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Taboo: The Journal of Culture and Education

Taboo: The Journal of Culture and Education is an academic forum for the study of teaching and pedagogy that focuses on the relationship between education and its socio-cultural context. Drawing upon a variety of contextualizing disciplines including cultural studies, curriculum theorizing, feminist studies, the social foundations of education, critical pedagogy, multi/interculturalism, queer theory, and symbolic interactionism, Taboo is grounded on the notion of “radical contextualization.” The journal encourages papers from a wide range of contributors who work within these general areas. As its title suggests, Taboo seeks compelling and controversial submissions.

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Welcome to the second edition of Taboo for 2013.
Firstly, we wish to thank the previous editors and all those who have worked to compile a collection of high-quality submissions, which we have the privilege of including here. Our apologies to many of the authors in this edition who have experienced inordinately long periods of time between having their submissions selected, reviewed, and accepted for publication and actually seeing these emerge in print. The hiatus in the publication of Taboo over the last couple of years occasioned by changes in formatting, site-hosting changes, and in editors has meant long delays between acceptance and publication. We apologize for this, however, in this issue and the following one we will hopefully be able to accommodate all of the authors who have been waiting for their pieces to be published, and just as importantly, accommodate the interests and needs of an audience who wish to read the sort of articles that appear in Taboo.

As editors, we found this issue to be a particularly interesting one to put together. The issue is one that has a flow of ideas and experiences of identity running across it: from the autobiographical work of Tracy D. Keats, the construction of consumerist orientations and identities of Jim Parsons and William Frick, Liping Wei’s explorations of multiculturalism, Diane Ketelle’s use of photographic images in reflecting on the connection between self and place, and G. Sue Kasun’s work on the impact of transnationalism on notions of home and belonging within Whiteness. These articles individually and collectively present a provocation to thinking about one’s own place, being, and possibilities.

Articles by Katherine Sprecher and by Aretha Faye Marbley, Fred Arthur Bonner II, Vicki A. Williams, Pamela Morris, Wendy Ross, and Hansel Burley look to the imperatives of the university in responding to increasingly diverse student populations and the contribution the academy might make to a genuine anti-racist, multicultural community.
4 Introduction

For us as editors, the insightful article by four experienced editors of journals—Caroline R. Pryor, Carol A. Mullen, Tricia Browne-Ferrigno, and Sandra Harris—has been illuminating, and has given us occasion to consider future developments of this journal.

Thank you to the authors who have put their passions, interests, and commitments to social betterment at the core of their work. Thank you also to the publisher—in particular, Alan Jones from Caddo Press, for his patient and guiding work. And thank you to the readers who will bring the ideas here into countless individual locations and lives.

—Jon Austin, Renee Baynes, & Glen Parkes
Editors, Taboo
I was introduced to the bricolage in educational research when Shirley Steinberg asked me to conduct autobiographical primary research—a more interesting, enlightening, and rigorous experience than I could have ever expected. Writing an autobiography elicited a multitude of thoughts and feelings, not the least of which were apprehension, excitement, intrigue, fear, and doubt. The process has proven natural yet intense because the research is genuine and intimate. In production and analysis of the text, I have used multiple research methods including thematic analysis, textual analysis, ethnography, critical hermeneutics, and psychoanalysis.

Steinberg attributes the term *bricolage* to Claude Levi-Strauss (1966) and describes it as a sort of toolbox that “involves taking research strategies from a variety of scholarly disciplines and traditions as they are needed in the unfolding context of the research situation” (Steinberg, 2006, p. 119). Drawing from Denzin and Lincoln’s (2000) work, Joe Kincheloe (2001) depicts the bricolage as a concept moving qualitative research into the future. Kincheloe argues that knowledge and research are more subjective than we are willing or perhaps able to admit. He therefore reasons convincingly for Nietzsche’s notion of perspectivism: the more perspectives a researcher is able to engage, the more understanding can be gained. This contradicts a common critique that interdisciplinarity and thus bricolage are superficial by nature. Instead, Kincheloe attests, a vigilant bricoleur recognizes the limitations of a single methodology and the inherent interconnectedness of social, cultural, psychological, and pedagogical inquiry.

The bricoleur becomes an expert on the relationships connecting cultural context, meaning making, power, and oppression within disciplinary boundaries. Their rigorous understanding of these dynamics possibly makes them more aware of the influence of such factors on the everyday practices of the discipline than those who have traditionally operated as scholars within the discipline. (Kincheloe, 2001, p. 684)
A researcher is therefore able to construct the most useful bricolage from a variety of strategies and based on an exploration and understanding of the object of inquiry within its existing contexts.

In exploring the various stories of my life and attempting to find meaning in autobiographical images, insights, and interpretations, the process of bricolage offers a rich, complex analysis from which I am able to gain deeper and wider understanding of the influences that shaped me as an educator (Steinberg, 2006).

**Phenomenological Reading**

*Structure*

Almost immediately, it was apparent that my biggest struggle with writing an autobiography was conceptualizing the final product. I like to begin with a goal in mind so that I can continually evaluate progress along the path. To sit down and simply write was difficult. What was even more difficult was dealing with the randomness of childhood memories that flooded once the gates were opened. Where would each story appear in the text, and in what order? What was important and what was irrelevant?

Structure emerged as a concrete theme in many instances but also as an emotional, overlying theme upon further analysis of my experience in creating the autobiographical document.

The value placed on a logical, ordered way of doing things was established early in the manner my parents and maternal grandmother ran our household. Although the children—three brothers, a sister, and myself—were intensely involved in multiple and varied activities, our home was scheduled and clean. Disorganization was not tolerated. Without order, nothing would be accomplished. Evidence of this can be found in the daily lunchtime routine during elementary school: dismissal bell, board the appropriately numbered school bus, follow the path home, eat a meal and watch cartoons, return to the bus stop with three minutes to spare. Other household examples include how Nan went about daily chores such as making the beds and doing the laundry, as well as mom’s organization of her office when she was completing her Masters degree.

My paternal grandparents upheld a similar standard of organization, running a convenience store where everything had its place on the shelves. In their home, there was a clear distinction between the formal living room and the casual family room, from the type and condition of the furniture to the nature and quality of the mounted photographs.

The appearance and maintenance of structure throughout my childhood meant that I was conditioned to approach situations and challenges in a certain way. From the mundane (such as an orderly spice rack) to the complex (understanding expectations and strategizing success), there is a constant need to build and preserve a structured environment so that I can function effectively.
Perfectionism, Individualism, and Competition

Pursuit of perfection may have been a natural progression from, or perhaps merely a co-requisite of, structure. I write:

I did my best to do everything, be everything, succeed at everything I possibly could. I played on every school sports team possible, even after making the commitment to specialize in volleyball, and was named Athlete of the Year. I aimed for a perfect 100% grade in every class, packing my timetable with every academic option I could. I finished the year with a 97% average, including all 30-level sciences, Calculus, and French, and received awards for top marks in numerous classes and many academic scholarships for university.

I intended to stand out as the best, regardless of the task, thereby setting myself apart from others. Additionally, it is obvious throughout the text that I did anything that I was good at, and only for as long as I was good at it. Activities such as swimming and playing the piano were only enjoyable while I was competing and winning. This individualistic competition is a Euro-Canadian ideology with which I was raised in the White Christian middle class town of Gander. Herbert Northcott contrasts Canada’s First Nations cultural view in Going Native: A White Guy’s Experience Teaching in an Aboriginal Context (Northcott, 2007):

While Aboriginal culture acknowledges differential strengths, these are to be used for the benefit of the community and not for individual self-aggrandizement. The Euro-Canadian ethic of individualistic competition for the purpose of identifying the strongest seemed foreign and hostile to the Aboriginal students. (p 59)

While interscholastic and athletic competition was indeed hostile at times—for example, I remember despising a promising younger athlete who joined the table tennis team and quickly began challenging my long-standing singles title—it was so normalized that it is only now that I can honestly question why such fierce individualistic competition was needed.

In school, we learned about Charles Darwin and “survival of the fittest.” Evolution yielded improved versions of individuals. Females of a species wanted to mate with the strongest, most dominant male in order to ensure his “good genes” were passed along to her offspring. The most scholarly and well-presented project won top prize at the Science Fair. Outstanding performances in the Kiwanis Music Festival earned an encore performance in Stars of the Festival on Friday evening. Athletes were revered in High School, earning greater privilege and higher social status than other students.

With these and many other examples, I learned what it meant to be the best and aspired to be it. Mistakes took away from perfection, and were only acceptable if they were not repeated. I learned to not only measure myself by what was possible, but also by what others were doing or not doing. Competition drove me to be better, but at the same time, allowed me an excuse to devalue others. Instead of following the typical path of Newfoundland students to a Maritimes university, my choice to
attend Carleton University was not only because of the touted Journalism program at that institution but also because very few people I knew were going there. I did not want to make the typical choice; I wanted to be different. Similarly, I did not want to be a teacher, simply because my parents were teachers.

In my Euro-Canadian world of individualistic competition, equality was not desirable and so it is a recurring theme to set myself apart through the pursuit of excellence.

Writing and Language

I learned that in order to excel in school, I needed to be able to clearly and intelligently communicate with teachers, particularly through scholarly writing. Fortunately, my grandfather was an early mentor for written language. In his neat, concise and factual style, he recorded years of daily journal entries in a beautifully leather-bound series with golden labels. I ran home after school on days when I had something exciting to tell Granddad. As I dictated, he would put pen to paper, right after he noted the weather, significant news headlines, birthdays, anniversaries or holidays. Writing was serious work, and it was important to love your work:

I learned a lot about thoughtfulness and attention to detail from Granddad’s journal writing. I constantly observed the care he took in scribing each word in perfect cursive, in documenting something for each of the grandchildren in the household…every day, in remembering to specifically mention those who were absent (those who lived elsewhere or who were deceased), in replacing the book in line with the previous annuals in the bookcase at the end of each writing session.

I came to love writing, particularly when it was required more often in school, and I realized that written language came easily. Although I may never be able to articulate the technicalities of the English language, I could feel my way into writing a good sentence—I wrote what sounded right. On reflection, it’s possible to correlate this aptitude with a strong history of reading from a young age. I remember book clubs and reading competitions in elementary school that led me to experience text and storytelling on a daily basis. Of course, there were always gold stars and certificates awarded to the most accomplished readers.

Writing also emerged thematically as a means for personal expression, creativity and emotional catharsis. Evidence from my autobiography include:

The collective grief was palpable, though I was unsure how I should express my own sadness. Many years later, at Nan’s funeral in the same church, I placed a handwritten letter inside her coffin and my mom reminded me that I had done the same for Granddad back when I was eight. In a letter, written as though I were speaking with him, I had expressed gratitude for everything he’d done for me, love for all the things he was to me, and regret for losing the future time with him. I’d tucked this letter inside a card addressed to Granddad and slipped it into the satin-lined box.
And:

I did not become dedicated to journal writing, but I did find other ways to express myself through pen and paper, and word processor. I wrote long letters to people, sometimes sending them, sometimes not. I wrote extensive fictional stories, placing heroes in fantastical situations. I welcomed writing assignments at school and spent long hours writing, reading and rewriting.

Such a strong emphasis on the written word leads me to de-emphasize spoken language. While my oral communication is well within the acceptable, it must be noted that written presentation is much preferred to its direct alternative—giving a speech or delivering a lecture. This phenomenon is something missing from my autobiography: I do not mention being able to win a verbal argument, for example, or talk my way out of being in trouble—both things that kids are known to do.

Feminism

It is only recently that I began to consciously learn societal limitations of being a girl. With competitive success as a beacon, I lived as though there was nothing I couldn’t do, nothing I couldn’t be. When there weren’t girls’ teams, I played on the boys’ teams. I was consistently the top student in my classes, regardless of gender, and my physical stature at 6’2” was an exclamation mark. When an opportunity arose, I took it. And when I was ready to move onto the next “thing,” I usually did it with free will.

In analysing why I became a teacher, a coach, and a mentor for young females, an underlying theme of feminism emerges. Although I do not talk much about my mother, she is presented in my autobiography as an educated, methodical, and liberated role model. She was the more vocal leader in our family, my father taking a quieter position. While Mom taught elementary school each day, my grandmother took on the household duties, displaying important take-charge qualities and an unwavering work ethic. Both ladies assumed complete control of their responsibilities and played important symbolic roles for me, never once submitting to a paternalistic assumption.

Outside of my own home, however, I encountered very few strong female role models. I remember scorning my Junior High music teacher because she appeared weak, although what made her appear that way is questionable. While I was socialized as a girl, I was also socialized to believe that women needed to acquire the male quality of strength and assertiveness. Therein lies my struggle between individualistic competitiveness and feminism. I was immersed in a culture that represented masculinity as dominant and invulnerable and femininity as passive and pleasing, naturalizing sexism (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). In psychoanalysis, I believe that “male” and “female” qualities are available to everyone, and I always craved a female leader who would show me the way—a mentor to teach me how to balance and blend the gender dichotomy.
Privilege

The all-encompassing theme of my autobiography is privilege. I was denied nothing and offered every opportunity to lead a successful life. This realization is somewhat disheartening, as I have always believed in self-creation, earning what you receive, and reward for the work you put in.

There are two aspects of my identity from which I do not derive power, however: that I am female, as previously discussed, and that I am a Newfie. My hometown was regarded as “multicultural” within a unique Canadian province, but Gander is a less severe stereotype of a Newfoundland community. Media, anecdotes, and Newfie jokes portray Newfoundlanders as uneducated, poor, primitive labourers—the gypsies of Canada. The most recognizable identifier is the “Newfie accent,” similar to Brad Pitt’s in Snatch. How could I be blamed for “neutralizing” my accent in order to fit in with the “other” of the normal Mainlander? This is an indication of the direction of power in that a minoritized group can emulate the dominant group in order to gain status (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012), but Mainlanders would only ever imitate a Newfie accent for entertainment.

Regardless of my minority struggles as a female Newfoundlander, I have been afforded much power in my Euro-Canadian culture. In The Great White North? Exploring Whiteness, Privilege and Identity in Education, Paul Carr and Darren Lund assert:

Power does have a colour in Canada, despite official multiculturalism, making our nation appear superficially to be a harmonious society in which anyone can be successful with the right attitude and effort. The meritocratic myth has worked against people of colour in Canada for hundreds of years. It is problematic that White people so effortlessly invoke deficits in individual efforts as an explanation of underachievement by some racial minorities. (Carr & Lund, 2007)

It is with this understanding that I have always explained the opposite phenomenon: overachievement is also a product of individual efforts. Upon further analysis, however, I must admit that White privilege has also played a part.

