restructure

their classrooms to meet all the needs of all the Dominican, White, Black, and Asian students in their care. Of course even suggesting this solution would lead to my dismissal and perpetual unemployment in this Puritan commonwealth but, in the name of justice and critical pedagogy, my own sacrifice is warranted. But, only one year earlier, I was the teacher sending “disruptive” students to the office with the expectation that the assistant principal clean up the behavior. Now I am the guy in the office and my perspective is changing. So, I am left with limited options. I can send Yonathan back to class, but then teacher gossip would lead to me being branding as the “Do-nothing administrator” who is weak on discipline. I can put Yonathan into the depressing Time-out room and give him detentions, but, then I would be sending him the message that his culturally ingrained behaviors are unacceptable in this school, socializing has no place in learning, and it is time to start acting like that White kid you sit next to in class... you know, the sweet messenger boy that just dropped off your office referral.
(Introduction to Auto|ethnography, May 2010)

I declared myself radicalized and the tone was self-righteous. Since I wrote these words three years ago, the passionate feelings that sparked them have been tempered as my trajectory of increased criticality has balanced out my vision of Utopia with the real world. But, despite the hyperbolic rhetoric, I still believe that students of color will be more successful if the structures of urban schools are loosened to facilitate various types of agencies. I am writing mostly about student behavior in the passage above but as I reflect upon my words, I could be arguing about the hidden curriculum or academic curriculum since they are all in tune with the same hegemonic values. Ladson-Billings (2003) discusses the “erasure” of the history of students of color in social studies curriculum. She makes a direct connection to the hidden curriculum (which I explored in chapter three), and the academic curriculum.

Perhaps this erasure would not be as damaging to the body politic if it were merely a matter of not seeing the other in our courses and curriculum. However,

this erasure is compounded by a societal curriculum (Cortes, 1979) that operates within and beyond the school and classroom. This is the hidden curriculum that articulates social locations and social meanings. Students have access to this curriculum whenever they turn on their evening news and see people of color as menacing, dangerous social outcasts. They have access to this curriculum when they see inverse relationships between who the student population is and who the teachers and administrators are. If the people who look like them occupy the lowest skilled jobs in the school-janitors, cafeteria workers, instructional aids-then they begin to calculate their own understanding of people. The official curriculum only serves to reinforce what the societal curriculum suggests, i.e., people of color are relatively insignificant to the growth and development of our democracy and our nation and they represent a drain on the resources and values. (Ladson-Billings, 2003b p. 4)

The solution to making the hidden, social and emotional, and the academic curriculum more transparent is to open up dialogue between the deliverers and receivers of curriculum. Once I infused some principles of critical pedagogy and specifically, critical race theory, to the various curricula I employed, I offered a counterweight to hegemony and was better able to share the burden for change with my students.

The Definition of Critical Pedagogy

The definition of critical pedagogy (and the more general *critical theory*) is ambiguous since leading scholars agree there are many types of critical theory and the definition is always evolving. Critical theorists avoid adhering to strict interpretations because to do so, would be adding positivist qualities to constructivist work. The Institute of Social Research at the University of Frankfurt (a.k.a. The Frankfurt School) is frequently credited with establishing critical theory in the decades before the Second World War and out of the social ashes of the First World War (Kincheloe, 2008). Critical

theory blossomed during the 1960's as colonial liberation and civil rights movements spread across the planet. Early leaders of critical theory believed a re-alignment of the social sciences could help make societies more democratic and just (Kincheloe, 2008). A central assumption in this movement was the conviction that nations that positioned themselves as free and democratic were in fact oppressing large portions of their own populations. Cultural and social forces can impose a multi-class system that subordinates large segments of the population and freedoms cannot be guaranteed through law alone. These forces are difficult to identify from the outside and the manner in which hegemony operates, makes it difficult for those being oppressed to recognize their own oppression (Freire, 1993; Grande, 2004; McLaren, 2003).

The Brazilian educational philosopher Paulo Freire is frequently credited with applying critical theory principles to education. Freire has taught me that people are born into a world with asymmetrical power relations; some are born into dominant cultures and some are born into subordinated positions and may remain there unless they take actions to liberate themselves. The belief that oppressed people must advocate for their own liberation is central to his theory. Those that oppress and those that are oppressed need to develop a critical consciousness and engage in critical dialogue to better understand the power structures that perpetuate oppression (Freire, 1993). A critical education, he believed, has the ability to alter the life and destiny of subjugated people because if oppressed people learn about the political and cultural forces that work to oppress them, they are better able to overcome injustice (Freire, 1993). White teachers

and education leaders in the United States, therefore, can assist in emancipatory efforts by developing a critical consciousness for themselves, engaging in critical dialogue with students and families to better understand the position of Others, and by teaching their students to be critical learners. Critical pedagogues agree that curriculum is never free of politics. Rather, they recognize that “knowledge acquired in school or anywhere, for that matter—is never neutral or objective but is ordered and structured in particular ways; its emphases and exclusions partake of a silent logic” (McLaren, 2003 p. 196). Dominant cultures first define what knowledge is valuable and then use curriculum to steer learning towards ends that enhance their own power over subordinated groups.

Critical pedagogy has many critics. The push towards standardized testing and accountability with the underlying argument that schools are designed to prepare students for an economic life is contrary to the more decentralized ideas of critical theories. Critics argue that a lack of clarity regarding what knowledge can be considered legitimate undermines the central mission of schooling.

Perhaps it is just as well that critical pedagogy’s clarion call has not been fully heeded. We would do better to reaffirm education as that which promotes, in the words of an 1830 Yale University report, “the discipline and furniture of the mind.” Put more simply, to quote a recent newspaper editorial, we might “let schools be schools,” encouraging a renewed commitment to what is uniquely their mission—fostering a solid foundation of knowledge and understanding, a love of learning, and the tools for pursuing that learning—as the first principle of schooling, not the last. There will always be debates over what truths and values to teach, as there should be, but at least let these be guided by a disposition toward objectivity, the spirit of free inquiry, and academic integrity rather than by chiliastic movements (Rochester, 2003 p. 82).

Hirsch's work on cultural literacy supports the argument that a school's central mission is to build "the discipline and furniture of the mind" and create a "solid foundation of knowledge and understanding". The problem with this argument however, is that if students do not see themselves reflected in the curricula being taught, they will have to be forced rather than enticed to absorb a foundation of knowledge.

The academic curriculum that is produced and selected is an example of how White privileges and power are reproduced across generations. This is not to say that the individual White decision makers are operating with the intention of subordinating students of color. It is also too simple to state that only people with White skin are involved in oppressive actions. But, by not critically reflecting on hegemony and the privileges that those in power take for granted (or by not caring about them) subordination occurs and is perpetuated from generation to generation as economically powerful people manipulate the education system to service their own privileges (Kendall, 2006). Freire argued that the dominant class supervises education to ensure it meets their own political needs.

We know that it's not education which shapes society, but on the contrary, it is society which shapes education according to the interests of those who have power. If this is true, we cannot expect education to be the lever for the transformation of those who have power and are in power. It would be tremendously naïve to ask the ruling class in power to put into practice a kind of education which can work against it. If education was left alone to develop without political supervision, it would create no end of problems for those in power. But, the dominant authorities do not leave it alone. They supervise it. (Shor & Freire, 1987 p. 35)

Educators like myself tend to have limited interest in listening to and engaging in a critical dialogue with students of color for the intention of sharing responsibility for change by altering the curricula to be more inclusive. My former school adopted curriculum programs and textbooks without first listening to the parents and students to learn their opinions. The conversations were one-sided and had more to do with maintaining hegemony and pontificating how students should learn and what they should know rather than in engaging in candid dialogue with families to build more inclusive norms and instructional practices.

Liberation, as Freire reminds us, cannot happen to oppressed people, it must happen with them.

We must be very, very critical every time we speak about emancipatory education, liberatory or liberating education. We must repeat always that we are not meaning with these expressions that in the intimacy of a seminar we are transforming the structures of the society. That is, liberating education is one of the things which we must do with other things in order to transform reality. We must avoid being interpreted as if we were thinking that first we should educate the people for being free, and after we could transform reality. No. We have to do the two simultaneously, as much as possible. Because of that, we must be engaged in political action against the dehumanizing structures of production. (Shor & Freire, 1987 p. 167)

My White privileges nurtured in me the freedom “not to notice [my] lack of knowledge about people of color” (Kendall, 2006 p. 64) and to “make decisions that affect everyone without taking others into account” (Kendall, 2006). Much academic curriculum is deposited into students without schools first engaging in critical dialogue to co-create equitable reforms. Applying principles consistent with critical pedagogy can help generate reform initiatives that share the responsibility for change between educators and

students thus allowing for all stakeholders to feel included in the process of teaching and learning. Unfortunately, in the Western and White dominated world of urban education, critical pedagogy threatens the status quo and remains a marginalized theory.

The Fear of Critical Pedagogy

Although I identify myself today with the teaching of critical pedagogues, I must admit that the professional side of me is a bit nervous about declaring myself a “Critical Pedagogue”. I fear Professor Joe Kincheloe’s assessment that “some seventy years after its development in Frankfurt Germany, critical theory retains its ability to disrupt and challenge the status quo” (Kincheloe, 2008 p. 47). I am an administrator working in a mainstream public institution, founded and organized around positivist principles that increasingly see curricula reforms such as SEL as transformative and essential for all urban school students. I know well that the ideas espoused in critical pedagogy are unsettling and controversial because they challenge hegemony, and I am concerned that using these ideas to criticize popular curricula and expose the idea of White privilege can harm my carefully accumulated cultural capital. Moreover, I benefited from a body of knowledge that prepared me for economic success so who am I to criticize? Critical pedagogy and critical race theory is threatening to many because it requires educators to readjust (or in some cases demolish and reconstruct) their worldviews and accept that the very order of all things is up for review (Kincheloe, 2008).