My White privilege is highlighted by the absence of ethnic minorities throughout my autobiography. While my hometown was considered more “neutral” than others, at least from my point of view, my experiences with people of colour are limited. I remember one Brown girl, and one half-Asian boy; I remember nothing about their “otherness” but rather presumed they were no different than me. They had the same opportunities to show their stuff, the same chance to win; they just had to do it. I never considered that they might have limitations beyond their control.

Not only were “the right attitude and effort” assumed in my upbringing but achievement and success were as well. Proceeding to post-secondary education was a given, and I was encouraged to go anywhere, do anything and become anything I aspired to. I could not imagine anything as unattainable. All I had to do was win. “Euro-Canadians understand capitalism, inequality and stratification” (Northcott,
Methodology

In analysing my autobiographical text, I have attempted to do what Shirley Steinberg (2006) suggests is necessary: to allow the text to open and present themes for the researcher…It then becomes ready for the critical hermeneutic interpretation which is my tentative research goal” (p. 122). I have also attempted to employ a multi-perspectival research methods approach that many scholars have termed bricolage.

In direct contrast to my natural style, I wrote erratically: I found it hard to stick to a regular schedule as suggested by Stephen King (2000) in On Writing; I remembered and recorded aspects of my childhood randomly, just throwing them onto the page; I tried to shut down my brain and just write. I used self-monitoring throughout the process of writing as I encouraged myself to engross in reflection rather than trying to understand before having something to analyze.

When many pages were filled, a structure emerged and I was able to arrange the various stories under headings. Although there were more memories to write about and other directions to pursue, I produced a document that felt whole and complete. Within this document, a number of themes appeared—some unsurprising but others unexpected. I then re-read each word, sentence, paragraph, and section multiple times, and recorded each instance that represented a theme. This information was organized into a table, and certain biographical information was repeated in several columns. Undertaking thematic analysis in this way allowed me to see direct correlation in the various themes represented throughout my youth.

I relied heavily on ethnographic analysis and psychoanalysis in attempting to understand meaning from the emerging themes. I found myself asking questions. Why did I do that? What was I thinking? What was I feeling? I attempted to use hermeneutic phenomenology to interpret less concrete findings within the text such as assumptions, stereotypes and societal pressures.

What I found most interesting was attempting to understand my own positionality within the text and the complexity of researcher within the research. Here I drew from Darren Lund’s Social Justice Activism in Education course in which I have been challenged to investigate why I see the world in the way that I do, and to understand and accept that others have a very different perspective. This has translated to my use of bricolage as a research methodology. Kathleen Berry states:

For contemporary research content and processes such as bricolage, identifying how and why the researcher is positioned in the study is a must. Shifting positionalities (based on place, time, gender, race, class, sexuality, etc.) from which a researcher reads, writes, analyses, indicate a recognition of the part played by the socializing texts of scholarly discourses, academic expectations and contexts throughout time and space. (Berry, 2006, p. 90)
By examining the text from multiple perspectives, and considering my positionality throughout, I am able to gain a broader, albeit more complex, understanding of meaning.

References


Tracy D. Keats is a graduate student in the Werklund School of Education at the University of Calgary, Calgary, Alberta, Canada. Her M.A. thesis is entitled “We Don’t Need Another Hero: Hollywood Representations of Captains in Team Sport.”
The Building of Consumerism  
and the Impact of School Sorting  

Jim Parsons & William Frick

A recent 2008 television commercial for Rogers Phone shows a group of young people sitting around a table, when suddenly a young woman comes up to share that she got a new phone for Christmas. In fact, she had opened it early and was using it, but said she would put it back under the tree so she could open it on Christmas morning. A young man asks, “Well, where is the surprise on Christmas morning, when you open your gifts now?” She responds “Watch,” and suddenly erupts into paroxysms of feigned joy as she pretends she has seen it for the first time. The group, duly impressed, nods—good job faking it!

There are many things disturbing about this television commercial, least of which is the fact that someone in Rogers’ think tank believes this experience represents a kind of “truth in advertising.” First, the ad celebrates an entitled sneakiness—although it is a Christmas gift, the young woman has opened the phone because she wants to. It is really that simple. Second, she has demonstrated—and been supported by the advertisement—that instant gratification is good. Why wait, when you can have things now? Third, the advertisement honors faking it—in other words, lying. Things will be fine, because she has the ability and will to feign sincerity and no one will know the difference. Finally, all these actions are condoned by the group—whose basic value set centers around two things: (1) their appreciation for the material possession—it is a “good” thing—as in “material good” and (2) their awe for their friend’s ability to pull off her act of insincerity.

The advertisement is certainly not about joy on Christmas morning, nor does the advertisement see anything wrong with the sort of “white lie” attendant upon the young woman’s “stealing” [Is it really hers until the arrival of the occasion for which it is given? And what is the difference, assuming the gift was from a parent, between this child’s opening this Christmas present or taking money from Dad’s wallet under the belief that Dad would leave it to her upon his death anyway? It’s just
The Building of Consumerism

a matter of timing right?] The advertisement is about having what one wants—and having it when one wants it.

The “job” of the commercial is to infect a “giggle” upon those who watch. But the truth of that giggle reveals the hegemony of consumer culture. The advertisement only works because it is deeply etched within the promotion of a deeper cultural myth and the “giggle” it engenders shows how deeply we accept the myth—in other words, we get it! Furthermore, the advertisement counts on us getting it in two ways: (1) we understand the ad’s logic and (2) we go out and buy (get) the product. The commercial’s hermeneutic informs us of the behaviors and current practices of youth in a society of instant gratification that lacks an understanding of ethical responsibility or the consequences of being a fake. For those “inside” the commercial, the critique of us as critics would be to suggest that too much is being read into a commercial meant only to catch attention, show what a product can do and how one’s life is better for having that product, and provoke a giggle.

The commercial, as is, does what it is supposed to do in a purely market-driven, corporate sense. The advertisement convincingly presents a product that creates what Valas (2009) calls a TOMA (Top Of the Mind Awareness, which in “guerrilla retailing” means developing a marketing plan so that consumers want or need the things you sell) experience for the viewer persuading them to consume—liberally and unhindered. That businesses market to children makes good economic sense, because children grow to become consumers and profits rise. For political conservatives, such marketing aligns with a fundamental philosophy that open, free, and liberal capitalistic markets, unhindered and constrained by regulation, are in everyone’s economic best interests.

Our task is not to evaluate such marketing or to point out the rightness or wrongness of such advertising. Instead, our point is to highlight what we believe such advertisements represent in terms of cultural-economic shifts and to suggest what these shifts mean for the curriculum of schooling. To sum up our main point, we believe schools are unknowingly complicit in the building of consumerist culture by creating a curriculum of sorting that works to build a consumer class whose main job is to practice materialism and fuel economic growth.

Why Schools are Up Against It

To better understand this cultural-economic shift, it is helpful to understand how economic ideas have grown and changed. In North America, these changes both reflect and shape how people have lived. To highlight these philosophical shifts, Jardine (2004) notes that classic liberalism (which fell out of vogue in the late 19th century, until a brief revival via Milton Friedman in the 1970s) assumed people were producers, an assumption in line with the needs of a productive economy; neoclassic liberalism (which began at the end of the 1970s) assumed people were consumers, an assumption in line with the needs of a consumptive society. In a
similar vein, Adam Smith’s *Wealth of Nations* (written in 1776) argued that the market maximized people’s ability to labor productively; Milton Friedman more recently assumed that the market maximized people’s consumer choices. Classical liberalism morphed from a philosophy that embodied *utilitarian* individualism into a neoclassic liberalism that embodied *expressive* individualism.

Thus, liberalism as a concept has re-defined itself. Today’s conservatives are more properly called “classic liberals,” and it is ironic that in the United States of America, Republicans call Democrats liberals because Republicans themselves typically espouse two classically liberal policies: (1) they wish to return to a laissez faire economic system and (2) they want a return to Protestant morality as practiced before the 1960s. The economic theory espoused by Republicans is libertarianism; although Republicans are not typically morally libertarians. Republicans believe the market should be left alone to reward those who “have what it takes” to benefit from their own insights, abilities, and perhaps even good luck. Restrictions of a free market are restrictions of free economic choice and are consequently suspect. Ironically, Republicans talk of government leaving citizens alone, but really mean government should leave the economy alone. Republicans are less willing to keep government out of areas of morality and are quite willing to have government institute school prayer and restrict abortions, for example.

The medical health insurance plans offered by John McCain and Barack Obama during the 2008 U.S. presidential campaign represent a case in point about how Republicans and Democrats read the way people think—or should think—differently. Obama wanted to create governmental programs that would provide health care to people so that no one would be left out. McCain wanted to provide money to people so they could choose their own health care—or, if desired, could choose not to have health care. Beneath the chatter about “big government” and “small government” was a basic but unstated difference between how Democrats and Republicans understand human nature. The elephant in the room for Democrats was the belief that many humans would simply make the wrong choice, spend the money provided by a Republican government, and continue to be on the government’s medical dole. Although one might also argue for efficiency of cost benefit, deep inside Democratic thinking is the belief that humans aren’t always wise and need to be organized and “encouraged” to be so. Republicans, on the other hand, either believed humans are more sagacious, more apt to make wiser choices, or—even if they are not—should have the right to make choices because ‘no one should tell anyone else how to live.’ Republicans are more willing than Democrats to accept a citizen’s wrong choices as part of the practical working out of freedom. What many people fail to ferret out of this issue is that, when considered, Republican icon Ronald Reagan probably had more faith in the wisdom and judgment of Americans than new Democratic icon Barack Obama—even though Obama would be considered to be more a ‘Man of Hope.’

Jardine (2004) points out an enduring irony in Western industrialism and
The Building of Consumerism

commerce. The breakdown of the Protestant ethic that stressed hard work, thrift, and self-denial might be lamented, but that breakdown was necessary for the economy to grow and for the creation of a large middle class. Specifically, if everyone practiced the Protestant work ethic, no one would purchase the goods produced from the vibrant economic impact of the very Protestant work ethic that generated the explosion of consumer goods within Western society. Those goods exist because years ago people accepted and lived the myth that they should work hard, save for what they needed, buy when they could afford to, and willingly delay what they wanted right now in light and appreciation of a bigger picture—a future where they and their children would eventually earn and appreciate the rewards of their hard work. Ironically, too many hard-working, save-for-tomorrow by delaying gratification citizens are not good economically. In fact, the growth of a business can only be fueled when people buy the consumer goods or services produced by that business. In other words, if a company is to flourish economically, someone has to buy the goods and services that company produces; if not, the products the company offers will not create profit and, without profit, the company will not grow. Without growth there can be no expansion of business and the dream of wealth that fuels it.

In a consumer society, those who practice self-denial and savings render the society dysfunctional. If it didn’t exist already, a culture of consumerism would have to be created and, to sustain itself, would have to teach people to practice spending instead of saving. Instant gratification encouraged by credit (a unique invention that allows even more “have it now”), is more useful in growing a “free” market than the Protestant work ethic. It is necessary that vibrant free market economics coincide with libertarian attitudes towards personal spending. Hence, when a September 11 happens, a President who acts within this logic will encourage people to spend.

The Way Schools Behave

Let us make a connection between what happens in schools and the history of liberalism and neo-liberalism. It would be impossible for schools not to teach students a broad curriculum that includes and embeds society’s prevailing mythologies. The way people talk and interact, the values they carry from home, the way they dress, the “toys” (cell phones and the like) they play with, the content of their conversations, and all the likes and dislikes, come with students and teachers to school to make up part of the curriculum—‘like white on rice.’

When young people come to school, they engage that broad curriculum; and, they are chastened by a school culture that includes being evaluated both by the exams and the values (formal and informal) of that school culture. To one extent or another, they cannot help but be shaped by their experiences—either by compliance or resistance. Some children succeed; some children fail to succeed and sometimes it is difficult to answer why.

What we do know is that, by the time our young finish school, either by drop-
ping out or by graduation, many have had negative school experiences. These young people then become the parents of the next generation of children who attend schools. It would be naïve to think that the children of those children would not embody their parents’ fears and stories and carry them to school. When taking about parental involvement in schools, educators employ the truism that suggests schools and teachers must realize that increasing parental involvement is often a question of overcoming pre-existing parent biases. The truth of this comment is testament that something about schools is “wrong” for a number of parents and children. It is no wonder many parents dislike showing up at school; they have little history of success there and don’t feel good when they come. After a parent-teacher conference night, teachers routinely suggest, with no sense of the deep irony of the statement, ‘the only parents who came were the ones they didn’t need to see.’

This history of lack of success begins early for many. Having taught grade seven, Jim came to believe that, by the time young people arrive at junior high school, they know if they will be successful in school. Young people have faced enough formal or informal assessments—or assessments have been done on them—to give them a sense of where they stand in the pecking order of school culture. Some students will glide into university education; some will opt for other vocations—all generally decided quite early in a student’s career, even in what is characterized as an “open” and “accessible” educational system in North America when compared to other educational systems around the world.

Prizes and signposts guide students “making either choice.” Those intelligent in the ways schools measure intelligence come to gain a vision of their own efficacy. To the extent to which they “apply themselves” in ways sanctioned by the educational system, they become the intellectual leaders of society. They will be granted further opportunities, practice, and knowledge to continue to develop self-efficacious behaviors. They become the “emperors” in Kevin Kline’s Emperor’s Club (2002).

The prize for those not intelligent in the ways school measures intelligence is that, instead of a vision of efficacious leadership, they gain a vision of a “good job.” This good job is clearly tied to wages and the promise that, to the extent to which they “apply themselves” at work, they can gain the promise of consumer goods and a comfortable life, all of which is wrapped around the extent to which they embrace the goals of materialism and consumerism. What makes these people uniquely good at being consumers of materialism are the attributes that made them poor school students—most didn’t study or work hard. Instead, they did something else probably more enjoyable. Perhaps they watched television, talked to their friends, or played Nintendo’s Wii. Whatever they opted for, they opted toward short-term gratification and opted away from the self-denial needed to succeed as a student.

These people will merge into a consumer society whose lack of self-denial and whose corresponding bent towards instant gratification will, in fact, be counted upon to fuel the consumerist economic activities of business. The positive skills
for consumerism are negative school skills. But, they are far from new skills; they have already been learned and practiced in the school setting. Specifically, in junior high school and high school, these young people come to practice behaviors that will soon become prized within their group. They play instead of work; they avoid responsibility and eschew consequences for their actions; and they regularly choose instant gratification over self-denial and materialism over thrift.

Schools and the philosophy that runs through them both nurture this behavior and yet are complicit in creating it by regularly sorting students and shaping student behavior. Not that stemming these behaviors would be easy, but any high-stakes or redundant sorting devices that permanently peg student performance helps create student identity by bifurcating it one way or another.

Choice, the Consumerist Cultural Myth, and School Reform

Social reproduction lies deep in our culture, and finds its way into even the literature of children. For example, in J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter*, Albus Dumbledore’s educational problem centers on how to train students not just in the “technology” of magic but also in the moral discernment necessary to avoid the reproduction of the great Dark Lords like Voldemort. Not ironically, a Sorting Hat decided which of four houses a student would enter. Even in *Harry Potter* (1997), sorting into one house or another is based upon the different values and qualities of students. For example, Dumbledore noted to Harry that the hat placed him in Gryffindor.

“Listen to me, Harry. You happen to have qualities Salazar Slytherin prized in his hand-picked students. Resourcefulness, Determination, a certain disregard for rules. Yet the Sorting Hat placed you in Gryffindor. You know why that was. Think.”

“It only put me in Gryffindor,” said Harry “Because I asked not to go in Slytherin.”

“Exactly,” said Dumbledore. “Which makes you very different from [Voldemort]. It is our choices, Harry, that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities.”

Harry asked, “Who am I at heart?” But a better question would be, “What must I do to become what I should be?” In Rowling’s books, Harry’s character was not a fixed thing, but something he was responsible to shape. Hence, the Greeks called character “that which is engraved,” and it has been well-known that education carries with it the act of engraving.

We are not alone in our view that schools are complicit in furthering consumerist society’s need to build a consumer class by sorting students into basically two groups. *Newsweek* (April 24, 2008) contained an article by Thomas Toch titled “Still at Risk,” a review of the 25-year old U.S. Department of Education’s report “A Nation at Risk.” Ironically, the original report was released in the emerging post-industrial economy “fueled” by the recession of the early 1980s that caused massive layoffs in the industrial and manufacturing sectors. The Report called, like
Obama calls, for Americans to preserve and enhance their places in the middle class and for American businesses to stay competitive in a new economic era. The Report challenged the fundamental assumption of public education that had emerged during the 20th century—that the best education for America’s students was to (1) acquire basic literacy skills in the early grades and then (2) learn the skills practical in the factory—a utilitarian vision of public schooling that had dominated 20th century curriculum.

In Toch’s words, the 20th century saw public schools as “sorting machines,” and offered students different educations based on assumptions about their futures. But the reform didn’t “work”; that is, it didn’t help students succeed in school. By the end of the 1980s, students still performed at alarmingly low levels when measured by the schools “standard-gauging” agencies and professional education organizations. Educators began to accept the idea that many students could not, and in fact should not, achieve “higher levels” of education. The eventual result of such thinking was George W. Bush’s signing of “No Child Left Behind Act” in 2002.

“No Child Left Behind” is generally seen as an inherently corrupt policy; however, it should have been an expected next step following the older George Bush’s and Bill Clinton’s establishment of state education standards and national educational goals that required student testing (in Canada, Alberta’s high stakes tests are a version of such control) and pressured schools from the outside by holding educators accountable for results (e.g., as British Columbia’s Fraser Institute routinely does). Such exams exacerbate the sorting process taking place in schools. Our point is that the change was not a problem of policy, it was a problem of culture; and, when policy and culture conflict, culture trumps policy. By the time “No Child Left Behind” became policy, most students had already come to accept their place within the larger society—whether they knew it or not.

Conservatives (classic liberals) tend to believe solutions lie in the marketplace; they had, under Ronald Reagan’s lead in the 1980s, come to metaphorically treat schools as “markets” that would “free” students. Following this policy, they worked to create competition between public and private schools by theorizing that, if one treated schools as markets and dispersed billions of dollars in federal education aid through vouchers that could be redeemed by parents at their choice of schools, one could create free-market schooling with the potential for students, parents, and families to shape their own education and thus, “get ahead.” In another market-focused alternative, Toch (2008) notes the rise in the 1990s of publicly-funded and independently-operated charter schools, which today educate a third of all public-school children in the United States; many school districts in Canada have mirrored these initiatives.

The reports noted here and the actions springing from them had it wrong. The consumerist myth was not something different kinds of schools or different choices about how families educate children, could fix. Instead, the idea had been built deeply into the fabric of North American society. Like it or not, schools came...
to do exactly what they were supposed to do—their task was to sort people into two groups—an efficacious elite who continued on an advanced educational track and a “middle class” whose basic job was to fuel the economy through their own consumption. The task of this “healthy” middle class was to spend its income to buy the material goods produced by the nations’ factories in greater and greater amounts—and thus, fuel the economy.

So, as mentioned, when George W. Bush says, after 9-11, “Go out and spend!” He is being true to the schools’ unspoken task of sorting and equipping. The student behaviors teachers so often experience—the lack of a work ethic and decisions increasingly made with a bias toward instant gratification rather than self-denial—emerge from the very ethic upon which consumer society is built. Such student behavior has little to do with standards or students’ inherent abilities but more to do with school design. That the design is not conscious or remains unspoken does not belie its existence; teachers (any of us actually), although we whine, should not be surprised by the evolution.

Our society’s economic “success,” as it is, is increasingly shaped by a small segment of highly-educated, efficacious leaders. The North American economy as a whole is driven by those who have, for reasons which make them poor students but good consumers, failed to gain leadership but have worked to gain enough economic power to utilize their best economic weapons—instant gratification and the lack of self-denial for the sake of consumerism and materialism.

The economy, reacting as sensitively as a teenager in love, is driven by consumer confidence—which has become the classic way to measure the economic self-esteem of those who fuel the economy. If consumers feel things will get better, they will buy. The plight of the middle class might improve if North America’s economy regains it confidence but the ability of that same middle class to shape the values and events of that society will decrease as their buy-in to a consumerist myth increases. Further, the children of this middle class, whose vision shrinks narrower as they are raised to adopt the values of their parents within this powerful myth, will have fewer intellectual opportunities to critically break free.

Then what of our schools? If it is true that children raised in families where books are prized and celebrated have a greater chance of becoming more literate, what literacy do children gain when they are raised within families where uncritical materialism and the consumer goods spawned from it are prized and celebrated? One thing is certain, teachers will find out during the next decade or two.

**Overconsumption, Beauty-Identity, and Faking It**

Two illustrations of many that could be chosen help demonstrate how the reality of the self-defining consumptive myth has come to permeate North American culture. Chris Matthew’s (2002), of MSNBC’s *Hardball*, book titled *American: Beyond Our Grandest Notions*, reviews F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* and
notes that Jay Gatsby was about his “father’s business.” This pseudo-religious phrase highlights the fervor to which the American myth of beauty has developed in the 20th century. Although The Great Gatsby is a classic story of a second chance, it is also a story of how North America has changed from a society where human worth was embodied in a person’s character to where human worth became embodied in that person’s beauty or celebrity. This change encourages a consumption mentality because, although it is almost impossible to purchase character, it is quite possible to purchase beauty. As Fitzgerald wrote in Chapter 6,

His parents were shiftless and unsuccessful farm people—his imagination had never really accepted them as his parents at all. The truth was that Jay Gatsby of West Egg, Long Island, sprang from his Platonic conception of himself. He was a son of God...and he must be about His Father’s business, the service of a vast, vulgar, and meretricious beauty. So he invented...Jay Gatsby...and to this conception he was faithful to the end. (1925, p. 99)

Gatsby became an idea of the self-creation Americans have mastered. The idea emerges from an ability to believe in oneself, but it also emerges from the focus of that belief—a focus on self-defined beauty. Ralph Lauren, who has come to sell beauty, noted in Vanity Fair: “My look is not really European. It’s an American’s visualization of Europe in the 1930s. I look in from the other side” (Lauren in Matthews, 2002, p. 25). To understand the culture of Lauren’s Polo ads, one only need to look at the faces of the people on display. These faces capture an arrogance that manifests “I was born to be beautiful.” Ralph Lauren’s store on Madison Avenue, once a stately mansion, has become a temple to “beauty,” where the newly rich come to pay worship to the old, aristocratic rich and leave with the clothing and furnishings that promise both a comfortable life and a comfortable identity.

Second, in her song “Beautiful,” Christina Aguilera, highlights her emotions about holding onto a conception of being “beautiful” in the face of immense pressure and criticism:

I am beautiful no matter what they say
words can’t bring me down
I am beautiful in every single way
yes, words can’t bring me down
so don’t you bring me down today.

As she sings, the song is at first mellow, but in the stanza Aguilera’s voice emphasizes her need to be heard. Her song tells us that she is, indeed, satisfied with herself and what she is. And what is the “she” that satisfies her? She is a beautiful individual, able to decide her own conception of beauty and free to live within that conception. Others might critique her, but disapproval does not discourage her. In fact, others’ opinions don’t matter. Emotionally and mentally her self-worth rests in her opinion alone.

Ironically, her song tells her audience that they should not care about what
anyone says about them. Ever the post-modern, for her everyone is beautiful in the way it appeals to them. Her lyrics, diction, and tone present a positive message to anyone “brought down” by others. But, what really is she claiming here? She is claiming that beauty is more important than moral purpose or doing the right thing. This individualistic, almost solipsistic viewpoint pushes her to individual definitions of merit and value. While internal strength is important, that strength is wrapped around her individual concept of “beauty.” Obviously, two pieces of evidence tell us her concept of beauty is important: first, she sings about it—it is a valuable topic for an artist to deal with; second, because artists direct their work to audiences, she believes her audience understands her message. They too will see the importance of self-defined beauty and its consumptive corollary as a descriptive evaluation of life’s core value.

Business echoes this ethos and, during the mid-20th century, had to change old social patterns of consumption to prosper and grow. Business began to reshape people from those who worked to those who consumed—as noted, a move from classic liberalism to neoclassic liberalism. In this conversion they utilized a great ally: they used advertising. Most advertising of the early 1900s described the real presence (the product exists) and concrete benefits (this is how the product can meet needs) to people. Things have changed. The benefits of products morphed to include more the mythological than the physical: so, for Ralph Lauren, a coat is re-stitched into more than protection from inclement weather and becomes one key to enter the top echelon of society. Of course, because it opens such an expensive door, there is a corresponding cost. Designer labels are truly wonderful keys, because companies can now produce fewer “designer” products and make larger profits, suggesting that designer labels are created more from identity than from fabric.

That people accepted this cultural myth is an understatement: people bought the myth and the material symbols of that myth. Furthermore, the invention and extension of credit meant they didn’t even need money. By the end of the 20th century, fueled by an increased ability to act out instant gratification, credit card debt skyrocketed. It is more than fair to note that the current housing and real estate crash in the United States, while blamed almost entirely on banks and credit institutions, was at least a partnership forged between the unwillingness of individuals to practice self-denial and the credit institutions’ encouragement of those same people to take advantage of opportunities for instant gratification without a big picture consideration of the consequences if something went wrong; using credit was not wrong—in fact, it was a right. Until 1986, United States credit card interest was tax deductible. As credit began to feed itself, homes grew larger to store the unneeded consumer goods bought on credit. Consumption had become a way of life and a right of free citizens.

This change has been drastic. In less than 100 years, the definition of what makes life worth living and what constituted human value was re-shaped from the value of character to the value of material goods. It is hard to say what the founders
of any nation in North America might say about the current propensity of North Americans to believe they are living in the best of all times—based on their abilities to collect and consume material goods. Consumption became the good life and ‘keeping up with the Joneses’ pushed people to believe they were the total of what they could buy. Their personal image was shaped by what they had gathered; when need for survival and protection have been met, what’s left? The answer is the aesthetic—the need for beauty. The consumptive nature of a beauty-identity has been famously depicted in the popular PBS documentary *Affluenza*. We live within a diseased culture of epidemic proportions. The disease is not consumption to support and maintain life, but overconsumption and the feigning that such behavior is the good life.

When the aesthetic became the measure of value, people’s needs for consumption changed. In the early and middle 20th century, a person was judged on the basis of production: baby-boomers grew hearing their parent’s admonitions that “the world doesn’t owe you a living.” However, in a consumer society, people are judged by the aesthetic image they project. Personality becomes more important than character, and one’s role model becomes Angelina Jolie, Brad Pitt, or another “beautiful person” upon whom celebrity has been bestowed and whose lives are valued as powerful.

Still, every once in a while celebrity bumps into older definitions of human value. An example is the “plight” of Sean Avery, recently of the Dallas Stars (ice) hockey team. Avery, who was being paid up to $12 million over a three-year contract to play hockey, made extremely crude, sexual comments about another player’s girlfriend. His teammates and organization quickly separated themselves from these comments and Avery was suspended from the team. In some ways, poor Avery had been sucker-punched or, in hockey terms, slashed. Although his comments were salacious and far beyond crass, Avery had made a career of edgy living and speaking and, in fact, had been rewarded for such behavior because teams thought his celebrity made him a “fan favorite” and his employer, the Dallas Stars, had used him as a way to sell tickets.

The culture of overconsumption, beauty-identity, celebrity, and faking it has become a model of being for at least North America’s younger “middle class,” and they seem to have thoroughly internalized this conception of what makes a person valuable, worthy, or important. In its simplest sense, school uniforms have been touted as a way of de-classing (not bringing stress on those less well-to-do to keep up to the fashions of the more financially-able) school, but also as a way to tone down the more titillating outfits worn by young women and men in schools. In a consumer society, people are judged by their image and spend to create and project that image—the food they eat, the clothes they wear, the technology they possess, the sincerity they fake, the personality they project. Advertisers, perhaps more than other groups, show us the way by mirroring our culture back to us by functioning pragmatically—their goal is to sell and they carefully research public
opinion to see what will and what will not sell. Advertisements only work when they somehow capture the logic of the culture for which they are intended.

Advertisers have changed their tactics because they have found appeals to the idea of individual autonomy—freedom wrapped in personal choice—powerful. By powerful, we mean they sell products. These advertisers center upon understanding demographics, which means they tailor advertisements to particular consumptive audiences. The better they hit or shape that audience, the more successful their advertisements are. Thus, when advertisers show us that personal choice among competing products is the essence of human freedom, we get a better sense that Western societies have come to believe their personal choices are ultimately important. Although this value system makes perfect sense to those who live within it, it makes less sense to those on the outside. Perhaps the justification of “jealously” put forth as a reason why terrorists bombed the World Trade Center—as many people have theorized—is our own hubris as a culture. It seems to those who live within the culture that we are the freest people ever—meaning, we have the largest number of consumer choices; but, to those who live outside this “freedom,” we might seem like pathetic slaves tied to a limited view of human value.