Knowing that this auto|ethnography will be published and can follow me like a bad party caught on Facebook™, I am taking a risk by putting my thoughts on the

operating table for dissection. I fear (and already experienced) colleagues dismissing critical pedagogy as “political correctness” or as a justification for being soft on kids with “behavior problems”. But, it is critical pedagogy that pushed me towards a more critical posture and allowed me to recognize how my White identity was tainting my understanding of justice and therefore my teaching. When I look back on my writing about education before I was exposed to the work of critical pedagogues, it seems incomplete and one-dimensional. But when I “step out” of my privileged position and then examine my experiences within the context of White privilege, my biases and positionality reveal how I placed certain forms of knowledge above others (Kress, 2011); this provides me with tremendous understandings I can use to assist in the liberation of some of my most repressed students.

Academic Curriculum: Controlling Democracy and Citizenship

Yanick: Like I don’t blame her for yelling at me but...what she did, but...she didn’t let me tell her my side of the story.

I entered the teaching profession with attitudes and beliefs that point to a desire to steer my students towards my definition of democracy and citizenship rather than critically explore my worldview in an effort to share the responsibility of change with them. The following excerpt from a paper I wrote in my undergraduate social studies method’s course (1998) presents data that reveal how my understanding of multiculturalism and critical thinking was one-dimensional and lacked the tenants of critical pedagogy that I now value. The selection reveals an understanding of the United

States as possessing a collective identity with a singular worldview. Absent from my analysis was the vast cultural and political perspectives at conflict with each other within our own borders, my failure to recognize my own White identity and privileges in relation to others, my understanding that the concept of democracy is socially constructed and my lack of interest in engaging in critical dialogue with people with different world views than mine.

It will be necessary for your child to gain an appreciation for the United States' place in the world. It is critical that a student understands her own reality before she can understand other cultures. The United States has played a critical role in world development. As the nations sole superpower, the U.S. role in the world is greater today than ever before. Your child must understand the basic tenants of American philosophy in order to appreciate our continual impact on the earth. The information will be presented in a manner so your child can decide for himself which values the U.S. should spread and which we should overhaul. The best way to do this would be through a mock United Nations where groups of students will adopt the basic cultural tenants of the nation they represent. I will create a conflict between two-thirds world nations and the U.S. as a major U.N. force will be forced to deal with the conflict. Students will be expected to think according to their nation's personal interests. It is my hope that students will begin to recognize how nations always bring their own worldviews into conflict resolution. (Dynamics, Social Studies Methods, February 25, 1998)

This data suggests that I did not recognize that my White identity constructed a worldview that could be different from other Americans or immigrants. My commitment to American democracy and its dissemination abroad reveals that the political system was advantageous to me and I made the assumption that all people living within the borders enjoyed the same privileges. There was no evidence that I understood how my membership in White America influenced my political thinking or how my knowledge

was constructed and maintained by privileges afforded to me by my race. I approached social studies curriculum as a State Department diplomat interested in maintaining policy that protected the best interests of the United States. Democracy was something already defined and needed to be deposited into students rather than seeing it as an ever evolving, inclusive process dependent upon open and honest dialogue with all segments of society. In the article “Unburying Patriotism: Critical Lessons in Civics and Leadership Ten Years Later”, Azadeh F. Osanloo of New Mexico State University explores the tendencies of civic educators following national tragedies like 9/11. He writes:

At the crux of the discourse surrounding civic education is the notion that democracy is not static but dynamic. We, the people, must breathe life into it. In many of today’s schooling processes democracy is presented as a lifeless tradition or a rote disciplinary topic. Democracy is discussed in a manner similar to that of an antiquated concept, something of the past, and not relevant for current life. Put simply, democracy is both a discourse and a practice that produces particular narratives and identities in-the-making, informed by principles of freedom, equality, and social justice (Giroux, 1993, p.1). In examining social justice via the conduit of a democratic state, we must remember that this country is founded on the ideals of communitarianism and a public citizenry, which leads to a spirit of social justice, not social “just-us”. (Osanloo, 2011 p. 59)

My data reveals assumptions that American democracy was created in the past rather than dynamic and in need of constant tweaking and adjustment. Democracy, I assumed, meant the same thing to all segments of society and that competition with other global nationalistic powers was more important than understanding the cultural conflicts within our borders. Osanloo argues that:

National identity is a shifting, unsettling complexity that translates through a variety of cultures, however most often defined by a middleclass, white, heterosexual hegemonic identity. Engaged, democratic citizens need to advocate

for and learn to negotiate the social, political and cultural differences within diverse multicultural pedagogical spaces. (Osanloo, 2011 p. 69)

Before I understood the tenants of critical pedagogy or critical race theory, critical thinking had more to do with students questioning slightly different interpretations of the United States rather than dissecting the power structures that maintain advantage and disadvantage (i.e. *Students will be expected to think according to their nation's personal interests*) and co-creating a definition of democracy that held relevance to both students and myself (Giroux, 2009). I was attempting to incorporate civic education into my curriculum but from a “middleclass, white, heterosexual hegemonic identity” infused with “blind nationalism” and an “ethnocentric belief of infallibility and supremacy” (Osanloo, 2011 p. 56). I believed my responsibility was to teach Yanick my understanding of democracy without listening to her side of the story. This data shows that I was positioned to use social studies curricula as a marketing tool to perpetuate White identity and to accomplish what Giroux believed was the preservation of “legitimate existing power structures” rather than encourage a “critical consciousness” (Giroux, 1984).

The following words spoken by Yanick have opened this section of my auto|ethnography: *she didn't let me tell my side of the story*. Yanick was discussing being disciplined but this sentiment echoes through a lot of quotes contributed by her. When I reflect upon my teacher/student relationship with Yanick, I remember her complaining frequently that I never listened to her side (this despite the fact that I participated in the morning *Circle of Power and Respect* with her daily). She may not

have been discussing history curriculum but when cast into a wider context, I didn't listen to Yanick's side with regards to a lot of matters. My failure to *radically listen*—or hear Yanick's vantage point without projecting my own thoughts and biases onto her words, (Tobin, 2009) perpetuated a curriculum that threatened to “subvert the democratic process and prevent the promotion of egalitarian beliefs” (Osanloo, 2011 p. 57). The evidence suggests that when I first transitioned to urban teaching I used curriculum to control some students by projecting my beliefs onto them. Professor Kress, the advisor to this paper writes:

Historically, education in the United States has served as a crude means of social control for poor and minority students. As purveyors of the dominant Anglo culture, schools function to “normalize” students into society, and because they are saturated with White norms in which many students cannot easily be academically successful, schools also serve as de facto sorting mechanisms that stratify society. (Kress, 2009 p. 44)

Hegemony rooted in Western thought so efficiently controlled my thinking that I did not question the now disproven assumption that people from different segments of society may have significantly different relationships with the United States than I did and that an individual's position in society would alter their outlook on the role of the United States in the world. I was not able to radically listen to my students because I was unable to hear their words without filtering them through my own biases. Therefore, I expected my students to change their understanding of the world without even recognizing that I was asking them to do this.

Releasing my need to protect my White identity and privileges has created a longer lasting more authentic and egalitarian democratic ideology.

As opposed to becoming conduits for mediocrity and the re-establishment of the status quo, schools should be sites for social change. The aim is to exalt critical thinking and discourse skills looking to produce the socially just citizen. Schools need to broaden the scope of liberal promises predicated upon an autonomous citizen to genuinely access the cornerstones of U.S. citizenship: democracy, freedom, and justice. Integral to this discussion is the idea that schools are some of the last bastions for such social reconstruction. Good schooling and education communicates thoughts and ideas that create and inspire a multiculturally nurturant society amenable to social change. It is important to nurture these ideas in a forum like public school: a place where pluralism exists on a myriad of levels and is ripe ground for discussing the concepts of civic education. (Osanloo, 2011 p. 59)

Yanick constructed an understanding of justice and democracy that was no doubt different from mine because she grew up in a world without the automatic privileges I took for granted and didn't even know I had. I now understand that approaching Yanick from the hegemonic-nationalistic perspective and not radically listening further alienated her from her school. In the selection above, I wrote: *It is critical that a student understands her own reality before she can understand other cultures.* I made an assumption that as a teacher, it was my responsibility to reveal a child's reality to them and once they know what I know, their perspective of the world will change and become similar to mine.

I assumed students like Yanick could not understand "other cultures" unless I revealed them to her. It is possible that I am reading too much into the passage I wrote about teaching American values to my future students. After all, it was written before I

stepped into my first classroom as a teacher. But when I juxtapose this relic of my thinking with the words of Yanick and her classmates, I recognize hegemonic principles in action described by Nelson M. Rodriguez (1998) in his article “Emptying the Content of Whiteness.”

....part of the ‘work’ of whiteness involves generating norms—that is, making things seem or appear natural and timeless so that people accept situations, as well as particular ideologies, without ever questioning their socially and politically constructed nature. (Rodriguez, 1998 p. 32)

I at first failed to recognize that my students could know significantly more about the world and how it works than I did. My involvement in generating norms was not checked until I started working with some students whose positionality was vastly different from mine.

Yanick’s parents emigrated from Haiti and I never engaged in a critical dialogue to understand their worldview (I had many Haitian students and I can tell you little about their values, cultures or beliefs). In my college selection, I wrote: *Students will be expected to think according to their nation's personal interests. It is my hope that students will begin to recognize how nations always bring their own worldviews into conflict resolution.* I did not understand that the history I taught espoused White epistemological norms while at the same time I was using school levers (like grades and detentions) to push students towards my understandings. I defined myself as a multicultural educator but my failure to engage in critical dialogue with Haitian students perpetuated the banking approach to teaching as I worked to deposit cultural norms into Yanick in an effort to make her change.

Citizenship Curricula

One way I interpreted the deficits I saw in students like Yanick soon after I transitioned from the suburbs was to convince myself that my students acted disruptively because they were never taught how to be good citizens. Perhaps, I speculated, the answer to fulfilling needs was to use social studies curriculum as a conduit for providing my urban students the citizenship skills they lacked. In a free write exercise in 2006, I wrote:

Negative behavior interferes with the learning environment. Teachers are constantly complaining about behavior they see as disruptive and destructive to learning. I believe much can be done to relinquish both teachers and students from the divisiveness of negative behavior. As a social studies teacher, much of the lessons I teach have to do with citizenship and democracy. It seems logical that social studies would provide an adequate spot to address persistent negative behavior. The idea is to use the content of social studies to address behavior issues in a school and to help produce more respectful and reflective citizens. Social studies education is valuable learning. I could design a series of lessons that run through the entire year and have both students and teachers reflect upon behavior problems and how they can address them. (Instructor O'Toole, Free Write, July 2006)

I later turned this idea into an actual research proposal where I stated:

My goal in the qualifying paper will be to review and analyze the literature on citizenship education, classroom behavior management and child psychology. I am interested in learning how and if urban social studies teachers have used curriculum to improve student behavior in both their own classrooms and the school. My goals are born out of my own experiences—more specifically, my own frustrations in managing difficult learning environments. I believe there are many urban social studies teachers who have improved the classroom-learning environment by directly linking the curriculum to behavior expectations. Urban teachers who are successful at improving student behavior by transforming abstract democratic principles into concrete lessons specifically designed to

improve student behavior have much to teach other teachers who are frustrated by negative student behavior. (Instructor O'Toole, First Draft of QPP, July 2006)

Only recently, therefore, did I position myself as the “knower” entrusted with the responsibility of teaching something as nebulous and socially constructed as citizenship using curriculum that would be fixed and reflect my values. The following selection was pulled from a possible draft of a dissertation proposal in 2006 and reveals my interest in exploring connections between “positive citizenship” and “positive behavior” but only through asking like-minded individuals rather than seek understanding in the very communities I sought to understand.

Research into classroom behavior management in an urban middle school classroom will provide me with information about successful and unsuccessful techniques teachers use to manage behavior in an urban middle school classroom. Sifting through different teaching styles, methods and curriculum teachers use to address negative behavior and encourage respectful behavior will inform me about the best and worst practices. I will also begin to decipher if there is a consensus regarding positive behavior and negative behavior. This research will allow me to identify any correlations between positive citizenship in society and positive behavior in school and how a direct connection can be made for better student understanding.

It will be impossible to understand behavior without reviewing some basic principles of child psychology. I will need to gain a deeper understanding for the motivation behind both positive and negative classroom behavior. I may find, for example, that much of the negative behavior that occurs in school may be rooted in deep-rooted psychological issues that cannot be addressed by curriculum and the classroom teacher. If my long-term goal is to develop curriculum to help make students better classroom and school citizens, I may find that certain behaviors cannot be impacted by curriculum. A more profound understanding of child psychology will allow me to fine-tune my planning as I begin to construct solutions to help a large number of kids perform better in school. (Instructor O'Toole, First Draft of QPP July 2006)

Hegemony constructed and molded my definition of citizenship and when I came across behaviors or ideas that contrasted my understanding, I set out to change them. This pattern is consistent with the White privilege that affords me “the ability to make decisions that affect everyone without taking others into account” (Kendall, 2006 p. 66). I did not suggest using curriculum to explore various understanding of citizenship and how it is lived in the various communities or the individual identities that made up the student body. Kendall describes this privilege in the following terms:

Being white enables me to decide whether I am going to listen to others, to hear them, or neither. I also silence people of color without intending to or even being aware of it, by talking over them, talking around them, not asking their opinions, or not considering the omnipresence of race as I view a situation. (Kendall, 2006 p, 67)

In essence, my understanding of citizenship was grounded in how I understood it without talking with the people I sought to teach. At the same time I advocated for positive citizenship, I was attempting to steer it. I assumed some of my urban students were misbehaving in class because they didn’t understand citizenship and their ignorance precipitated acting out behavior. The students were not following my directions, were not changing their behaviors and so the deficit model for student failure conditioned me to believe that society has a duty to teach them proper citizenship. Civic education curricula could help limit “disruptive behavior” but not through a critical dissection of race or the culture of power. Rather, my approach was in line with what Giroux (1980) describes as “citizenship transmission.”

Knowledge, in this view, is situated above and beyond the social realities and relationships of the people who produce and define it. It is fixed and unchanging in the sense that its form, structure, and underlying normative assumptions appear to be universalized beyond the realm of historical contingency or critical analysis. Appearing in the guise of objectivity and neutrality, it is rooted in the precious adulation of the fact or facts, which simply have to be gathered, organized, transmitted, and evaluated. We get a better sense of the implications of this model for citizenship education if it is viewed not simply as a pedagogical veil for incompetent teaching or teacher "mindlessness," but as a "historically specific social reality expressing particular production relations among men" (Young 1975, p. 129). That is, if we view how this model defines notions of power and meaning as expressed in its treatment of knowledge, human beings, values, and society, we get a more accurate idea of what its political and pedagogical commitments might be. (Giroux, 1980 p. 337)

The selection below contains data that points to suggests that I believed the transmission of citizenship as I defined it would have a calming effect on my urban social studies class because citizenship could teach them “how their behavior impacts learning.”

Many social studies teachers share my passion for firing up students around the issues of justice, democracy and freedom. Many also share my dislike for the disruptive behavior that threatens to sabotage lessons and distract students from learning. What if teachers tied classroom behavior expectations directly to the social studies curriculum on a daily basis? Does the social studies curriculum provide teachers with enough resources to teach responsible classroom citizenship? I believe that social studies, more than any other academic discipline, has the power to encourage students to be reflective on how their negative and positive behavior affects fellow classmates and the learning environment. By more directly tying the concepts of positive classroom citizenship to lessons on government, history and geography, students will become more understanding about how their behavior impacts learning. (Instructor O’Toole, First Draft of QPP July 2006)

This interpretation of citizenship is directly linked to the hidden curriculum and the values I attempted to transmit within the walls of my classroom. Ironically, I am trying to use citizenship education as a tool to pacify my disruptive students even though

disruption has been an essential part of social change in the United States. Critical race theorists argue that this approach is designed to “maintain a White supremacist master script” (Ladson-Billings, 1998 p. 18) where various perspectives and voices are removed from the curriculum in favor of more standardized knowledge that keeps White people in control of history.

This master scripting means stories of African Americans are muted and erased when they challenge dominant culture authority and power. Thus, Rosa Parks is reduced to a tired seamstress instead of a long-time participant in social justice endeavors as evidenced by her work at the Highlander Folk School to prepare for a confrontation with segregationist ideology. (Ladson-Billings, 1998 p. 18)

My interest in using citizenship curricula as a tool to control student behavior reflects my interest in demarcating the terms of debate and shaping the essence of the conversation around all things, including citizenship. I was seeking to better control my students by taking ownership over citizenship by defining its symbols, values and by ignoring contrarian understandings (Giroux, 1981). The political theorist Antonio Gramsci argued that the dominant culture does not maintain domination simply by controlling the mass media and the “resources of the state and civil society” (Giroux, 1981 p.23) (although this too is essential) but also by defining the discourse that is allowed and the discourse that is taboo. Rather than share the responsibility for change by listening to Yanick’s side of the story, I relied on my own construct of citizenship and set out to use it as a tool for deculturalization. The selection above indicates that I was manipulating history and citizenship as a behavior tool rather than as a tool for

empowerment. If I taught my students that Rosa Parks actively fought the status quo, would I be given a green light to student resistance in my own class? I did not consider that my definition of citizenship would be mistrusted and students would resist since generation of Black Americans were denied citizenship by a government controlled by White men. Education Historian Roger Smith (1997) shares the following:

But they have been pervasive indeed: when restrictions on voting rights, naturalization, and immigration are taken into account, it turns out for over 80 percent of U.S. history, American laws declared most people in the world legally ineligible to become U.S. Citizens solely because of their race, original nationality, or gender. For at least two-thirds of American history, the majority of the domestic adult population was also ineligible for full citizenship for the same reasons. Those racial, ethnic, and gender restrictions were blatant, not “latent.” For these people, citizenship rules gave no weight to how liberal, republican, or faithful to other American values their political beliefs might be. (R. M. Smith, 1997 p. 15)

In this context, my interest in using citizenship education as a new urban teacher seems tone deaf. As Smith demonstrates, U.S. history is characterized by a long tradition of discrimination and bigotry, and I perpetuated this by denying access to an exploration of various forms of knowledge.

Critical reflection, however, empowers me to “step out” of my worldview and to re-conceptualize knowledge and the power used in its development and transmission through curricula. Professor Tricia Kress from UMass, Boston clearly reveals the essential importance of “stepping out” to social movement. She writes,

In other words, “stepping out” is a process, which involves having the resolve to say “no” by refusing to collude in the colonization of minds and bodies (hooks 1994), including my own. This resolve is steeled by a desire for a different (perhaps utopian) future, in which people can contribute to the process of

knowledge production and social change together as equals. Not only is this antithetical to the hierarchical design of education, research, and policy frameworks in which knowledge is transmitted from a more knowledgeable authority to an unknowing mass of bodies (Au 2010), it is tremendously difficult to imagine while immersed within the hegemony of U.S. society where social hierarchies (knowledge-based or otherwise) are pervasive and considered “normal.” Critical theory, then, serves as a filtration system that enables me to see through the ideological mud that slows or prevents social movement. (Kress, 2011)

I was not in the space to step-out when I transitioned from suburban to urban teaching and as a result, I expected my students to change to meet my curricula demands. The use of curricula to pressure others to be more like me is arguably most profound in my approach to history education.