Schooling’s Response, Teaching and Learning, and Consumptive Culture

Schools simultaneously lament and are complicit in the cultural problems we have tried to articulate. Culturally, the interests, attitudes, and self-views of children and youth have dramatically changed. Schools are both victims of this change and culprits. Students possess a consumptive identity formed by powerful and pervasive cultural elements (including their own parents) that schools could not possibly counteract on their own. That said, schools respond in ways that exacerbate the problem of citizen formation as consumer.

What Bloom (1976) has called “affective entry characteristics” (more generally known as motivation for school learning) play a part in this cultural shift. If students are ‘emotionally prepared to learn, as expressed in their interests, attitudes, and self-views,’ they are more likely to succeed in learning tasks than students who enter ‘the learning task with lack of enthusiasm and evident disinterest.’ Bloom cites evidence that affect (motivation to engage in school tasks and learn) is also alterable. Thus, “teaching, curriculum, and grading policies in the school which stress high ratios of success experiences to failure experiences should result in increased amounts of positive affective entry characteristics for subsequent related learning tasks” (Bloom, 1976, p. 105).

How can schools possibly respond to such a pervasive cultural value system when the institution is, in itself, a cultural manifestation of prevailing economic values? Is there anything in mass schooling that constitutes a critique of the consequences of our collective economic life? Success in learning supposedly breeds
success. But schooling as a system, as opposed to a place where a few heroic teachers change lives, is not set up to take Boom’s advice (which is both science and art) seriously, as we have indicated earlier. Only those self-efficacious leaders who conformed to a school-defined intelligence and achievement agenda got it; the masses—the growing number of people who consider themselves “middle class” these days—are evaluated and shaped differently.

Notes

1 It is our contention that generally the choice has been made for students by teachers and the curriculum being taught. We might call this phenomenon a deeply embedded structure of mass schooling where the institutional cultures of schools build control systems along a reward and punishment continuum based upon whether a student is viewed as alienated or committed. This system responds to students with corresponding allocations of curricular and instructional approaches that serve to categorize and classify children [see Etzioni (1975); Cicourel & Mehan (1985)].

2 Toch is co-director of Education Sector, a Washington think tank, and author of “In the Name of Excellence,” a history of American education in the 1980s.

3 Author 1 critiqued the Nation at Risk report almost 23 years ago [Parsons, J. (1986). Beyond Excellence: The Faces of Children. *ATA Magazine, 67*(1)]. Ironically, Ronald Reagan, who has recently been venerated as a great American president, had just entered the office of President. He released the Report, but ignored the Report’s recommendations in favor of his interest in school prayer.

4 If you can call what Republicans do theorizing—even Republicans would probably disparage of the word, although prominent think tanks continue to define and promote a conservative education policy environment (see, for example, Fredrick Hess at the American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research).

5 Author 1 can attest that the dress of young men and women can be unsettling. When visiting a northern, rural high school in Alberta, he was astonished at the revealing clothing young women were wearing around school. Many young women were dressed in startling ways. And, as a school administrator, Author 2 can attest to the unending guidance and discipline required to encourage both male and female students to conform to what were seen as responsible and legitimate dress codes.

References


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Preparing Teacher-Researchers for Local-Global, Multicultural Classrooms: Prospects for Postcritical and Feminist Qualitative Methodologies

Katharine Sprecher

Student populations in the U.S. are becoming increasingly diverse, as global migration and immigration bring greater numbers of people from around the world to our already multicultural communities and schools (Banks, 2008, 2009; Brown & Kysilka, 2002; Spring, 2008a). In this sense, U.S. classrooms are local-global environments, in which children from widely varied ethnic, socio-cultural, national, and linguistic backgrounds interact daily. Such student interactions mirror the local-global dynamics of a world in transition, in which globalization rapidly instigates myriad interconnections among peoples and systems—economic, environmental, cultural, epistemological, and political—on local and global levels (De Lissovoy, 2010; Spariosu, 2004). The local-global microcosms of classrooms, schools, and communities therefore serve as preparatory environments, in which students learn and practice the art of intercultural communications, understanding, and co-existence.

Nevertheless, the local-global introduces new complexities to social environments that, if not addressed with appropriate praxes, may exacerbate tensions and misunderstandings among students from different backgrounds (Banks, 2008). Such learning outcomes could radically under-prepare students for futures in local-global societies marred by inequities, exploitations, and social and ecological crises. Additionally, diverse student bodies bring multiple epistemologies, communication styles, and cultural assumptions, experiences, and expectations to teaching and learning that must be attended to pedagogically (Nieto, 1996; Sleeter & Grant, 2003). These circumstances are further complicated by the disconnection between student positionalities and those of the majority of U.S. teachers, who are predominantly White and middle-class (Brown & Kysilka, 2002).

These realities beg changes in educational policy, practice, and teacher preparation that prioritize social justice-oriented, local-global learning. This includes a re-emphasis on multicultural educations that are adaptive to the unique and evolving dynamics of classroom environments. Sprecher (2011) argued that the demands
Preparing Teacher-Researchers


I therefore propose a post/critical, local-global educational framework that integrates elements of the aforementioned theoretical, pedagogical, and methodological approaches. This framework would recognize and re-emphasize the role of teacher-researcher to inform both localized practices and cross-regional considerations. Due to the complex nature of student learning, the multiplicity and reflexivity inherent in local-global classrooms, and the potential interference of hegemonic power and inequities, I believe postcritical ethnography and feminist praxis-based methodologies may offer especially useful tools for post/critical, local-global schooling. As I will demonstrate, these approaches integrate emancipatory epistemological orientations with methods for knowledge production that embrace and respond to diversity.

For too long, educational research has been shaped by political trends rooted in positivism and conservatism that exclude teachers from the research process (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Kincheloe & Berry, 2004; Lankshear & Knobel, 2004). Furthermore, an over-emphasis on quantitative studies has oriented research as a tool for comparison, reward, and punishment rather than as a means to assess and immediately inform future directions and strategies for pedagogy in various and unique locales (Darling-Hammond, 2007b; Karp, 2003; Lankshear & Knobel, 2004; Neill, 2006). Teachers are logically situated as trained observers and first responders in their classrooms. Thus, the role of teacher-researcher is wasted if policymakers fail to see the value in teachers’ work as they observe, interact with, and report on their students on both daily and long-term bases (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004).

In the following pages, I use a methodological bricolage to present a description of these research approaches and the ways in which they may be especially useful tools for teachers utilizing post/critical, local-global frameworks. This includes an examination of conceptual elements employed by these approaches in attempts to conscientiously avoid practices that may inadvertently objectify, exoticize, marginalize, or oppress students. I begin this discussion with an explanation of my methodology and its relevance for this work, followed by a more thorough definition of the local-global and an outline of my proposed framework.
Bricolage

Kincheloe and Berry (2004) advocated bricolage as a methodology of rigor suited to the complexity, multiplicity, and reflexivity of educational research contexts. Bricolage employs a form of tinkering—that is, drawing from or developing research methods as they are needed—so as not to restrict knowledge production to the confines or dictates of any technique or model (Berry, 2006; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Kincheloe, 2005). A bricoleur examines many dimensions that affect educational contexts that may include the socio-historical, political, cultural, epistemological, material, and local-global (Berry, 2006). In addition, bricolage is oftentimes interdisciplinary, allowing processes of knowledge production to transcend disciplinary boundaries. Rather, bricoleurs seek a dialectical relationship among disciplines, in which overlaps and liminal spaces lead to new understandings (Kincheloe, 2001; Kincheloe & Berry, 2004). For this article, I conduct a literary conversation to examine relationality among theoretical, pedagogical, and methodological discourses, as well as geopolitical events and circumstances. Thus, my dialectic goes well beyond a simple literature review to analyze the interrelationships of multiple modalities and what they may mean for education. My goal is to explore ways in which certain discourses and strategies might be integrated in local-global contexts to become useful tools for teacher-researchers and teacher educators.

Like the other discourses I discuss in this article, bricolage takes an emancipatory standpoint, and sets researchers to the task of promoting social justice through their work. Rather than simply describing, bricoleurs seek to innovate; imbuing their research with creativity and imagination for what could be (Kincheloe, 2005; Kincheloe & Berry, 2004). This mirrors my own strategy, as I attempt to develop new approaches to schooling, the professional role of teaching, and teacher education that I believe are more conducive to equity and excellence in local-global learning environments. Additionally, I adopt the bricoleur’s commitment to anti-reductionism, in which the researcher makes no claims to final or universal truths. Rather, as a bricoleur, I offer my naturally partial interpretations to ongoing, collaborative conversations (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004).

Bricoleurs inform their research with theoretical and philosophical insights on human conditions, such as power, the nature of knowing, and hierarchical relations. Thus, bricolage is heavily informed by discourses such as critical theory, postmodernism, poststructuralism, and hermeneutics in order to check dominant assumptions and linguistic frameworks that shape hegemonic worldviews, including those of the researcher (Kincheloe, 2005; Kincheloe & Berry, 2004). Researcher positionality is under constant self-examination, and bricoleurs acknowledge that they, and their understandings of the world, are always embedded in the process of knowledge production (Berry, 2006; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Kincheloe, 2005; Kincheloe & Berry, 2004). While bricolage embraces complex theoretical explorations, bricoleurs inform their projects with lived experiences, recognizing that
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discourses cannot ever fully describe or contain the dynamic and multi-dimensional realities of the lived world (Kinchole, 2005; Kinchole & Berry, 2004). My own work is responsive to and inspired by my experiences as a mentor, tutor, and teacher with children from international backgrounds and subjugated group identities.

The following section begins my dialectical exploration by discussing a synergistic educational framework for post/critical, local-global multiculturalism, to be followed by a section on postcritical ethnography and feminist praxis-based methodologies as potential tools for teacher-researchers employing such a framework.

Defining the Local-Global

Far from a binary construct, the local-global implies complex interrelationships in which the attitudes and actions of peoples in diverse locations affect and are affected by each other (De Lissovoy, 2009, 2010; Spariosu, 2004). Examples abound. The export of jobs from the U.S. has contributed to higher national unemployment and incarceration, while overseas labor exploitation of unprotected workers has been fed by consumerism without conscience (Bigelow & Peterson, 2002; De Lissovoy, 2009; The National Labor Committee, n.d.; 2003). Uninformed U.S. citizens have supported or ignored aggressive U.S. military activities in South America and the Middle East, resulting in hundreds of thousands of civilian deaths in these regions (Chomsky, 2004, 2006, 2007; Pitt with Scott, 2002). Coal, oil, and chemical industrial pollution have contributed to climate change, severe weather, species extinction, and toxic living environments leading to increased disease and respiratory illness around the planet (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 2012). As citizens, consumers, students, and future voters, activists, workers, and/or prisoners, children and youth are inextricably linked to local-global dynamics.

Furthermore, the local-global crises of the twenty-first century call for an educated citizenry capable of collaborating with others across the world to address these problems (Banks, 2008, 2009; De Lissovoy, 2009, 2010; Noddings, 2005; Spariosu, 2004). Yet these crises cannot be explained in simplistic terms, as they are often rooted in historically embedded attitudes about other human beings, the earth, and self in relation to both. While this article cannot thoroughly address the ecological dimensions of global crises, the environmental is also a key element of the human. The theft, destruction, and willful pollution of people’s home environments and resources are often directly related to racist and neo-imperial attitudes of development that privilege the economic desires of mostly (but not entirely, such as in the case of China and Japan) Euro-Western multinational corporations over the health and human rights of indigenous and racially minoritized peoples (Bigelow & Peterson, 2002). The racist attitudes and misguided assumptions of social Darwinism that perpetuate the travesties of internal neocolonialism in the U.S.—such as disproportionate impoverishment, incarceration, and wage exploitation (Tejeda et al., 2003)—mirror global institutional policies that perpetuate
global apartheid (Alexander, 1996; Marable & Agard-Jones, 2008; Richmond, 1994) through actions such as structural adjustment lending, unfettered free trade laws, and military action in favor of corporate interests (Abouharb & Cingranelli, 2008; Chomsky, 2004, 2006, 2007; Cobb & Diaz, 2008; Shah, 2010). At the heart of these attitudes and behaviors is a belief system guided by Eurocentric ideologies that promote market fundamentalism and a racialized hierarchy in which certain people, cultures, values, and knowledges are viewed as superior, while others are viewed as deficient and disposable.

Contemporary education can no longer ignore the complexities and imperatives of our local-global era. Though I believe the development of any framework must be a collaborative and continuous process that addresses the unique and changing contexts of any place and locale, I would like to briefly offer considerations for such an endeavor (Sprecher, 2011). This would involve drawing from social reconstructionist and critical multiculturalisms, global and decolonial educational praxes, and postcritical and feminist qualitative methodologies. I refer to the framework as post/critical, local-global multiculturalism in order to highlight the epistemological bases of my approach. In past writings I referred to this framework as decolonial multicultural education. I now employ the terms post/critical and local-global to better highlight the global justice aspects of my approach and to avoid confusion with existing decolonial pedagogies that emphasize the experiences of border and indigenous communities. Though such works are of crucial importance, I believe my own standpoint as a white woman better positions me to assist dominant group members with the process of deconstructing their own neocolonial worldviews and behaviors, reconstructing alternative possibilities, and learning how to listen to and collaborate with subjugated groups towards a more just and balanced world.

An Adaptive Framework for Post/critical, Local-Global Multiculturalism

A post/critical, local-global multiculturalism would incorporate culturally relevant pedagogies and pluralism throughout curricula, assessments, and the physical school environment in order to provide equitable educational opportunities that avoid the Eurocentric marginalization of non-dominant groups (Banks & Banks, 2005; Gay, 2000; Nieto, 1996; Sleeter & Grant, 2003). In addition, intergroup or human relations educational techniques could assist students’ intercultural relational learning. By explicitly exploring and teaching against bigotries and intergroup conflicts, schools might reduce negative interactions and improve and expand their sense of community, while preparing students for futures in a globalized multicultural world (Banks, 2005; Sleeter & Grant, 2003; Stephan & Vogt, 2004). I also advocate social reconstructionist multicultural education, which incorporates the previous approaches, as a tool to integrate social justice throughout practices and resist assimilationist and deficit-oriented multiculturalisms that disserve minori-
tized students (Nieto, 1995; Sleeter & Grant, 2003). Such an approach, however, calls for the application of sophisticated theoretical critiques to counter hegemonic narratives that silently reify inequity.

Critical multicultural education (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997; McLaren, 1995), in particular, offers useful tools to reveal and oppose unconscious assumptions that contribute to oppressive human relations. Exploring the socio-historical dynamics that have stratified peoples according to socially constructed concepts such as race, gender, and class, critical multiculturalism challenges the dominant narratives that privilege some people over others. This includes thorough critiques of the hegemony of Whiteness as a normalized status by which all other identities are measured. Employing critical theory and philosophical tools such as postmodernism and poststructuralism, critical multiculturalism seeks to deconstruct the systems of language and knowledge that perpetuate colonial domination through patriarchal, Eurocentric ideologies and discourses. This includes resistance to capitalist exploitations and material dominations of the majority of the world’s peoples by an elite minority (Kinicheloe & Steinberg, 1997; McLaren, 1995).

Critical multiculturalism can be especially useful to teachers on multiple accounts. First, it can help teachers to examine their own embedded worldviews and perspectives, while providing tools to transform understandings that might be harmful or oppressive to students. Second, critical multiculturalism can enrich the social justice pedagogies teachers employ in their classrooms with deeper understandings of the complexity of human relations. This can assist attempts to avoid assimilating or marginalizing practices. It can also bolster classroom relationships by revealing the complex dynamics that imbue bigotries and hegemonic assumptions (Kinicheloe & Steinberg, 1997; McLaren, 1995).

In addition, the multiplicity of local-global classrooms requires approaches that acknowledge the interrelationship of the local and global in children’s lives. Teachers can draw from global education frameworks (Banks, 2008, 2009; Hicks & Holden, 2007; Noddings, 2005) that integrate global dimensions and teach students about the interconnected world in which we live. This includes extending concepts of social justice and responsibility to issues like global poverty, international development, war, and ecological sustainability. Future generations need to be educated to participate as local-global citizens (Banks, 2008, 2009; Hicks & Holden, 2007; Noddings, 2005; Spariosu, 2004; Spring, 2008b), and students can better engage their intercultural learning processes with their classmates if they are taught relevant local-global contextual information. Like multicultural education, global education frameworks can benefit from critical explorations, since some models have promoted Eurocentric ideologies concerning international development and relations that beg critique and analysis. This includes, for example, market-based assumptions that business leaders from wealthy countries can “save” people in impoverished countries through high-tech development projects that primarily benefit those who are wealthy (Cannella & Viruru, 2004; Escobar, 1995).
I believe global and multicultural frameworks should be informed by decolonial approaches to education, which draw from critical and postcolonial theories to analyze the socio-historical contexts that shape human relationships, including knowledge production and educational paradigms. Expanding critique to the local-global, decolonial education explores the continuing exploitations and inequalities perpetuated by neocolonial practices that include the material and epistemological subjugation of peoples originating in projects of colonialism, imperialism, and the expansion of neoliberal global capitalism (Cannella & Viruru, 2004; De Lissovoy, 2008, 2009, 2010; McLaren & Farahmandpur, 2005; Tejeda et al., 2003; Villenas, 2006). Decolonial pedagogies resist internal neocolonialism by rejecting education that imposes colonial knowledge systems on minoritized students, promoting instead educational practices shaped and guided by community members and knowledge systems (Tejeda et al., 2003).

Like critical multiculturalism, decolonial education resists the categorization of the world’s peoples into a hierarchy of races that serves to privilege Euro-Western knowledges, languages, and values and justify the exploitation and impoverishment of indigenous and racially minoritized peoples. Among many White people, the pervading myth of Euro-Western culture as the epitome of human civilization engenders racial prejudices imbued with nationalism. According to this ideology, the nonwhite peoples of Other/ed countries and cultures struggle—often unsuccessfully—to mimic and achieve the “successes” of their White counterparts. This worldview blames impoverished people for their own supposed failures—or accepts such “failures” as a natural outcome for certain racial groups—while omitting all socio-historical context regarding the devastating and enduring consequences of colonialism, imperialism, and predatory global capitalism in people’s lives (Bigelow & Peterson, 2002; De Lissovoy, 2009, 2010; McLaren & Farahmandpur, 2005; Tejeda et al., 2003). Rather, powerful international actors such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund have proposed—and imposed—continued economic, social, and environmental exploitations as “solutions” to profound poverty and stratification, further exacerbating cycles of appropriation and impoverishment (Abouharb & Cingranelli, 2008; Bigelow & Peterson, 2002; Cobb & Diaz, 2008; Shah, 2010).

Anti-racist pedagogies must not omit these complex and evolving dynamics, which inform our understandings of race and racism. This is especially true in the United States, where histories of subjugation blend with globalization ideologies that stratify the world’s peoples according to dualistic hierarchies of White/nonWhite, civilized/primitive, rich/poor, developed/developing, and First/Third World (Alexander, 1996; Marable & Agard-Jones, 2008; Willinsky, 1998). This ideology of the Americas includes a rampant and hostile geopolitics that defines some people as illegal when they enter certain areas of their ancestral territories that have been redefined by national borders. A growing percentage of the U.S. population—people from or descended from citizens of Mexico and Central and
South American countries—is faced with border prejudices associated more with their racial and linguistic identities than their actual “legal” status (Nevins, 2002; Santa Ana, 1999).

Such hierarchies and dynamic bigotries play out in school relationships among teachers, staff, students, and families. Thus, relational learning happens, whether facilitated or not, among individuals as worldviews integrate and sometimes oppress. As students engage with teachers and other students, their subjectivities continuously reflect new relational understandings of themselves and others (De Lissovoy, 2010; Tejeda et al., 2003; Thayer-Bacon, 2003).

Decolonial (De Lissovoy, 2010; Tejeda et al., 2003), global (Banks, 2008; Spariosu, 2004), and critical multicultural (McLaren, 1995) education theorists have argued that student relationships are dynamic learning processes in which participants can co-construct emancipatory knowledges. Spariosu (2004) asserted that global crises such as war, genocide, nuclear proliferation, and ecological devastation require the collaboration of intercultural actors to develop new paradigms for problem-solving and for sustainable and peaceful coexistence. De Lissovoy (2010) promoted similar co-constructions of knowledge that decenter hegemonic narratives, while recentering subjugated epistemologies and perspectives more conducive to local-global kindredness. As students participate in relational learning, teachers can help to facilitate environments that foster positive interactions, in which students co-construct valuable skills and knowledges for intercultural competence and local-global agency. Conversely, unattended student relationships could potentially devolve into stratified interactions that mirror the bigotries and inequities of the larger social world (Banks, 2008; Cohen, 2004).

While the models described may contribute to such goals, they naturally present limitations. Inclusive, social reconstructionist, multicultural education places an emphasis on gender equity, yet lacks strong critical feminist and queer theory elements to deconstruct and challenge heteronormative and androcentric epistemologies, curricula, pedagogies, and school relationships. Though some critical multicultural scholars have incorporated feminist theories (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997), many have alluded to critical feminisms while not actually writing extensively about them. Global education proponents have generally relied on gender-blind analyses, which is not surprising considering the invisibility of feminism and feminist activists in the global justice movement (Eschle & Maiguashca, 2010). Decolonial education, on the other hand, has more thoroughly explored critical feminist and queer/sexuality theories, thanks to the work of border, transnational, postcolonial, and decolonial feminist theorizers both within and beyond the discipline of education. The following sections exploring postcritical and feminist methodologies will examine their and other feminists’ work—and why it is an important component of any liberatory pedagogy—in greater depth.
Teacher-Researchers for Local-Global Classrooms

The deployment of critical, local-global multiculturalism calls for teachers who embody the tenets of multicultural education and social learning approaches, which require teachers to learn about and get to know their students (Ladson-Billings, 1992; Moore, 2004). Such pedagogical orientations serve multiple purposes. This includes scaffolding, or building bridges, between classroom lessons and students’ lives and prior knowledge to inspire and improve learning (Ladson-Billings, 1992). In addition, teachers can develop caring relationships with students (Beaubouef-Lafontant, 2002; Noddings, 1992; Thompson, 2003) and build strong classroom communities by modeling and promoting intercultural awareness and respect and by creating inclusive learning environments that reflect the experiences and perspectives of all students.

Differences in a stratified society are complicated by social inequities and injustices, power, and privilege. Teachers who seek to know their students must necessarily delve into the complex socio-political circumstances that imbue their students’ material and epistemological realities (De Lissvoy, 2010; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997; McLaren, 1995). This necessity is exacerbated by the disconnection between teacher and student demographics. As student populations in the United States become increasingly representative of minoritized and poor children, the teaching force remains composed primarily of white, middle-class individuals (Brown & Kysilka, 2002). Thus, a gap exists between the positionalities of many teachers, who enjoy intersecting identity privileges associated with race and class, and those of their students. Such a gap may result in teachers having limited understandings of their students’ lives and experiences, potentially leading to miscommunications, misguided educational approaches, and possibly even distrust between teacher and student.

The dangers imposed by teacher-student disconnects are exacerbated by the power inherent in the teacher’s role over students in traditional schools. Teachers are given authority to control children’s behaviors and, to some extent, what and how they learn. Though public schoolteachers have been afforded little decision-making power concerning curricula and assessment, the absence of any requirements concerning multiculturalism allows teachers to choose whether or not to employ inclusive curricula or pedagogies. In addition, the implementation of tracking systems and strict regulation of student behaviors in many schools conveys a hidden curriculum that teaches students obedience, passivity, and conformity often in accordance to class and racial distinctions (Anyon, 1980; Bourdieu, 1973).

The complex dynamics of difference highlight the need for teachers capable of analyzing their own positionalities and those of their students. Such reflections should encompass the power inherent in teachers’ identities and goals as authorities, both individually and as representatives/reinforcers of social authority, over children. Moreover, as frequent group facilitators, classroom community builders, and keepers of the peace, teachers can greatly benefit from better understandings of
the relationships and interactions among their students that take into consideration power disparities among children. This calls for sophisticated research skills involving observation and analysis of complex and dynamic human environments.

The following section describes postcritical ethnography and feminist praxis-based methods, which I assert provide excellent tools for teacher-researchers employing emancipatory, local-global pedagogies.

**Postcritical Ethnography and Feminist Praxis-Based Methods**

Noblit, Flores, and Murillo (2004) presented postcritical ethnography as an integration of theoretically based methods, derived from interpretive ethnography and critical theory, that are infused with postmodernist and poststructuralist insights. Critical theory provides language and analyses that critique human relations based in power, privilege, and oppression. Originating in Marxist, class-based analyses of economic stratification, critical theory expanded social critiques to encompass other categorical discriminations such as racism, patriarchy, and homophobia. Critical ethnography is committed to emancipatory intentions and the advancement of social justice, and employs critical epistemologies to actively reveal, oppose, and change social oppressions. Recognizing that the act of research and knowledge production is a political one that usually reifies inequities and those in power, critical ethnographers seek to give voice to those who are typically excluded from representation. Nevertheless, the critical ethnographer remains ever conscious of the unavoidable power relations between researcher and research subjects, and recognizes the control and privilege embodied in “appropriating the rights of representation even as [the researcher] seeks to emancipate” (Noblit, Flores & Murillo, 2004, p. 2).

Interpretive ethnography is based on the theoretical assumption that all knowledge systems are socially constructed, and offers tools for ideological introspection regarding one’s research methods. Interpretive ethnography rejects positivist claims to objectivity and generalizable truths to be discovered through empirical research, and asserts that methodologies must address the complex, subjective, and socially constructed quality of human experiences (Noblit, 2004, p. 186). Such claims have been applied to educational evaluation, and criticized positivism as inappropriate for real world decision-making. Critical ethnographers echo this critique of positivism’s over-simplistic analyses, while seeking to employ educational research to highlight students’ subjugated knowledges and lived experiences (Noblit, 2004; Noblit et al., 2004). Interpretive ethnography’s attendance to one’s own assumed truths, sense of objectivity, and tendencies to generalize may be helpful for teachers who strive to be respectfully inclusive and avoid student objectification.

Interpretive ethnography’s contributions include examinations of poststructuralism, semiotics, and the *linguistic turn* (Toews, 1987, p. 879), leading to the perception of ethnographies as “interpretations of interpretations” (Noblit, 2004, p. 191). These new cross-disciplinary analyses of meaning-making led to a *crisis*
of representation (Lather, 2004; Noblit, 2004), in which ethnographers abandoned claims that their research presented objective truths about their research subjects. Rather, such ethnographers embrace the understanding that ethnography consists of “partial attempts to understand what others believe and do” (Noblit, 2004, p. 191).

Despite the emancipatory intentions of many of its practitioners, ethnography remains a methodology rooted in colonial origins. Thus, ethnographers must remain cognizant of the earlier purposes of their method to serve as a tool of the colonizer to study, objectify, and inform strategies to subjugate the colonized (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Noblit et al., 2004; Willinsky, 1998). Teacher-researchers must also remain conscious of the potential for their tools to objectify, marginalize, and colonize students (Cannella & Viruru, 2004; Richardson & Villenas, 2000). Critical ethnography assists this endeavor by providing tools for critique of power and oppression, including those that may exist within its own framework. Nevertheless, in certain cases, critical ethnography has been canonized within its own discipline and touted as the legitimate framework. In such instances, Critical ethnography has promoted universalized ideological positions “that reified structure, materialism, realism, and rationalism” (Noblit, 2004, p. 192).

Such ideological limitations inspired critiques from poststructuralists, anti-rationalists, and feminists, who reinscribed interpretivist approaches to counter disciplinary hegemonies such as the privileging of “patriarchal, Eurocentric, individualistic, and white” (Noblit, 2004, p. 191) ideologies. Understandings of the socially constructed nature of knowledge were employed to re-emphasize the need to include multiple voices in research, particularly those from marginalized and oppressed groups such as minoritized people, women, and students (Noblit, 2004). Postmodernist and poststructuralist insights further unsettled the canonization of critical ethnography into a foundationalist ideology that promotes hierarchies linked to colonialism and modality. Postmodernism’s rejection of objective truths instigated new approaches to ethnography that included postcolonial, feminist, and critical race theories, among others. By embracing such epistemological orientations and techniques, postcritical ethnography offers an approach that “redefines knowledge as a product of a dynamic, relational process” (Noblit, 2004), and in so doing, challenges Western, patriarchal hegemony over the production, presentation, and privileging of knowledge inside and outside academia (Maher with Teartault, 1996) (Sprecher, 2011, p 125). As individuals who work daily in environments shaped by top-down hierarchies and discourses that reify the canonization of knowledge and certain knowers, teacher-researchers may benefit from theoretical challenges to such practices. Moreover, teacher-researchers can use postmodernist, poststructuralist, and feminist tools to address their own internalization or resistance to both dominant and oppositional discourses that become hegemonic.