Academic Curriculum: Controlling History

Matt: Do you have to like ignore parts of your culture or hide it?

Yanick: Sometimes like, in middle school, I felt like I had to do that. I mean like I wasn't... I wasn't the quiet type I was like talk with my friends. To tell you the truth, I didn't take, I didn't follow directions from the teacher if I didn't like a teacher. I didn't listen to them but I knew that I had like to do my work so when I was with my friends, I was like this loud girl but when I was like in my classes I was like standing there doing my work, asking questions, and stuff like that but like once I was in her class I was like this other girl.

Although I transitioned from teaching mostly White and affluent students in California to economically, racially and ethnically diverse students in the city, the social studies I taught remained the same. Before moving, I organized all of my lessons into a three ring binder and mailed it UPS to my new classroom. And when I think about it,

the curricula I taught in both California and outside Boston was remarkably similar to the curricula I learned in the suburbs of Connecticut when I was a kid. I taught Yanick about Apartheid, Mandela, MLK Jr., Rosa Parks and how to interact with other kids in her school. But this surface pluralism was overpowered by the hidden curriculum that sought to “detach” her from her Haitian identity and history and connect her to a national and state identity in-line with the history I valued. Ladson-Billings suggests that simply introducing these powerful figures does little to educate a Black student, for example, about his or her own history.

Sprinkled in this history students might encounter the names of people such as Harriet Tubman, Nat Turner, Frederick Douglass, and Martin Luther King, Jr. However, they will not leave their history course with any sense of a coherent history of Africans in the Americas. In social studies courses other than history, African Americans are virtually invisible. (Ladson-Billings, 2003b p. 3)

My understanding of multicultural education had nothing to do with understanding my own positionality. Rather, it was focused on telling students that there are important people in their culture they should know about. I taught lessons on cultural heroes believing this subliminal, *I am on your side* message to gain the attention of my minority students would help pull them my way. I was a White guy pointing to legendary minorities and shouting, *be more like him!*

Although there is much to learn from these heroes, lessons absent a critical constructivist approach that confronted my own racial identity in relation to my students rang hollow and, as Ladson-Billings points out, my students would “leave their history

course with any sense of a coherent history of Africans in the Americas” (Ladson-Billings, 2003b p. 3). The evidence suggests I subscribed to the E.D. Hirsch cultural literacy philosophy by believing that the disenfranchisement of my disadvantaged students was perpetuated by a void of “cultural knowledge” (Peterson, 1995 p. 80). But because I deposited knowledge about these figures without placing them into the context of my students’ lived experiences, I was continuing a “long-standing American tradition of silencing” voices and I was reproducing the idea that the dominant culture “is more valuable than others” (Peterson, 1995 p. 81). I protected my own history by putting pressure on students like Yanick to change their understanding of the world while mine remained the same.

Christine Sleeter (2003) concluded the following after reviewing *California’s History and Social Science Framework and Standards*:

My conclusion was that despite a surface appearance of being multicultural, the History-Social Science Framework and Standards for California Public Schools is organized in a way that strongly prioritizes experiences and perspectives of traditional white, mostly male Americans, and that obscures historic and contemporary processes of U.S. and European colonialism and institutionalized racism. Its purpose is to attempt to detach young people from their racial and ethnic cultural moorings and connect them to a national and state identity that is decidedly rooted in European culture, and that champions individuality and the expansion of capitalism. In agreement with Symox (2002), I found this set of academic content standards to reflect a highly assimilationist ideology, despite a veneer of pluralism. (Sleeter, 2003 p. 21)

The histories taught in urban public schools as, Sleeter suggests, works to disconnect some students from their own culture. In a study conducted by Sleeter and Grant (2010),

textbooks across four subject areas were analyzed for their portrayal of various groups of people. They discovered that the struggle of Black Americans was diminished and when present, the books rarely included the Black perspective.

For example, one book says of Martin Luther King, Jr.: “He dreamed of a better life for all Americans. He wanted people to live together in peace. King worked hard to make his dream come true. We remember him on his birthday every year”. However, it neglects to discuss the oppression of Blacks that King’s movement challenged. These books do not tell the reader that the Blacks’ Civil Rights struggle was against Whites and laws they had passed. For example, one book does not indicate that when King said to supporters of segregation, “We will not hate you. But we will not obey your evil laws. We will soon wear you down. We will win by suffering” he was talking to White segregationists. It is up to the book’s fifth grade readers to conclude who the “you” is that King is referring to. However, the book is very explicit that some White people were on the side of the Black Civil Rights advocates: “Thousands of white people joined the [equal rights] movement” A question to consider is: Would ten- or eleven-year-old children, not having grown up during the 1950s and 1960s, know which groups of people made up the opposing forces in the Civil Rights struggle? The books often do not explicitly provide this type of information. (Sleeter & Grant, 2010 p. 90)

This avoidance of historical dissidence not only enervates the power of people who fought for justice, it also assists in the assimilation of subordinated groups by reducing a major historical conflict to a minor misunderstanding between a few people. It is as if to say, *don’t worry about what happened in the past, we were always on your side.*

As a college student, there is evidence that I considered ignoring Columbus’ subjugation of indigenous people to cast a positive light on American history. In a college history paper, I explored how revisionist historians were using the 500th anniversary of Christopher Columbus’ voyage to tell a more textured story of the founding of America and how this “revised” story may harm nationalism.

For the first time, the destructive actions of our European ancestors entered the mainstream public debate and almost everyone began to accept it as fact. I assume teachers are expected to teach the truth but what are the potential consequences of teaching history as it actually happened? By teaching the truth, this nation may be threatened in the long run.

I continued:

Teaching students to love their country will prove difficult if you are teaching its real history at the same time. Imagine my first period class--right after they sit down from taking the pledge of allegiance, I will be telling them how Thomas Jefferson was a brutal slave owner who advocated the expulsion of freed Black people from Virginia.

Ultimately, I came to peace with myself, at least in this paper, and concluded that I could do both:

Fortunately, as the world's leader, we now have the ability to add morality to our international and domestic policies. So what do I do? Do I lay all the nasty facts out on the table or do I continue telling them how great Jefferson was? I will never feel comfortable with the latter so I guess I will do the former. I will still try to encourage patriotism by telling the students that they have the ability to prevent future injustices. If teachers across the nation convince their student that the future can be different from the past, then the potential exists to have both patriotic citizens and strong moral policies. (As a future history teacher, April 1997)

This data reveals a soon-to-be-educator determined to “encourage patriotism” but fraught with whether or not to expose truths that reveal major abuses in American history. The fact that I asked these questions suggests perpetuating the status quo, not radically challenging it (Osanloo, 2011) was amongst my first teaching instincts. The data suggests that the *elaborate system of norms* that Giroux points to as a central component of hegemony predisposed me to assume that patriotism as I defined it was an essential

value that needed to be transmitted in a middle school social studies class (Giroux, 1984). I entered the profession willing to perpetuate “certain forms of cultural capital, i.e. ‘that system of meanings, abilities, language forms, and tastes that are directly and indirectly defined by dominant groups as socially legitimate’” (Giroux, 1984 p. 149). It is through my active distribution of this form of knowledge that I put pressure on students to change their history while my history stayed in tact.

There is also evidence, however, that as an undergraduate student, I recognized a problem with perpetuating the good parts of history and leaving out the bad parts. The fact that I spent time contemplating whether to reveal or hide history is indicative of a struggle that didn’t have to happen. I now recognize in critical pedagogy another option: a critical examination of the information “masquerading” as truths.

We hoped students would see that the intent was to present a new way of reading, and ultimately, of experience the world. Textbooks fill students with information masquerading as final truth and then ask students to parrot the information in end-of-the-chapter ‘check-ups’. The Brazilian educator Paulo Freire calls it the ‘banking method’: students are treated as empty vessels waiting for deposits of wisdom from textbooks and teachers. We wanted to tell students that they shouldn’t necessarily trust the ‘authorities’ but instead need to participate in their learning, probing for unstated assumptions and unasked questions. (Bigelow, 1995 p. 68)

The following socio-historical example provides an avenue to explore how history curricula is used as a tool for manipulation and control and provides a context to reflect on the cultural forces that may have caused me to accept curricula that reduced the burden on me to change.

The Arizona Example

It is a placate admission of fear of losing control when the dominant culture enacts laws and policies that make it unlawful for students to intellectually explore their historical-cultural roots, challenge principles of nationalism, or celebrate a culture that is different than those of the dominant cultures. In May 2010, Arizona Governor Jan Brewer signed House Bill 2281 into law. The preamble states:

THE LEGISLATURE FINDS AND DECLARES THAT PUBLIC SCHOOL PUPILS SHOULD BE TAUGHT TO TREAT AND VALUE EACH OTHER AS INDIVIDUALS AND NOT BE TAUGHT TO RESENT OR HATE OTHER RACES OR CLASSES OF PEOPLE. (Arizona house bill 2281.2013)

The law declares that school districts and charter schools “shall not include in its program of instruction any of the following”:

1. Promote the overthrow of the United States Government.
2. Promote resentment toward a race or class of people.
3. Are designed primarily for pupils of a particular ethnic group.
4. Advocate ethnic solidarity instead of the treatment of pupils as individuals. (Arizona house bill 2281.2013)

The state Board of Education or the Superintendent of Public instruction will issue a notice to schools that are found to be out of compliance with this law. If after 60 days, the school continues to fall out of compliance, then ten percent of its state aide will be

withheld on a monthly basis. The bill was signed into law twenty days after the governor signed a controversial immigration bill that, in part, required people suspected of being illegal immigrants to provide proof of legal residency (Santa Cruz, 2010).