Researchers may implement postcritical ethnography in a variety of ways. However, common methodological considerations include attendance to “positionality, reflexivity, objectivity, and representation” (Noblit, 2004, p. 198). The
concept of positionality describes the researcher’s careful consideration of her own situated knowledges, identities, experiences, biases, assumptions, and interests, and the impact these have on her research and her perceptions of other research actors. Exploring elements of her own biography—such as her political beliefs, gender, race, class, and personal experiences—may assist researcher reflections on possible power disparities between her and research participants/students. This includes the ways her positionality influences her intentions for her research and how she collects, interprets, and represents her data (Noblit, 2004; Noblit et al., 2004). For many teachers in the U.S., this will mean deeply exploring positionalities of whiteness and middle-class socio-economic status in relation to the social stratifications in which their intersecting identities are embedded. Teacher identities and positionalities are relational and frequently contrast those of the many students living with poverty or subjugated identities. Teachers who do not engage in deep explorations of power and positionality will not be well informed or prepared for working with and relating to children from diverse backgrounds.

Postcritical ethnographers employ reflexivity to remain conscious that people’s identities are ever-changing, rather than static, and social interactions are experiences contextualized by the fluidity of time, history, and identity. Objectivity extends this concept to trouble notions of deobjectification, since the postcritical ethnographer makes interactions and occurrences static—and hence objects—by writing about them (Noblit, 2004; Noblit et al., 2004). Thus, the postcritical author explicitly offers written representations of others that are her “partial and positional” (Noblit, 2004, p. 199) interpretation of what is, rather than an objective claim to totality or reality. Representation is of particular importance to postcritical ethnographers, as the manner in which authors choose to express their findings and describe research subjects has the potential to misrepresent others and may inform social and political actions that affect those she describes. Postcritical ethnography therefore promotes critical reflection and decision-making during the writing process in order to trouble potentially harmful avenues of representation. Displaying research subjects as exotic others for curious consumption (Noblit, 2004), or adopting deficit oriented or ethnocentric perspectives, no matter how subtle, should be avoided (Berry, 2006). Such tools may prove helpful for teacher-researchers to avoid static, essentializing, and objectifying interpretations and representations of their individual students and classroom communities.

Lather (1991, 2001, 2003, 2004, 2007) advocated feminist ethnography that is post-critical, stressing the value of postmodern and poststructural tools applied to critical ethnography’s use of “feminisms, post-colonialisms and critical race theories” (2001, p. 479) to explore normalized inequities and power relations. Lather (2003) advocated research that is openly ideological, critiquing positivist claims to objectivity and neutrality. Since all research is value-based, postmodernism and poststructuralism can be applied as a means of deconstruction. Poststructuralism can be used to explore the historical and cultural embeddedness of language and
the ways language affects individuals’ perceptions of reality (Lather, 2001). This can assist research that includes numerous voices and interpretations to avoid producing knowledge mired in power-saturated discourses (Lather, 1991). Lather’s (1991) proposition for “deconstructing/deconstructive inquiry” (p. 154) employs postmodernism as a tool to enable researchers to continuously “think about how we think” (p. 154) in ways that explore the often hegemonic nature of our knowledges and assumptions. Lather (2007) proposed “getting lost as a way of knowing” (p. 4) as a research method that rejects the authoritative voice and embraces continuous self critique. Such critique may be applied to tools such as reflexivity to avoid the potential for overconfidence and the reauthorization of researcher voice (Lather, 2007; Pillow, 2003). Deconstruction, on the other hand, can allow researchers to embrace not knowing in order to produce research that provides one perspective among many in a conversation in which no participant has absolute knowledge (Lather, 2001, 2007).

Feminist Praxis-Based Methods

While feminist methodologies are vast and diverse (Hesse-Biber, 2007; Weiner, 1994), I briefly introduce and discuss some of the approaches that mirror and inform postcritical ethnography and provide pertinent considerations for post/critical, local-global educational contexts. Weiner (1994) proposed feminist methodologies for educational research, asserting that feminisms can combine critical elements with praxis to integrate theory and “everyday realities” (p. 122). Thus, an emphasis on praxis attends to the daily lived experiences and interactions that compose teaching and learning. Like postcritical approaches, some feminist methodologies have emphasized the research process, or the how, as much as the findings, that is, the what. This has called for careful examination of researcher positionality, as well as methodological considerations, throughout the knowledge production process (Hesse-Biber, 2007; Weiner, 1994). Weiner (1994) wrote:

...feminism has played a vanguard role in challenging science’s epistemological foundations which are rooted in modernity by anticipating (and engaging with) many of the recent debates arising from poststructuralism and postmodernism. Thus challenges have been made to universal, patriarchal research paradigms, i.e. the study of ‘man’ (e.g. Stanley and Wise 1983); positivism’s claim to neutrality and objectivity (e.g. Harding 1987); the distortion and invisibility of the female experience (Smith 1978); the notion of the autonomous and rational individual as the main goal of education (Walkerdine 1990); [and] the extent to which educational research itself can challenge inequality. (Weiner, 1990)

Feminist researchers have also promoted “interactive, contextualized methods” (Weiner, 1994, p. 128) that seek “…pattern and meaning rather than… prediction and control” (Lather, 1991, p. 72). This research approach seeks to improve circumstances for research subjects, and is rooted in commitments to social justice
that are embedded in process, praxis, and practice. Such feminist methods employ reflexivity, attendance to researcher subjectivity, and critiques of power relations both in the larger society and between researcher and researched (Hesse-Biber, 2007; Weiner, 1994). Seeking to dislocate the authoritative power of the researcher, feminist methods seek reciprocity and empowerment, in which “a fusion of values, theoretical perspectives and practice” (Weiner, 1994, p. 129) involve research subjects in knowledge production (Hesse-Biber, 2007; Weiner, 1994). In the realm of education, this means students, teachers, parents, administrators, and other educational actors participate in the co-construction of research, knowledge, and pedagogy (Weiner, 1994).

Teacher-researchers who take up such approaches may benefit from allowing the collaborative, contextual process of teaching and learning to inform their understandings, rather than trying to force rigid techniques and systematic inquiries onto the organic complexities of living and learning. Such an approach bears particular significance for spaces that seek to facilitate local-global, relational learning, since teacher-facilitators must actively assess and respond to dynamic and unpredictable processes as they occur. Emphasizing interactive contexts and reflexivity in reciprocal meaning-making, feminist teacher-researchers could challenge machinations of power and control through methodologies that prioritize students’ perspectives, needs, and understandings over the production of rationalist, universalizing, and publishable research. Within such a framework, teaching and research become a single, unified endeavor, no longer separated into binary constructs.

Moreover, feminist methodologies offer a wealth of theoretical orientations that may inform and improve teacher-researchers’ post/critical, local-global understandings and practices. In addition to challenging androcentric biases in research, feminist methodologies seek to re-center the experiences and perspectives of those who are marginalized, and who have often been eclipsed, made peripheral, or objectified in traditional research (Hesse-Biber, 2007). Hesse-Biber (2007) explained that feminist research emphasizes the importance of difference to improving understanding and knowledge production. By attending to intersecting identities—such as race, class, gender, sexuality, and disability (Collins, 1990)—feminist researchers seek to avoid making universalizing claims that normalize the experiences of dominant group members and exclude those of minoritized people.

Pivotal works by postcolonial, transnational, third world, Chicana, and Black feminist theorists such as Mohanty (1988, 2003), Anzaldua (1987), hooks (1984), and Collins (1990) have highlighted the plurality and intersectionality of human experiences while focusing critique on feminism’s own Western- and White-centric shortcomings (Hesse-Biber, 2007). For example, hooks (1984) Collins (1990) stressed the knowledge gained by Black women through their uniquely gendered and raced positionality in White supremacist societies. Collins (1986) argued that knowledge shared from these standpoints greatly enriches scholastic understandings by highlighting the complexities undertaken by those who must navigate multiple
terrains of insider/outsider status. Chicana feminist theorists have explored the uniquely situated experiences of Chicana women living in the borderlands of different nations, cultures, and languages, while asserting the intellectual value of Chicana women’s everyday, embodied actions, interactions, and relationships (Anzaldua, 1987; Galvan, 2001; Villenas, 2006). Additionally, Chicana feminist scholars such as Anzaldua (1987), Moraga (1983) and Perez (1993, 2003) have explored their own positionalities as lesbian and queer to examine and challenge the oppressive impact of heteronormativity and homophobia in their lives. Linking their experiences and interpretations to larger social paradigms of marginalization and oppression, these scholars have further demonstrated the interconnectedness of Otherizing ideologies rooted in Euro-Western, male superiority (Hurtado, 1998).

Moreover, postcolonial, transnational, and third world feminisms have directed concepts of marginalization and oppression toward the local-global. Thus, women’s experiences according to nationality, geographic region, and the context of imperialism, colonialism, and transnational capitalist exploitation are key considerations. This both expands knowledge possibilities and increases the necessity for caution among researchers who may “attempt to speak for ‘the other/s’ in a global context” (Hesse-Biber, p. 13) shaped by extreme power disparities. Drawing from and inclusive of scholars of decolonizing, indigenizing, and endarkening methodologies—such as Smith (1997), Cannella and Manuelito (2008), Saavedra & Nymark (2008), and Dillard and Okpalaoka (2011), to name a few—globally conscious feminist methodologies may further inform teacher-researchers’ post/critical, local-global approaches. Gained insights include respect for indigenous knowledge, self-determination, and linguistic rights throughout research (and educative) processes (Cannella & Manuelito, 2008; Smith, 1997); the myriad, complex, and fluctuating possibilities of borderland experiences (Anzaldua, 1987; Saavedra & Nymark, 2008); and the spiritual potential of reciprocal, relational qualitative research through endarkening feminist methodologies (Dillard and Okpalaoka, 2011). Taking holistic, reflexive, and collaborative approaches to understanding the complexities and multiplicities of human experiences, such scholarship resides at the vanguard of social research and offers highly pertinent theoretical and methodological insights for post/critical, local-global classrooms.

Further Implications for Schooling and Teacher Training

Postcritical ethnography and feminist praxis-based methods share commitments with critical multiculturalism and decolonial education to centering hegemonic knowledge systems, while analyzing the power disparities that validate or invalidate different people’s knowledges. These tools can be especially helpful for teachers when deciding what to teach and how to teach it and how to analyze, represent to others, and respond to students’ progress and needs. For example, informed educators might reject traditional history curricula that uncritically describe early American
colonizers in heroic terms and omit other voices, teacher-centered pedagogies that exclude alternative learning styles, and high-stakes, test-based representations of students that label, categorize, and often track them according to perceived abilities and deficits. Rather, practitioners would participate in the continuous development of curricula, pedagogies, and assessments informed by their own research, adapted to their students’ demonstrated contexts and needs, and guided by parental and community member input.

Moreover, critiques of power relations may help teachers better analyze the stratifications that imbue schooling processes. Top-down hierarchies ensure that a small minority controls educational practices that are often shaped by the political ideologies of those in power. Oftentimes, the ideologies of the powerful reinforce the status quo through tools of social reproduction such as tracking or Eurocentric curricula, pedagogies, and assessments that privilege dominant-group students and marginalize others (Anyon, 1980, Bourdieu, 1973; Tyack, 2003). Additionally, traditional schooling bestows powers to teachers over students and principals over teachers and students to strictly regulate behaviors toward conformity, obedience, and efficiency of management. Efficiency schooling practices require the rigid regulation of student behavior (Tyack, 1974), and teachers are commonly appointed as policing agents (Denzin, 2003) who teach children they must sit at desks, walk in lines, and speak only when called on to be considered “good.”

Furthermore, students rarely have any say in how they are educated, or how they are represented in a field that frequently imposes deficiency oriented labels to rate and categorize children. Titles such as ESL/ELL, learning disabled, and emotionally disturbed commonly essentialize and define children according to deficit discourses in which those who speak English and think and act in predictable, dominant culture ways are the norm by which others are measured (Corker & French, 1999; Deschenes, Cuban & Tyack, 2001; Lester, 2011; Nieto, 1996; Roey, Ferguson, & Noguera, 2011). The issue of representation is of highest pertinence because most teachers in the United States are members of dominant racial and class groups, yet are in the position of representing children from subjugated and marginalized groups through grades, reports, and assessments.

Postcritical ethnography and feminist methodologies may also provide insights regarding the larger social disparities—such as racism, sexism, classism, nationalism, and linguistic chauvinism—that often infest relationships among students, teachers, administrators, staff and parents, and community members. Such disparities exist not only as interpersonal prejudices, but as normalized assumptions about who has the right of decision-making and authority over others, who is respected, and whose knowledge, perspectives, and ways of communicating are valued and acknowledged. Such assumptions are often woven into structures of schooling, such as professional hierarchies and classroom rules. Parent-school communications may also be imbued with exclusionary, patronizing, and deficit discourses and practices when under-prepared staff from dominant social groups interact with
parents from marginalized or subjugated groups. For example, culturally incompetent professionals may assume an essentializing stance to explain marginalized parents’ behaviors, attributing individual actions to ethnocentric cultural generalizations. Such perspectives simplify and dehumanize the individuals to which they are directed, while misinforming well-intentioned professionals and their subsequent responses (Sprecher, 2011).

Teacher-researcher methods might include participatory observations that are documented at the end of each day, informal interviews with students and parents, and portfolio analyses of students’ schoolwork. Thus, postcritical feminist methodologies could be implemented as forms of authentic assessment that analyze students’ educational processes in order to adjust pedagogies and better support future learning, rather than as a way to simply grade and stratify students after the fact. Such assessments would be well informed by frequent re-examination of the role teacher positionality may play in interpretations of student activities and interactions, as well as conscious commitment to resisting essentializing, hegemonic, and otherizing impulses.

Moreover, such research need not be limited to systematic inquiry, but rather, exist as ongoing and integral aspects of teaching and learning. This is not to reject calls for rigor. On the contrary, I am calling for research as daily practice informed by continuous explorations of theoretical and empirical literatures, professional development, and collaborations and critiques among professional colleagues (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004), community organizations, parents, and students. By combining such practices with regular documentation, teacher-researchers may be able to coproduce bodies of knowledge with their school communities to inform not only their own practices, but broader educational considerations as well.