The law bans all mono-ethnic courses including those that focus on American Indian and African American experiences. In reality, however, the law is aimed at Mexican-American themed curricula that appeal to an increasingly powerful segment of Arizona's population. More specifically, critics of the law argue that it was intended to target the Tucson Unified School District in particular due to the popularity and activity of the Chicano studies program (3% of the 55,000 students in Tucson enroll in ethnic study courses). In Tucson, these courses satisfy requirements for English, American History or American Government (Zehr, 2010 p. 16-17).

Many argue that the personal beliefs of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Tom Horne were the catalyst for the drafting of the bill. Sources report that Horne was profoundly perturbed by a visit a Hispanic civil rights activist made to a Tucson high school a few years before the bill was signed into law. During her speech, Dolores Huerta made the comment that "Republicans hate Latinos" (Calefati, 2010). Horne argues that events like this prove the ethnic studies curricula are divisive, serve to nurture hostility towards the United States, and promote a sense of victimization amongst immigrant students. In an April 2010 press release, he stated:

Traditionally, the American public school system has brought together students from different backgrounds and taught them to be Americans and to treat each

other as individuals, and not on the basis of their ethnic backgrounds," Horne noted in an April press release. "This is consistent with the fundamental American value that we are all individuals, not exemplars of whatever ethnic groups we were born into. Ethnic studies programs teach the opposite, and are designed to promote ethnic chauvinism. (Calefati, May 12th 2010 Mother Jones online)

Horne's attack was bolstered by a handful of teachers that referred to the ethnic courses as "anti-American" and thus added to a political climate already primed for immigration reform. Critics of the courses have used one textbook on the Mexican American War titled, *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos*, as evidence that the curriculum promote anti-American propaganda. A historical leader is quoted in this book as saying, "Kill the gringo" (Finkel, District Administration Oct. 2010).

Critics of the law, including teachers and administrators that teach and support ethnic curricula, report that the opposite is true. The goal of the courses is not about advocating for separation but to empower students and to stimulate their desire to learn by teaching culturally relevant curriculum and by validating the knowledge they hold even before entering the classroom; cultural knowledge is used as a resource to pull students into an academic realm they may have previously dismissed. Tucson school officials state the courses are not designed to advocate divisiveness. Rather, the goal or mono-ethnic courses is to teach content similar to that in more traditional history or literature courses, but from different cultural perspectives (Calefati, May 12th 2010 Mother Jones online). For example, the Vietnam War may be taught using the experiences of Latino or African American soldiers and literature courses may rely more

heavily on work from Latino authors (Calefati, May 12th 2010 Mother Jones online). A teacher at a Tucson magnet school believes the Mexican-American studies courses create classes that are “more authentic to the students lived experiences” (Zehr, 2010 p.16-17). A 17 year-old student believes the courses he has taken make him “more socially critical of a lot of things around us. We explore the other side of the story” (Zehr, 2010 p.16-17).

Lessons Learned from Arizona

Giroux argues that dominant cultures use a variety of controls on subordinated cultures in an effort to maintain cultural hegemony (Giroux, 1984). The ability to control access to cultural knowledge through the use of academic curricula provides the dominant culture incredible leverage with regards to constructing and maintaining cultural hegemony. Differing cultural and political knowledge that seeps through the cracks, it is believed, threatens the cultural identity and privileges of those in charge. Supporters of the law that argue Chicano students are better served by “traditional” history and language arts classes are revealing their fear that other histories threaten their own power. Denying a group their own history is a tool used by dominant cultures throughout history to maintain their privileges and convince Others to change. Joel Spring (2010) identifies the *denial of education* as an

attempt by a ruling group to control another culture by denying it an education. The assumption is that education will empower a group to throw off the shackles of its domination. (Spring, 2010 p. 8)

Claims that Mexican-American curricula and courses are anti-American is a declaration that there is only “one” America and organized efforts to celebrate or simply learn about

the cultural experiences of Others is a threat to the one “true” culture as defined by those in power. In his article “‘It is certainly strange...’: attacks on ethnic studies and whiteness as property”, Richard Orozco (2011) shares analysis on Horne’s letter to the people of Tucson in reaction to his support for the law.

After a short introductory paragraph calling for a comprehensive movement of Tucsonans to eliminate ethnic studies in TISD, Tom Horne (2007) writes, ‘First, let spend a minute on underlying philosophy. I believe people are individuals, not exemplars of racial groups’ (1). Later, he adds, ‘Those student s should be taught that this is the land of opportunity, and that if they work hard they can achieve their goals’ (2). These statements lay the foundation of what he believes will be a collectively accepted ideology; one that is steeped in the Protestant work ethic and the European mobility model, and contemporarily reified by the normalization of whiteness, color-blindness, and meritocracy. Imbedded in these notions are that normalized White privileges are shared by non-Whites because the privileges one ‘earns’ are constructed solely by ones individual actions. Missing from Horne’s position is an acknowledgement of US sociohistorical, sociopolitical, and contemporary sociocultural experiences that are not consistent with the taken-for-granted, privileged experiences of many Whites. He invokes what Bonilla-Silva (2003) refers to as *abstract liberalism*, the use of abstractions to ‘explain racial matters’ (28), by queuing the concepts of individualism, and meritocracy through equal opportunity. (Orozco, 2011 p. 826)

Horne argues that he is offering Mexican Americans a better shot at social mobility if they abandon their own history in favor of working hard and accepting America as the land of opportunity. Orozco rightly points out that Horne writes with the false assumption that everyone benefits from his White privileges. Horne and his allies successfully codified the denial of history education into law and thus set the stage for an aggressive form of cultural assimilation. If the Tucson schools continue to offer students curricula in courses that explore the history of various minority groups, they are faced with the loss of critical financial resources, 10% of state aide. The reality is that students

from non-White cultures are either denied exercising their cultural knowledge and have to accept the Western oriented history or, if the courses are still offered, they are denied a fully funded education. The irony is that Horne argues he is helping non-Whites achieve the American dream but he is denying them the opportunity to access the same privileges that allowed him to achieve success. He most likely benefited from the following White privileges listed by Peggy McIntosh in “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Backpack”:

6. When I am told about our national heritage or about “civilization,” I am shown that people of my color made it what it is.
7. I can be sure that my children will be given curricular materials that testify to the existence of their race.
17. I can criticize our government and talk about how much I fear its policies and behavior without being seen as a cultural outsider.

Horne is perpetuating his own power by forcing Others to change to become more like him. It may seem like a far leap to connect the Arizona law to my own experience with curricula but embedded in both the Arizona example and my experience is the exclusion of dialogue, placing the burden of change onto Others, and the exalting of White privileges and knowledge over all others. Orozco writes,

Horne’s letter to the citizens of Tucson engages in a politics of veiling whereby the privileges conveyed upon whiteness are re-established as the status quo through ‘dysconsciousness.’assumptions Horne makes in his letter convey a taken-for-granted worldview rooted in whiteness. (Orozco, 2011 p. 831)

My social studies curricula was not aggressively denying students of color an education in the same way Arizona law 2281 is, but by teaching the same exact history curricula to my White students as to my students of color is arguably protecting the privileges of

those who connect with the hidden curriculum without truly listening to those whose voices are marginalized.

Those who recognize it as an assault against human rights are actively challenging Arizona law 2281. More widely accepted and mainstream curricula, however, are also expecting minorities to change their ways of being and become more like the dominant culture or risk losing access. Curriculum that celebrates one way of knowing and devalues Other ways can be so fully encapsulated in hegemony that its negative impact on some students of color goes unnoticed by the teachers that may believe they are acting in a student's best interest. Justice is eluded whenever voices are silenced and those in power maintain their privilege through force. Therefore, it may be fair to conclude that the daily social studies curriculum used across the nation may have a wider and therefore more profound impact on protecting White history at the expense of Other histories.

Kincheloe (1999) details the negative impact that results when the histories of Others are cast off and ignored in favor of the dominant history.

Whatever the complexity of the concept, whiteness, at least one feature is discernible-whiteness cannot escape the materiality of its history, its effects on the everyday lives of those who fall outside its conceptual net as well as on white people themselves. Critical scholarship on whiteness should focus attention on the documentation of such effects. Whiteness study in a critical multiculturalist context should delineate the various ways such material effects shape cultural and institutional pedagogies and position individuals in relation to the power of white reason. Understanding these dynamics is central to the curriculums of black studies, Chicano studies, postcolonialism, indigenous studies, not to mention educational reform movements in elementary, secondary, and higher education. The history of the world's diverse peoples in general as well as minority groups in Western societies in particular has often been told from a white historiographical perspective. Such accounts erased the values, epistemologies, and belief systems that grounded the cultural practices of diverse peoples. Without such cultural

grounding students have often been unable to appreciate the manifestations of brilliance displayed by non-white cultural groups. Caught in the white interpretive filter they were unable to make sense of diverse historical and contemporary cultural productions as anything other than proof of white historical success. (Kincheloe, 1999 p. 166)

Looking at the urban school world through a privileged lens is therefore not just troublesome for the students whose values, epistemologies, and belief systems are erased. The failure of urban educators to recognize the beauty in the various worldviews of my students is in itself a loss. To quote Freire:

The oppressors do not perceive their monopoly on having more as a privilege which dehumanizes others and themselves. They cannot see that, in the egoistic pursuit of having as a possessing class, they suffocate in their own possessions and no longer are; they merely have. (Freire, 1993 p. 41)

I did not punish students for exploring their individual histories. But there is evidence that I participated in the deculturalization of some of my students of color because I did create a space where they could pursue their own histories. Hegemony shaped my socio-cultural experiences and therefore my educational philosophy and actions as an educator. My form of progressivism contained traces of the Great White Hope because I acted without recognizing that all knowledge is politically constructed and there is great value in bringing different forms of knowledge into the classroom. Christine Sleeter (2004) points writes

Scholars and educators point to countless ways in which “objective truth” has not been objective, but has consisted of “grand narratives” that begin with the experiences and concerns of elites, and fold everyone into generalizations that are supposedly universal and objective. Further, knowledge and the knowledge selection process relates directly to power. As Collins (1998) put it, “despite their commitment to truth, many of the truths produced by anthropology, biology,

sociology, political science, history, and other academic disciplines manufactured consent for colonialism, imperialism, slavery and apartheid”. (Sleeter, 2004 p. 124)

I conclude this chapter with a selection from my essay submitted as part of my application to the UMass Boston Leadership in Urban Education doctoral program. It reveals data that suggest before I was able to look at urban education from theoretical perspectives that nurtured greater criticality, I was ignorant to socially constructed nature of knowledge and curriculum and I looked to Others to change so I could stay the same.

Today’s progressive minded educators have repeatedly identified the school and non-school factors that hinder student learning. A massive national effort, a Great American Education Project, would reinvigorate urban schools and help mend social woes. Redefining already established social institutions and investing money to create webs of social services for student access could close the achievement gap, strengthen curriculum, improve teacher quality and increase access to health care. The United States is at a historic crossroads. We have accumulated knowledge through quality research about schools and learning. We have parents, students, politicians and urban education professionals across the nation hungry for reform. If a colossal, five-to-ten year reform project began and if the federal, state and local governments were encouraged to commit or redirect resources, positive large-scale reforms would take place. Both the school and non-school barriers that hinder learning could be razed. Promising reforms are taking place but schools and children are still being left behind. A massive, focused reform movement that is transparent and rooted in knowledge, not politics, can make public schools thrive. (Leadership in Urban Education Application Essay, 2005)

As an urban school educator I would welcome a reform movement of the scale described above. Moreover, I would be elated if education reform became a top national priority. But, the rhetoric above does not truly advocate for deep structural changes to America’s urban schools, at least nothing that would alter the schema dimensions of structure.

Rather, I am trying to separate politics from policy and I again argue for the *Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs* approach to school reform: *If basic needs are met, students will learn.*

I offered schools as a conduit to *mend social woes* as if the dominant culture that maintains the power in urban schools had the desire, ability, and moral righteousness to fix the problems with the underclass. I cast the *parents, students, politicians and urban education professionals across the nation* that are *hungry for reform* as a single entity in lock step with each other on what constitutes good reform. I argued that *reforms rooted in knowledge, not politics* needed to rise to the top as if knowledge can ever be separated from politics. I sought to strengthen curriculum rather than dissect it for anti-democratic elements. I commented on the need to redirect resources without commenting on the need for a critical analysis on the economic and political power structures that constructed what I described as a the achievement gap. Basically, I believed I had the answers to solving the academic achievement gap between White and non-White students without even understanding what it is or what factors caused it.

I wanted to control knowledge and change the disadvantaged by directing the political, social, and material capital I benefited from downward. It is ironic that I positioned myself as a liberator but the ideas I proposed for a large scale reform project was narrow, inappropriately focused, and unable to accomplish much of anything. I fell into the same trap many ethnocentric leaders fall into: “this all-out focus on the

‘Achievement Gap’ moves us toward short-term solutions that are unlikely to address the long-term underlying problem” (Ladson-Billings, 2006 p. 4).

Gloria Ladson Billings (2006) argues that popular culture and the media have adopted an exceedingly superficial understanding of the achievement gap.

One of the most common phrases in today’s education literature is “the achievement gap.” The term produces more than 11 million citations on Google. “Achievement gap,” much like certain popular culture music stars, has become a crossover hit. It has made its way into common parlance and everyday usage. The term is invoked by people on both ends of the political spectrum, and few argue over its meaning or its import. According to the National Governors’ Association, the achievement gap is “a matter of race and class. Across the U.S., a gap in academic achievement persists between minority and disadvantaged students and their white counterparts.” (Ladson-Billings, 2006 p. 3)

Ladson-Billings believes focusing on one cause for the achievement disparity between White students and students of color is missing the point. She finds it more meaningful to look at the “historical, economic, sociopolitical, and moral decisions and policies that characterize our society” (Ladson-Billings, 2006 p. 5) and compares the achievement gap to the ever-growing national debt. Reinforcing curricula that perpetuates the status quo cannot fix a problem that has been developing over many generations. My call for a *colossal, five-to-ten year reform project* would be akin to the government controlling spending for one year but not putting a dent in the national debt that has been accumulating for centuries. Trying to alter the cultural and political landscape by providing resources for the underserved to change without putting pressure on those in power to alter their practices would not accomplish transformational reforms. Ladson-Billings believes that current disparities can be linked to factors such as the denial of

education of slaves, years of inadequate school funding, the exclusion of communities of color from civic engagement, and policies that have dehumanized segments of society since the earliest days of our republic (Ladson-Billings, 2006). In this context, my advocacy for *a massive, focused reform movement that is transparent and rooted in knowledge, not politics* appears to be empty rhetoric.

Reviewing my thoughts about grand-scale urban school reform projects have allowed me to recognize how my best intentions were misguided because I could not appreciate how my position in society influenced my understanding of the problems and I did not include critical self-reflection or sharing the burden for change as a key component. In an examination by a Professor from Tanzania attempting to figure out Whiteness in America, he was forced to grapple with the dehumanizing feeling of being labeled an alien in a new culture. Yet, Professor Semali (2000) also realized that as a member of academia, he overlooked how he was “equally implicated” in the oppression of others in certain ways.

my tacit participation as an intellectual and academician in an educational system that tokenizes multiculturalism in classrooms; my enjoyment of ethnic jokes, especially when the ethnic group being taunted is not my own; my silence on those occasions when privilege was accorded to me as a male in face of ignoring female counterparts; or my condoning the language of complicity in matters of racism, sexism, and classism in the media, textbooks, and in language arts. (Semali, 2000 p. 184)

Professor Semali’s words teach me that the “liberation” I sought for others had constricting parameters. The data shows I described the people I self-righteously attempted to serve as empty vessels just waiting for a White hero to deposit knowledge

into them. I did not investigate the social dimensions or political attachments of the curricula I sought to spread because I did not recognize that my history was not everyone's history. I am surprised this essay helped me gain acceptance into the same institution that has directed my thinking towards a more critical posture. But I am not surprised that I wrote this selection around the same time I brought my social studies curricula binder across the country. I started this section with dialogue where I asked Yanick "if she has to ignore parts of [her] culture or hide it?" I conclude this chapter speculating why I didn't ask the following question: "Do you feel you have the culture you need?"

Conclusion

Yanick: Mr. Harrison would get you into trouble a lot.

Assad: I am not saying he is racist...like he is like a racist but, he might of focused on the African American kids.

Matt: Ok, so you make the statement if kids were out of the room, and two White kids and two Black kids come out of the room and we would yell at the Black kids. Would Mr. Harrison do the same thing you think?

Students: (*collective banter*)

Terrell: We are not calling you guys racist, we just know that inside of you...there is a little like switch...like there is a little switch. Like obviously, if we are all together, we are all walking to class, just waking to class you are not going to go like, you know what, you are going to say something to all of us. But, if it happens at two different times, like even now, I have a few teachers like that. If a White kid walks in after a bell... and kind of like eases in.... and I can tell a teacher sees and she tries to ignore. And I like try to ease in and she is like 'ok sign the tardy list'. Like Mr. [S], yeah like Mr. [S] It is not like you guys are racist.

Matt: Yeah but what is it though?...it could be racist.

The data shows that I did not question or understand hegemony as an undergraduate student and therefore my teaching involved prodding students to think the way I did. I did not use pedagogical methods to empower my students in an effort to increase their criticality on concepts such as patriotism or nationalism. Rather, I sought methods to handle complex moral topics in a manner that protected the sheen that encapsulated my beloved nation. I did not use the political system to suppress identity as those in Arizona are currently doing but I wore intellectual blinders and perceived my future role as a teacher to be a patriotic cheerleader set on reproducing intellectual norms. I fell victim to the true power of hegemony; my thoughts, actions and conversations were so heavily guided by the dominant culture that I didn't realize a different way of knowing the world could be equally valued.

When I left the suburbs for the cities of Massachusetts, I may have identified myself as progressive and liberated but my initial struggle with urban students was perpetuated by a narrow view of success and knowledge and a strong inclination to use social studies curricula to protect my own White history. My inability to conceptualize my experiences from a socio-cultural or critical pedagogical perspective caused me to latch on to values ingrained in the suburban cultural fields I came of age in. By circling my wagons around cultural capital that I recognized, I alleviated my fear of urban youth I didn't understand, and I found a way to systematically teach others to be more like me.

The “switch” that Terrell alludes to in the quote above is meaningful in that it reveals how hegemony caused me to teach the same social studies curricula to significantly different students without giving it a second thought.

CHAPTER VII

FINAL THOUGHTS

Introduction

Matt: So let me ask you this question. Do you think schools...are schools, are teacher everything about schools set up to favor one type or race rather than others? Ok, is it like easier for kids from different races to be successful as defined by the school than other kids? Who has the easiest time being successful?

Terrell: Yes

Kwan: I would say Asian kids, like a quiet Asian kid would like walk into school and the teacher would be like take someone aside just like, 'invite him to your lunch table' and then yeah you like...

Terrell: I would say of all the type of races, Black, White, Asian and like Hispanic, I would say the Asians are like, like, cuz like an Asian like classroom participation points, like a little Asian kid would probably not say anything the whole class and still get a 100. But me, I really actually try to stand out. I know that I am Black and I know that I am intelligent and I have a good vocabulary... it is not like very much but I know some words, so every time I get a chance I try to stand out and try to like show off a bit to show that I am not just one of those like young African American kids who is like born in like whose just comes from the projects or something like I actually have some morals.

Matt: Huh.