Conclusion

I believe postcritical ethnography and feminist, praxis-based methodologies offer tools that can better serve a more holistic and context-based approach to students, both as individual learners and as members of classroom communities. Teachers may use them to observe, assess, record, and respond to the reflexivity, multiplicity, and complexity of local-global classrooms. Such methods may be especially conducive to post/critical, local-global multiculturalisms, due to shared conceptual elements such as critical and decolonial theories and philosophical challenges to hegemonic and universal knowledge systems. Relational learning, in particular, may be bolstered by teacher facilitation supported by advanced intergroup assessment skills that acknowledge the roles of power, entitlement, and marginalization in social processes and schooling.

The proposals I have discussed in this article would only be viable with a shift in teacher professional role that explicitly acknowledges and makes time and space for the observations and analyses that many teachers already conduct but
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haven’t the support to fully realize. This means a change in schooling structures to provide teachers with both the time and resources to train for, conduct, and share their research, and the decision-making capacities and authority to implement their responsive pedagogies.

Darling-Hammond (2008) noted that multiple countries with reputations for educational excellence allot much more time in teachers’ schedules for assessment, planning, preparation, and development than currently allowed in U.S. schools. In the United States, public school teachers are generally allotted six to ten hours beyond their in-class teaching time to perform additional duties, while in Singapore, teachers are afforded twenty hours a week to engage in non-instructional tasks such as observing and collaborating with other educators (Darling-Hammond, 2008). In Finland, teachers are regarded as highly trained professionals whose responsibilities include collaborative decision-making regarding their school’s curricula, pedagogies, and practices (Darling-Hammond, 2008; Lombardi, 2005). The current overload of in-class teaching time common in U.S. schools, as well as the top-down hierarchies in which teachers remain relatively powerless, would not be conducive to professional roles as teacher-researchers.

Nevertheless, I believe the potential benefits of highly trained teacher-researchers for local-global schooling merit the changes that would be necessary for implementation. In addition to increased authority and non-instructional time, this would mean a shift in teacher training and professional development. Teacher education would need to convey a framework for post/critical, local-global multiculturalism; namely, elements of social reconstructionist and critical multiculturalism and global and decolonial educational approaches. Such training would also emphasize qualitative research methodologies that embrace postcritical and feminist praxis-based approaches. While I cannot dedicate time in this article to discuss the logistics of extended mentorships and paid internships for future teachers, such approaches could potentially equalize costs by providing additional in-class support and reducing teacher turnover rates. Meeting the challenges and opportunities of local-global classrooms and societies need not require an excess of funding or sacrifice. Rather, these seemingly radical changes in the way we educate may only require the creativity, the will, and the courage to rise to the occasion.

Notes

This article is a revised version of a chapter from my doctoral dissertation. My dissertation is currently posted as an unpublished work on the University of Tennessee’s TRACE (Tennessee Research and Creative Exchange) digital archive. I am grateful to my dissertation chair, Dr. Allison Anders, for her careful review. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Katharine Sprecher, 22 Sundance Drive, Weaverville, NC 28787. Phone: 503-490-7615. Email: kmsprecher@gmail.com

1 For an in-depth discussion outlining my proposed educational framework for post/critical, local-global multiculturalism, see Sprecher (2011).
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2 For an introduction to some of the existing, but rare, feminist treatments of global education, see Goodman (2004) and Reilly (1997).

3 See Olesen (2011) for further discussions and citations of works that both trouble and assert the value of methodological tools such as standpoint epistemology, intersectionality, difference, experience, and gender.

4 The space limitations of this article allow only a brief introduction to this scholarship, and readers are strongly encouraged to pursue independent research in these areas.

5 Here, I am diverging from the assertion that teacher-research should be limited to systematic inquiry as a characteristic of rigor. See Lankshear and Knobel (2004) for their argument in favor of systematic inquiry that includes theoretical and empirical study, as well as peer review through observation and publication.


References


Preparation of Teacher-Researchers

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Preparing Teacher-Researchers


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Polluted Postcolonialism
of a White West Virginian,
or, A Transversal Gaze toward Transnationalism

G. Sue Kasun

I’m not sure what to do with being somebody’s “Other.” This article is an exploration of my own sense of being Othered (Brown, 2005) in contradictory ways, and the responses to that othering my research is taking, arcing between postcolonial theory and transnational theory—all the while, looking for “home.” On one hand, I’m nobody’s Other. White, married, presently living in a middle-class home; what could be more normative? Writing this as a self-reflection likely fits the norm of progressive, liberal White women trying to “find themselves,” too. I cringe about this over-autobiographical reflection, but I need to write this. The perspectival voice I try to articulate is one that has been too long suppressed (Delgado, 1989). This article is an attempt to decolonize, to claim the voice from drowning in Whiteness, capitalism, patriarchy (Smith 1999)—the many faces of hegemony. It is also an exploration of my positionality as an educational researcher and my attempts to locate myself in the historical moment, which is strongly linked to transnationalism.

Theoretical Beginnings

Postcolonial theory best frames the story of the place where I grew up, a place where structures of power were generally mystified by my formal schooling but where subaltern resistances created fissures which would support my adult discovery of postcolonial theory and my yearnings to reframe the story of where I was raised. I share some of those subaltern resistances and theorize more broadly about the conditions of my home state, West Virginia, and how it has been internally colonized in the U.S. I explain the postcolonial sense of exile (Said, 2000) I have experienced as someone who is now an outsider to West Virginia.

In this article, I explore demonstrative events from growing up in West Virginia, the ways race plays into the postcolonial condition and the role of “poor Whites,” and how West Virginia’s historical trajectory has become better explained through
transnationalism. I then turn toward transnationalism as a “conceptual acid” which can be used to demonstrate the contestations, interruptions, and contradictions of globalization (Briggs, McCormack, & Way, 2008, p. 627). I theorize that my exile has pointed me in the direction of transnationalism, in both my life experiences as someone who became bilingual after living off-and-on for many years in Mexico and in my research agenda, where I seek to highlight what can be learned from the potential of those who live their lives in both hybridity and transnationality.

As a first-generation college graduate from a working-class West Virginia family, I am someone’s Other. In “Theorizing modernity in Appalachia,” Susan Keefe explains:

Mountain people have been typically cast along with non-Western peoples as the Other in the modern paradigm, representatives of an earlier traditional era at one end of a unilinear continuum with modern Western society marking civilization’s progress at the other end. (2008, p. 160)

I think to middle school when my brother, a graduate of West Virginia University, explained what it was like to attend college in our home state with so many people from New Jersey. “They come to West Virginia to study because it’s so cheap, but they all think they are so much better than West Virginia.” This sounds just like the kind of tourism and even credentialing available to individuals from the centers of empire who visit former colonies for similar reasons. Sure enough, three years later after I “got out” of West Virginia at 18, I was on a study abroad trip to Guadalajara, Mexico, in a bus, with a young woman on the program from New Jersey. I had been lucky and “gotten out” (typical brain drain phenomenon of former colonies and economically “backward” places like West Virginia). She argued with me, red in the face, that people from West Virginia simply were not intelligent. She did this in front of the 20 or so student colleagues and faculty advisor from my small liberal arts college based in North Carolina. No one joined in my defense as I appealed to various arguments as to why her point simply wasn’t true. This was not the only time I ran to West Virginia’s defense, just one of the most memorable.

Getting Out

From a young age, I had understood on visceral levels that I would need to leave West Virginia, like so many dislocated people of color and others internally colonized in the U.S. [see, for instance, Juan Carrillo’s treatment of being a Chicano in East L.A and his journey through the Academy (2009)]. How had I sensed that I needed to leave home? I would become un-homely (Bhabha, 1994), a fragmented creation of a not-wanted, not-recognized place that nevertheless exists for the people who live there and in the imaginations of those who recognize its existence in their imaginations. The accent of the people where I grew up would never stick; to this day I cannot even imitate it, though one of my two brothers speaks regularly with the accent. He happens to be the only one who stayed. I would dislocate
geographically and psychically. The Appalachian culture of all my grandparents would nonetheless infiltrate my ways of knowing; yet I would not see the faces of my ancestors as those values and feelings articulate(d) themselves through me.

Yet this was part of my problem, and still is. What systematic discourses do we have to appeal to as Appalachians (to broaden my sense of self-authoring)? I have begun to find Home in postcolonial theory as a way to articulate my own intersections of oppression and also interest in my work toward social equality in the field of education. Surely there are Appalachian Studies, but do the discourses circulating in those studies affect larger audiences? When do national magazines, national newspapers, films, or mass-produced music speak to the situation of what it means to be Appalachian, beyond the shame-inducing caricatures of in-bred hillbillies? (I allow the reader to know what I mean about this caricature without forcing the deconstruction of it.) When, for instance, ethnic studies continue to carry currency among the many diasporic communities of Africans, Latinos, and native peoples—Appalachians are… what? I will attempt to answer this later, but first I recall my prior and partial sense of self (recognizing these senses will always remain partial and shifting). Previously, I had figured myself as being from a working class background, drawing connections to being fatherless at age seven, with a murky sense of West Virginian-as-other, in order to make sense of why I care about working against social inequities in schooling. I’m beginning to refigure that sense.

Race Making—Tropes of Whiteness from the Hills

Before proceeding, I do not want to suggest that the kinds of oppression I have lived and carry with me are the same as those who are racialized as “Other.” I agree with Fanon that the racist creates his inferior (Fanon, 1967), and that to be Black, or any form of non-White (regardless of where one is in the world) is a marker of difference I will never understand as theory in the flesh (Moraga, 1981), where the lived experience of Blackness or being a person of color is experienced in a way that burns beyond the intellect into one’s cells. I draw attention to the racialization of the “Other” as being central to the historic process of colonization. However, I wish to invoke theories regarding Whiteness which complicate the Black-White binary to suggest that the idea of poor Whites works as a buffer zone, a sort of “other” Other to non-Whiteness (Allen, 2008; Hartigan, 2005). It is a dangerous, perhaps horrifying mirror for Whites who did not grow up as other-White, as most Appalachians have. Indeed, it may be like rafting through the river of the film in Deliverance to discover an underworld of other-Whites who might destroy the “right” Whites, as Hartigan demonstrates in his text. For me, this racial/non-racial Othering plays out like this—while I have never been denied my seat at the table in a restaurant because of my skin color, I have wondered over and over again if I belong there because of where and how I grew up. Here I invoke Bourdieu’s sense of habitus and “not for the likes of us” when I think of myself at a French restaurant
in the Washington, D.C. area, for instance. Nonetheless, I have passed, time and again (as far as I know, but my habitus will always keep me wondering). A different kind of cellular oppression.

In recognition of carrying the privilege of Whiteness, I argue that part of the trap of being Appalachian is disguised by that same Whiteness. It is an external marker which masks the oppressions lived in Appalachia. Recently, at the largest, U.S.-based education research conference, I found myself lamenting out loud, “How do I show who I am here? This whole machine homogenizes us, makes us alike, so bourgeois.” I didn’t want to be just another pressed-pants smart woman who passes as middle class, sipping a glass of chardonnay among thousands of people who somehow looked and smelled just like me. So I asked out loud, “Should I wear a white t-shirt with yellow under-arm stains that might indicate how I grew up?” The very mechanism researchers rightly critique—racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Leonardo, 2009; Roediger, 1999)—simultaneously helps mask possible positions of deeper solidarity of multiply oppressed peoples because of the oppositional discourses raised against racism.

Let me not be too innocent. At times I do enjoy the privilege of passing as a pressed-pants, smart, middle-class woman. In my studying and work abroad, the same White privilege has opened the door for me to explore new forms of identity, for instance. Privileged other-as-exotic-bearer-of-Whiteness, and in my case, U.S.-based Whiteness. Yet let me also say that it would almost be impossible to explain the material wealth I grew up with in the U.S., which felt very working class (and would be consensually understood as such throughout the U.S.), as being somehow on parallel with working class folks in formerly colonial countries. The West Virginia part is completely lost unless I attempt to bring it to light, and even then it’s hardly understood. The message can only be as strong as the deliverer, and there’s little to enforce the notion of being from a geographic minority in the global/transnational media echo chamber. In these outside-the-US contexts, I have been able to engage in spheres where the painful context of being from West Virginia is conveniently invisible, where researching among materially poor women in Guadalajara became a way for me to co-identify with the subaltern without having to theorize my own alterity (Author, 1996, 1999). Instead, I co-identified with them as women, as working class. I listened to their stories of strength and drew strength from the stories and their interlocutors.

And as a further disclaimer against my innocence, there is the question of generational history. No doubt the great-grandmother and great-grandfather who came from Croatia knew their kids could trade up from what must have been peasant stock to full-on, non-hyphenated Americans in all their Whiteness (they died suddenly in the Spanish influenza epidemic of 1918, their stories largely lost—my own granddad realized on his deathbed, when I asked him, that he must have spoken Croatian with his mother but had no recollection of it, this language loss was clearly part of the wages of Whiteness). And so will my case be. Yes, it will have
taken my offspring three full generations to escape Appalachia (and precisely as many from my husband’s side as Polish immigrants, interestingly, to escape the sounds of any Polish words or deep traditions), but our kids, should they materialize, would be fully integrated into the benefits of Whiteness with their over-educated parents and the trappings of middle class taste preferences (when was the last time we ate buttered noodles or generic brand hotdogs for dinner, the very stuff I grew up on?). I contrast this intentionally with non-Whites in the U.S.; their lot would (typically) not be the same. Their children, unless able to phenotypically “pass,” would clearly be marked by physical difference. Sure, my White children would have some residual, curious senses of their backgrounds, but they would only be fleeting resonances which make for interesting conversation, much like the people I meet who claim to have a dad or mom from West Virginia.

Exile

But let me go a bit deeper into the question of moms and dads exiled from West Virginia. Because of this longing to say everything, this counter-hegemonic feeling of wanting to scream into the microphones of broadcast news, to tip over church altars at the moment of consecration, to bleed and at once feel it, I speak of exile. There is no script for us, no compass. Glissant explains of the ability to speak, “In the poetics of the oral African text Everything can be said” (1999, p. 137), unlike the Western disciplining of maintaining the line on the unspeakable. Exiled West Virginians, we simply pass into Whiteness in all its normativity and leave the rest unsaid. Yet I refuse to pass so willingly, and I invoke the wisdom of Anzaldúa in this refusal: “I will have my serpent’s tongue, my sexual voice, my poet’s voice. I will overcome the tradition of silence” (1999, p. 81). There is no guidance on healing the wounds of childhood shame about the condition and location of the house where one grew up. How many times did I pray my friends would not notice the construction company that looked like an industrial machine dump as their parents drove me to the home so close to that site? How often did I wonder about what the city only an hour’s drive away, Pittsburgh, was like, from the town where I grew up, whose population had decreased half in size from almost 65,000 when I grew up as a result of the closed mines and steel mills? My mom, like so many who had led the isolated lives of Appalachia, was terrified, and still is, of driving into any city. And yet I had no one to discuss this with. A childhood girlfriend, whose pantry was consistently empty, and I pretended that all was well. It was as if language didn’t exist to describe how we lived. It seems there is no bridge between the values of thrift and stoicism, for instance, and the white middle class ways of spending-on-credit and, say, therapy.