I better recognize my place in the complex world of urban education as a result of having a more profound understanding of my Western middle class identity and the White privileges that accompany it. These new understandings have incredible implications for my practice as a leader in an urban public school. I am committed to

making schools more inclusive and equitable institutions but I must be shrewd when operating in a politically charged urban eco-system and to be honest, this self-examination does not provide me the skills needed to direct Others toward an examination of White privilege. Hegemony constructed in my mind a perception of the “Other” and this perception influenced the hidden, social and academic curricula I was attracted to. The role power and its reproduction plays in urban public schools is a “fundamental, largely unspoken, aspect of learning” (Nieto, 1999 p. 6). The dominant White class grows up to perpetuate the same system that benefited them (Nieto, 1999 p. 6).

Since I did not have a sophisticated understanding of the role resistance was playing in my urban classroom, I was ignorant to the fact that some of my students did in fact use differences in culture and power as leverage to their advantage. In the dialogue that opened this section, Terrell states that he was “actually trying to stand out”. He perceives a difference between how the Asian students and the Black students are treated and uses the stereotype as means to gain individual power. His words suggest that he used his intelligence and vocabulary to position himself in contrast to what he believed to be the assumptions of White teachers that groups all Black kids as unintelligible project kids. His oppositional behavior was a reform of resistance based on “denying [his] school identities” forced onto him by the White people. As a Black student, he had a social perception to counteract (Masko, 2008 p. 178) and he made the choice to “stand out” rather than “sit there the whole class and still get a 100”.

Summary of the Study

This study focuses on five years of my professional life but incorporates the totality of my life experiences. The critical-self reflection explores how my White identity and privileges impacted my understanding of the hidden, social and emotional, and academic curricula. I used the voices of my students who participated in this reform as an instrument to focus my reflection. My interest was in exploring my positionality in relation to my students as I transitioned from suburban to urban teaching. The data for the study was pulled from my own personal collection of writing from sixth grade to the present and from the semi-structured interview conducted with seven of my former students.

Looking Back at the Data in the Process of Conducting the Research

The data used in this study was collected from my own personal written work, a semi-structured interview with former students, and the use of peer reviewed academic literature. The semi-structured interview was used as a catalyst for critical self-reflection. I combed through the transcript carefully to identify themes and I used these themes to construct a focused lens in which to review my written work and academic literature related to the themes that emerged. This method allowed me to partially reconstruct my feelings about urban education over time and to connect these feeling to a more critical understanding of myself. It is important to recognize the impossibility of fully reconstructing my thoughts from a cultural context that has evaporated with time. Life experiences and new forms of knowledge have significantly altered the way I see the

world. With this limitation in mind, I was still able to identify scraps of thoughts over time and reconstruct patterns of understandings.

I sifted my data through a bricolage of theories and focused on my own thinking over time. I recognized that it is impossible to make accurate assumptions about the thoughts of Others but my speculations served to deepen my own understanding about various interpretations of the world. This research was not about Others. Rather, it was about my own thoughts about Others. This distinction liberated me to take risks and to use my data as a vehicle to explore complex social relations and come to new understandings about my world.

Revisiting the Research Questions

My research questions shifted frequently and significantly overtime; the question that guides this final draft is significantly different than the questions I started with. My interest at first lay in investigating whether or not I had been a force for deculturalization as a teacher. This question proved impossible to answer after a few months of inquiry, as I realized it can only lead to a *yes*, *no* or *maybe* answer. As I kept combing through the transcript of the interview with my students, I came to realize that my real interest was in developing a more complex understanding of how we experienced the same urban school. I also recognized that at the same time I was teaching this particular group of students, my writing for my doctoral courses were rapidly changing in tone and content as the theories I studied began to impact my philosophy of urban education. Moreover, I

transitioned from suburban to urban teaching so complications with the hidden, social and emotional, and academic curricula that I had taken for granted had emerged. I knew where my story lay when I looked holistically at all of these factors coming together.

The research questions I generated to focus in on these transitional years also expired quickly the more I learned about critical constructivism, critical pedagogy, socio-cultural theory, hegemony, critical race theory and deculturalization. It was impossible to focus solely on two years of my professional life when all that I had learned and experienced as a student, professional and human being from birth through the present played an intricate role in my attitudes and practices. And, just when I thought I was done with this self-study, I was directed by my advisor to look again, look again and then look again. The story I was telling had more to do with race (specifically, my own Whiteness) and how my own White privileges influenced my understanding and actions over time. In the end, after numerous revisions, edits, deletions and rewrites, I generated the following research question that allowed me to incorporate my own personal history at the same time I focused in on two important years of my professional life.

- 1) *How did my positionality as a White middle class educator influence my understanding and actions as a teacher of students from subordinated cultures?*
- 2) *In what ways did my positionality afford my perpetuation of the hidden curriculum, social and emotional learning curriculum, and academic curriculum?*

There was significant evidence in my data that I built and maintained a hidden curriculum and selected social and emotional and academic curricula based on my position in life and the White privileges that influenced my actions. I subscribed to the

deficit model for urban student failure for much of my professional life and this lens caused me place the burden for cultural change onto my students while I was allowed to remain the same.

The Hidden Curriculum

Evidence suggests that I inadvertently constructed an unjust hidden curriculum that disproportionately rewarded White students and potentially made school harder for some of my students of color. This is not say that I lacked appreciation for the beauty and ideas in cultures different than mine (after all I was always attracted to urban education and in working with students from backgrounds different from mine). But, it is impossible to escape a conclusion that I compared the Other to myself, was unable to recognize my position in the world, made assumptions that differences frequently equated to deficits and then placed the burden onto students to change their ways without critically looking at my own practices. Dr. Kress (2009) writes

...because Whiteness tends to be invisible, White educators have the privilege of not examining who they are and where they come from as part of their own identity development during the teaching and learning process. (Kress, 2009 p. 41)

Approaching students with this mindset has consequences: “deficit lenses lead to low expectations, which lead to superficial learning experiences further perpetuating the disadvantage of these youth” (Kress, 2009 p. 42). Kress continues:

Tied to humanism, individualism, and the Protestant Ethic, this White norm rewards the students who are silent and passive learners, who work hard and do their work alone, and who bring no prior knowledge with them into the learning environment. Students who do not adhere to this norm are then looked down upon

as immature, lacking in self-discipline, or lacking in intellect. In short, anyone who does not fit into this definition of “proper” student is then classified as abnormal because he or she does not embody these specific attributes of Whiteness. (Kress, 2009 p. 43)

My deficit laced assumptions may have had less of an impact on the hidden curriculum I maintained in the wealthy suburbs of Silicon Valley but once I transitioned to an urban classroom, my lack of critical reflection on my own positionality had consequences for myself as well as my students. Assad makes it very clear that I did set different standards for him than I did for Molly: *I didn't earn a “B” that quarter but somehow it came out as a “B”*. I did classify students that did not fit my specific definition of proper (as defined by my White experiences) as deficient or abnormal and I sought methods to correct them. I described students in terms of what they lacked and my approach to reform was based on repairing their problems by depositing knowledge and ways of being into them so they would act more like me. These attitudes underlay a hidden curriculum in an attempt to “produce students who not only learn specific subject matter but also learn how to embody raced, classed, and gendered realities” (Morris, 2005 p. 28).

After exhausting a series of failed and near failed reform initiatives, I eventually faced the unsettling reality that my culture and White privileges was propping up a hidden curriculum that had to be deconstructed to offer my students of color more of a voice in their learning experiences. Learning about critical pedagogy helped push me towards examining my position in relation to my students and identifying how my culture and ways of being influenced the hidden curriculum in my classroom. In his dialogue with Paulo Freire, Ira Shor shares the following powerful metaphor.

The students are not a flotilla of boats trying to reach the teacher who is finished and waiting on the shore. The teacher is also one of the boats. (Shor & Freire, 1987 p. 50)

Once I began to reflect on the hidden curriculum as a learner rather than a teacher, I gained new insights and understanding to better understand how culture and power operate in a classroom.

Social and Emotional Learning Curriculum

Social and emotional learning programs may have been an improvement to punitive programs like my demerit system because they reduced suspension rates and encouraged school wide coordination. But, in the end, both programs were born from White privileges and better served the interests of the White teachers looking to protect their privileges more than the interests of urban students who remained stuck with professionals who don't really understand them yet expected them to change. Growing up in White middle class, suburban home with college-educated parents provided me White privileges that went unexamined for most of my professional life. My written work illustrates how my thinking about education was consistent with constructivist thought and my subscription to the deficit model for student failure made it convenient to focus on the "Other" rather than critically deconstruct the system of culture that perpetuates my White privileges. As Kendall points out,

We can never know what it is to be Other if we aren't very clear about our experiences as white people. (Kendall, 2006 p. 2)

My comfortable immersion in my White world was challenged upon transitioning to urban teaching and the new experiences, combined with the theories I was exposed to as

a doctoral student, started me on the road to increased criticality. I started to reflect on the privileges that fostered a special relationship with students whose culture and ways of being I identified with. The data suggests, however, that even as I was learning about critical constructivism, critical race theory, critical pedagogy, socio-cultural theory, and deculturalization, a learning gap persisted and the theories did not immediately spark critical reflection or change in my actions. I continued to pressure some students to change their ways of being while I remained the same. I self-described myself as a progressive liberal and this self-imposed identity made it hard to accept the possibility that I could be doing harm.

We believe that we are well-meaning, committed white people, so it is very difficult to accept that we, as individuals who have never purposefully done anything to hurt anyone, could be hated or feared. If we see ourselves and people like us only as individuals, we can't image people of color being damaged or offended by us. We don't want to face the fact that we are benefiting from our whiteness at the expense of our friends and colleagues of color. (Kendall, 2006 p. 96)

I spent multiple years practicing and supporting a social and emotional learning program because it connected with my privileges and because I believed it to be helpful. But in the end, it was examining my own White identity and privileges that propelled me to think about some of my more “challenging” students of color in new ways.

Ironically, as I write this closing I continue to develop and advocate for social and emotional learning programming in my urban school. In fact, I am currently the member of a district committee headed by George Sugai (an academic whose work is critiqued in this auto|ethnography) to implement SEL into my current school. This is a clear

hypocrisy when put into context of the findings from this auto|ethnography, but I have concluded that SEL offers practical solutions and do help make schools more fair. Schools that adopt SEL programs force members to examine discipline programs that are overly punitive and encourage replacing these methods with more education-based approaches. Although SEL offers promising changes, it does not go far enough, and it cannot become the only reform program to deal with the complexity of urban schools. SEL, I believe, does start the process of seeking “different” methods to work with students in a more thoughtful way. Rather than relying on the old law and order approach to school discipline, social and emotional learning is a catalyst for a school wide discussion on equity and culture. In other words, it is a step in the right direction. But, because teachers are not expected to critically reflect on their positionality, SEL does little to shift the responsibility for change away from students.

Teachers open to critical pedagogy may welcome a holistic review of culture and power but, in my experience, many more will resist. If I want to generate meaningful change and help make schools more equitable, SEL is a good place to start. I must always recognize, however, that it is only a starting place and not give up at pushing stakeholders in my school to ask the tough questions and examine how their own privileges impact their expectations and understanding of their students of color.

Academic Curriculum

This auto|ethnography in no way marks an end in my journey to understand my Whiteness and the power of academic curricula to force Others to match the values of the

dominant social class; it is only the beginning of my journey. I now understand, however, that my positionality does influence the knowledge and curricula I teach or implement. It was not until I began unpacking the words of my former students and examining my own Whiteness did I recognize the shortcomings of the knowledge I taught and the manner in which I taught it. I learned through this critical self-examination that because knowledge is socially constructed, one size cannot fit all and relying on academic curriculum that only perpetuates positivist paradigms shuts down dialogue and places the burden for change onto the Other. In his examination of the sub-discipline of Whiteness, Kincheloe (1999) writes:

Understanding that when multicultural education addresses only the other and the other's cultural difference, Whites do not have to examine their own ethnicity and the ways it shapes their social outlook and identity. Once this fundamental concept is appreciated the most difficult pedagogical work begins with the examination of white privilege, the complex nature of whiteness, the dynamics surrounding the white identity crisis, the redefinition of whiteness, and the formulation of an emancipatory white identity. (Kincheloe, 1999 p. 190)

Once I did start listening, it was my own students more than any article or book that helped me recognize the injustices of denying students access to their cultural knowledge and histories. Lisa Delpit (2006) captures the essential need for dialogue between teachers and their students with the following words.

Teachers are in an ideal position to play this role, to attempt to get all of the issues on the table in order to initiate true dialogue. This can only be done, however, by seeking out those whose perspectives may differ most, by learning to give their words complete attention, by understanding one's own power, even if that power stems merely from being in the majority, by being unafraid to raise questions about discrimination and voicelessness with people of color, and to listen, no, to hear what they say. I suggest that the results of such interactions may be the most

powerful and empowering coalescence yet seen in the educational realm - for *all* teachers and for *all* the students they teach. (Delpit, 2006 p. 135 ebook edition)

This auto|ethnography has no doubt enhanced my understanding about my own White privileges and its impact on the curricula I taught but I cannot safely say I have divorced myself from the actions that help maintain inequality in schools. I now understand and hope to remind myself for the remainder of my career that listening and sharing the responsibility for change are important skills in teaching and leadership.

Limitations of the Study

The most obvious limitation to this study is the fact that it focuses on the experiences of one individual educator. There is no colossal conclusion that can be modified into policy and impact urban students at a macro level. The new understandings I have as a result of this study can be shared but not replicated because they are situated in my own lived experiences. However, Roth explains the benefits of auto|ethnography as a methodology to include their ability to “tell about a culture at the same time it tells about a life” (Roth, 2005 p. 4). But even here limitations present themselves because urban public schools consist of an immeasurable amount of cultural fields interacting with one another. This study may resonate only with individuals who can see their own lived experiences in my work.

Another limitation to this study is the manner in which the data was analyzed and reported. My research questions changed many times; the more I learned about myself, the more irrelevant my questions became. The one constant was the transcript from the

semi-structured interview with my former students. Once I identified themes that emerged from this discussion, I went back to find data that connected with the themes and questions. Therefore, it is impossible to say that this work represents all that I am and know. Rather, it was extremely focused and could only cull out certain attributes of my thinking over time. Different research questions may have yielded significantly different understandings. A limitation, therefore, is that there is much about myself I still do not know.

I did not have a follow up discussion with the students whose thoughts were essential to this critical self-reflection. It is highly likely that I made incomplete or improper assumptions that could not be clarified or unpacked. This does not invalidate my findings because the study is about me, not them. But, my findings could have been impacted if I wrongly interpreted information presented by a students and used it to form a pathway to self-discovery.

Implications for Teachers, Administrators, Policy Makers & Researchers

This auto|ethnography led to new understandings that have implications for me and for readers who connect with my work. The following implications can help alleviate the oppression of subordinated cultures in urban schools. The various forms of capital and knowledge need to be explored and celebrated. Teachers need to advocate for *culturally sustaining pedagogy* to foster “linguistic, literate and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling” (Paris, 2012 p. 95). Top down policies that push

accountability above all else can threaten pluralism. I have learned that reforms that advocate for a common way of doing things can have the unintended consequence of pushing diverse schools into discouraging different forms of knowledge. This can result in the narrowing of curriculum and behavior expectations and thus the continuation of the tradition of deculturalization in urban schools (Spring, 2001). Urban public school professionals and policy makers need to examine if White privileges have encouraged the subscription to the deficit model for student failure and whether or not the voices of families they serve are incorporated into curricula design. Teachers need to enter a relationship with a student with radical listening and with the assumption that he/she can learn about him/herself at the same time he or she learns about the student. As a result of my new understandings, I am not calling for the abandonment of *Common Core* or other formal learning curricula or standards in favor of no standards. Rather, educators need to acknowledge that knowledge is politically and socially constructed and there are many ways to know the world. Knowledge exalted by the dominant culture serves a political purpose and urban schools are by default institutions charged with perpetuating the status quo. School reforms must begin with open and honest dialogue between those in power and those who are directly impacted by policy and there needs to be an expectation of shared responsibility for change.

I need to push back against voices that argue for reconstituting or strengthening the status quo. I have personally found it impossible to identify all of my own White privileges but I know they play a significant role in my professional life. People with

White privileges will feel threatened by reforms that value the knowledge of people of color if the reasons behind the changes are not critically examined in a safe manner. Individuals that recognize their own position in the world in relation to Others need to advocate for reforms that transform rather than perpetuate the status quo. It may not be possible for a paradigm shift to happen in one school year or even over an individual's career. But critical pedagogues have an obligation to radically listen to their students and actively check the prejudices of Others that are expressed in faculty meetings, leadership meetings, or grade level team meetings and constantly advocate for the inclusion of more voices at the table. Over time, attitudes can change and society as a whole may recognize that through radical listening and amplifying the voices of the oppressed serves the collective better than silencing them.

My findings also have implications for future research. I am hard-pressed to fully align my day-to-day practice with the tenants of critical pedagogy. I would encourage researchers to engage in dialogue with urban students of color and their families with the specific goal of making various forms of curricula more relevant and meaningful. In essence, I encourage researchers to co-construct curricula implementations by facilitating honest and open dialogue between teachers, administrators, students and their families. Advocates of academic and social and emotional curricula frequently argue their programs are inclusive of student voices but without encouraging all stakeholders to consider their positionality, the knowledge they value, and how hegemony impacts policy implementation, it is just empty rhetoric. I am eager to see the results of new curricula

initiatives that are constructed after Western ideologies, white privileges, resistance and various ways of knowing are considered.

This study also has implications for teacher education. I believe principles of critical pedagogy should be introduced to educators before or during their first days in the classroom. If I had a critical perspective lens on my classroom during the early days of my career, I may have avoided years of deficit thinking. Researchers should deepen studies to see if providing pre-service teachers with a more complex bricolage of theoretical frameworks can lead to more sophisticated and balanced understanding of White privilege and the hidden curriculum.

Conclusion

Matt: Did you have to take on a new culture?

Terrell: Yeah, you just gotta, you just gotta know how to switch roles and talk to different types of people. But you are going to need to learn that in life anyway.

Matt: Yeah, but Molly, you don't necessarily have to do that to be successful. You don't have to learn a different culture.

Terrell: True, she has the culture that you need.

I have changed a lot as a professional and a thinker since my first days as an urban educator. In reality, I have changed much since I first sat down to write this auto|ethnography. Everything about me, including my common sense was influenced by my White identity and my subscription to the deficit model for urban student failure faced little scrutiny until it was critically examined in relation to the words of my former

students. I now understand that switching to urban teaching awakened dormant biases nurtured in the Connecticut suburbs and these biases influenced my professional identity. I did not appreciate the weight of Terrell's powerful declaration: "True, she has the power you need", until years after he said it and only after critically reflecting with the help of my theoretical bricolage. Students in urban schools that are dismissed or ignored because they are labeled as behavior problems or ignorant may have a sense of clarity about urban schools that dwarfs that of the educators that attempt to deculturalize them. When I transitioned to urban teaching, I failed to radically listen to what Terrell was telling me and so I instead expended time, effort and resources attempting to pull him closer to my way of thinking. I believed that there was a right way and a wrong way to act and learn and White school professionals (myself included) were privy to moral truths. The professors in the UMass Boston Leadership in Urban Education doctoral program pushed me to critically exam my tendency to retreat to the false security of ethnocentrism and as a result, I believe I am a more just and equitable school leader today. This work is just beginning as I grapple with transferring my new understandings about myself into action.

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