There is the exile from the familiarity of the land where I grew up as well. The creek that ran in front of my house runs today, still, but I wouldn’t today get knee-deep in it again to build an earthen dam again so that my brothers could catch
minnows as fishing bait. There are hills in front of and directly behind the house where I grew up, the same house where my mom resides today. Yet they feel lower than how I remember them as a child, and at once more formidable. I can only go so far up one of them before I wonder what it is I hope to achieve as the brush and trees grow almost impenetrably dense. The open spring from which my granddad collected all his drinking water in reused gallon milk containers has since been blocked off. I never investigated why. Would I learn of carcinogens from mills and mines? I could still feel comfortable walking through the trails of a park, built today for consumption by tourists. Would I not just be a tourist, however, strolling the paved pathways?

Despite the dislocations of my sense of exile, the lived experience of it is also one of my lenses of analysis. Said (2000) discusses his sense of exile and his ability to see with a multiplicity of lenses. On some levels, I believe that I, too, have the lenses of exile as I approach social science research. Despite the pain and isolation of it, I am also grateful, and it is in postcolonial theory where I have been able to connect my sense of exile to the way it has been theorized by those most deeply burdened with postcolonial conditions.

I call out and wonder if the words will merely bounce among mountain walls or perhaps resonate with someone in ways that I wish I had heard them when younger. In the era of hyper-communication, the time-space compression (Jameson, 1991) has allowed me to reconnect with my age-mates from West Virginia. It has become painfully clear that what I thought was imagination surrounding my exile for so many years is real. The people with whom I was connected as a child? Now there is little more than an occasional exchange about someone’s lovely child. The friends who grew up working class in West Virginia have either traded up into a system which now works for them economically, or they maintain the social conservatism where the unsaid must stay that way. I find my affinities stronger with a few other West Virginians in exile. We commiserate about mountaintop mining, the devastation of the local environments, the killing of more miners so that coal might power up the Eastern Seaboard. We ache, minimally vocal, in guilt-ridden gulps of lattes our brothers and sisters back in West Virginia consider superfluous.

Polluted Postcolonialism

With angst, I theorize my experience, and that of West Virginia, as a sort of polluted postcolonialism. While it is obvious that the state of West Virginia lies within the world’s largest empire-power, it acts in terms of statehood, as poor whites do, to help maintain racialized oppressions, bearing some of the burden of those oppressions, rather than enjoying the full privilege of whiteness. Like poor whites, West Virginia can be the brunt of jokes told by people of all stripes without the fast and ready accusation of being a racist, yet the boundary maintenance of racial hegemony is maintained by those jokes. Also like poor whites, the idea of West Virginia fills the imagination of people throughout the U.S. with all kinds of unseemly ideas—the unspeakable.
Incest, poor nutrition, and genetic mutations are among the images both poor whites and West Virginia conjure. I contend that the racial issues of boundary making by the notion of poor whites are under-theorized for two reasons. First, I believe most poor whites who do trade up to normative whiteness are relieved to leave the stigma behind and feel little obligation (or have the discursive tools) to further explore it. Second, I believe the avoidance of the discourse surrounding how whiteness works, and in this specific case as it is imagined in West Virginia and Appalachia, helps maintain the hegemony of racial boundary making.

Another problem of portraying West Virginia and Appalachia as postcolonial is the ethnic and racial make-up of the majority of people who have lived there since European White settlers displaced native peoples from the lands. It is obvious that those who settled the lands had hoped for prosperity and perpetrated the very kind of exploitation of colonizers. The interesting double-bind is that in the particular case of West Virginia, those who live there never seem to cash in on the prior generations’ investment in settlement. On the contrary, those who stay in West Virginia generally maintain a lower status than other Whites throughout the United States. What complicates this, as I demonstrate below, is that most of the land and industry owners do not reside in the state itself; throughout the state’s history, they never have. One large question here is that if the very people who historically arrived to exploit the land and people later became the exploited themselves, how exactly do we theorize this situation? While I argue that postcolonial theory is helpful in understanding the current situation of exploitation, what of the historical bind to the complicity? I will return to this question with thoughts on transnationality later.

Other researchers have theorized West Virginia and Appalachia as a colonial entity, a corrective to casting West Virginia’s people as merely inhabiting a “culture of poverty” (Fones-Wolf & Lewis, 2002, pp. ix-x), though, like so many “others” thrown into a net of a culture of poverty, the depiction remains durable. Part of the culture of poverty includes the depiction of the poor (and the colonized) as lazy, thereby justifying low wages and a perpetual cycle of material poverty leading to a perceived need for the colonizer’s protection (Memmi, 1965). I revisit some of the material/historical conditions to help reclaim the histories I was not offered as part of my formal academic training.

In April 2010, twenty-nine miners died in Montcoal, West Virginia in one of the United States of America’s worst mine disasters in decades. One might imagine their deaths were unanticipated from the way the tragedy was covered in national media. However, it appears that only the high number of deaths was out of the ordinary. In West Virginia, according to the Office of Miners’ Health Safety and Training, every year there are multiple mine deaths (2010), and mining tragedies have existed as long as the coal has been mined from West Virginia. While national media portrayed West Virginia as dependent on jobs related to mining, the decrease of coal-based labor has been exponential. In 1930, there were 130,000 coal-related jobs; in 2010, there are about 30,000. Poverty, health, and education rates remain
among the very worst in the country [see data reports from the Appalachian Regional Commission for state and regional comparisons (2010)].

Common sense reasons for West Virginia’s lack of economic development abound. West Virginia is the only state entirely contained by the Appalachian mountain chain; as such, it has proven difficult to create paths of transportation in and through West Virginia. Unlike the rest of the country, hundreds of small farms are still maintained, often for supplementing or providing subsistence. Because of the geography, there has been a historic sense of isolation from the rest of the country. Indeed, researchers have demonstrated a segmented approach to modernity on the terms of Appalachians themselves (Hatch, 2008; Keefe, 2008). One reason that is not regularly discussed is the colonial nature of who holds the land and industrial production. The top three coal mines in the state are run by corporations whose headquarters are not found in West Virginia, and it is unlikely any of them are. Logging companies engage in the lucrative removal of trees for mountaintop removal, simply for their own profit. Additionally, the chemical manufacturers and auto plants are also operated by out-of-state entities. In fact, many of these entities are now transnational corporations. With such dislocations of business interests, it’s little wonder that the people who live in the state are subject to the exploitative work conditions of, say, the threat of death in mines. The largest coal-producing county in the state, McDowell County, also has the highest poverty rate, at 37.7% (Brookings-Institution, 2006). Over 90% of the land is held by out-of-state landowners. This is an illustrative case of how postcolonial frameworks can apply to West Virginia.

Other Othering, the Turn Toward the Transnational

I am not from McDowell County; I couldn’t be much further from it and still claim to be West Virginian. In fact, I’m from a small, northernmost region of West Virginia referred to as the “northern panhandle.” Throughout the rest of the state, I’ve been told I’m not a “real” West Virginian because there are cultural distinctions in the tiny geographic arm of where I grew up. So not only do I find I do not fit in as a full-on White in the US, I’m not fully accepted as West Virginia-enough by fellow West Virginians.

None of this erases the histories of my family. My mom’s parents grew up in coal camps and farms and lived part of their lives in central West Virginia. The same granddad had worked for a chemical manufacturer through most of his adult life; part of his daily labor was the checking of instruments where he put his bare hands through asbestos to check the gauges. He had also labored in mines in his youth. One wonders what combination of asbestos and coal dust worked his lungs to their death after several years on oxygen; he literally gasped for his last breath as his lungs ultimately failed (and, yes, like most men of his generation he did smoke tobacco as well, but he had quit 20 years before his death). My dad died of a rare form of cancer in his mid-40s, a man who had otherwise been known for
his strength and athleticism. One wonders if the contaminants of mills and chemical industry that settled into the Ohio Valley had anything to do with his untimely death. But these histories are not easily and readily explained in my journeys in West Virginia; the accent I unconsciously worked so hard to cultivate as a child betrays me as a northerner in the eyes of other West Virginians.

While it is helpful to use the tools of postcolonial theory to understand the case of West Virginia (and its situatedness in Appalachia), the tools of transnational theory are also being crafted in ways that help us reframe and extend our thinking. Transnational theory allows Glissant’s notion of transversality to come into play, where diversity and “creoleness” can find many homes among the un-homely to take roots and offer new shoots (Glissant, 1999). We move further away from the oppressor-oppressed binary and so many of the other Western binaries critiqued by postcolonial theory. Ong explains that transversality is one component of transnationalism, ignited by the “changing logics of states and capitalism” (1999, p. 4). Transversality allows us to shift toward understanding multiple intersectionalities of experience on a global scale.

In the case of West Virginia, Richard Hassler draws comparisons to the mass privatization of land in southern Africa to the “raze of the land” in West Virginia’s mountaintop removal, where entire mountaintops are blasted with dynamite to extract the tons of coal beneath them, leaving both degraded ecologies and communities in their wake (2005, p. 98). He argues that a sense of “postfrontierism” is at the heart of the sense that humans can use and abuse the land, without “moral authority of ownership, stewardship, or proprietorship,” in many global contexts. This postfrontierism is a global phenomenon which fits the sense of empirical case study in transnational research (Khagram & Levitt, 2008).

Basch, Glick Schiller, and Szanton Blanc explain that “[a] global perspective must explicate the role and dynamic tensions generated by global capitalist hegemony,” (1994, p. 15). Their contribution to the theorizing of transnationalism allows the optic to shift, “which asks a different set of questions based on different epistemological assumptions” (Khagram & Levitt, 2008, p. 1). In the case of West Virginia, I can begin to understand how a transnational corporation like DuPont owns the largest coal producing company in West Virginia. I can also begin to weave together the counter-practices of various social networks who contest transnational companies’ practices across national boundaries with varying degrees of success and experience (Ansley, 2001-2002).

Finally, on a most personal level, I can begin to see my own un-homeliness coming back home. Home begins to be the connections, however temporary, with people involved in struggle, involved in (re)claiming multiply-manifesting senses of history and identity in hybrid, un-homely ways. While I may never feel fully comfortable back in the geographic space that once was home, I recognize home among my colleagues in a march for the recognition of rights of immigrants in the U.S., among people from multiple backgrounds. Home really was there when
I was among the women I researched with in the 1990s, albeit temporarily. I find home in brief glimpses with West Virginia friends-in-exile on Facebook, and even when I am in West Virginia, in short moments. I recognize it in my yearnings to connect immigrant students to find a sense of rooting, however fleeting, on U.S. soil. Home is the assertion of my voice and the polysemous ideas I speak, with my “poet’s voice.” Home is the breathing in of so many suppressed voices from print, conversation, articulations of art.

While full rooting in a transnational context is likely no longer tenable, what’s to say we cannot have momentary co-rootedness in acts of solidarity? Those moments may be apoeretic, fleeting. Yet in our efforts to invoke intellectual exile, as suggested by Said (2000), we can all cast the analytic toward the transversal in an increasingly transnational moment. My future research will link my own lack of rootlessness to the rootedness of home in these fleeting but meaningful, contested, hybridized contexts. With some measured ambivalence, I claim that’s the best I can hope for, and somehow it is comforting—like home.

References


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Perspectives on the Editor’s Mentoring-for-Democracy Role in Publication

Caroline R. Pryor, Carol A. Mullen, Tricia Browne-Ferrigno, & Sandra Harris

This article describes perspectives on the role and responsibility of editors in mentoring authors through the publishing process. Our perspectives as journal editors are framed by our experiences as university professors involved in editing numerous academic bodies of work within educational studies (e.g., performing functions as editors and editorial board members, peer-reviewing manuscripts). Our review essay is written with the goal of promoting large-scale positive change within the journal editorial culture and greater understanding on the part of editors and reviewers, as well as authors who submit their work for publication review. We provide data initiated in two American Educational Research Association sessions, in 2008 and 2010, framed by the ideals of democracy foundational to a democracy-focused journal for augmenting our exploration. Also included are four vignettes from journal editors whose perspectives overlap and yet are idiosyncratic with regard to their own reflections and lived experiences. This discussion disseminates new research and thought with the prospect of enhancing democratic opportunity through editorial mentoring.

As context for self-investigation, editorial board representatives of several journals have reflected on the nature of disciplinary work that might otherwise not immediately reveal the nature of their underlying democratic pragmatism. For example, although public educational institutions rely heavily on democratic thought, other institutions whose policies have far-reaching implications for K–12 students (e.g., health, government policy) should be included in the research on democratic citizenship (Mullen, 2011). To garner such breadth and in recognition of multiple genres and the researchers who might report these, here we discuss how those involved in disseminating new research and thought might enhance democratic opportunity through editorial mentoring. We build on what Mullen et
al. (2008) shared as the rationale for a 2008 American Educational Research Association (AERA) editors’ panel presentation:

In part, editors can ensure a broad dialogue by publicly calling for sharing civic responsibility to clearly explain their publication mission and purposeful advancement of scholars’ work. … editors will discuss how the expansion of their mission has now impacted their response to submitted manuscripts and to the framework in which journal editors have traditionally worked. (p. 3)

We also reflect on ideas from this panel for graduate students by re-entering a dialogue specific to the journal *Learning For Democracy (LFD)* (e.g., the advancement of democratic thought as outcomes for teaching and learning) (Pryor & Brown, 2008). We begin this review essay by discussing the importance of ideas that Popper (1945) expressed that posit linkages between knowledge and a free society. Popper’s ideas, foundational to *LFD*, were explored only initially in a 2010 keynote address to the AERA SIG Democratic Citizenship in Education. Certainly, the calls for social and personal independence–dependence proliferate as ecologies of thought and practice (e.g., the 2010 AERA conference theme) are considered central to any discussion about democratic citizenship. The importance of Popper’s philosophical ideas and the relationship of these to a free and democratic society offer us additional insights.

As a second step in framing this discussion, we pursue possibilities for applying democratic thought to a practical venue—editorial scholarly service. Our primary goal is to further opportunities for scholars to engage in discussions central to the publication and dissemination of their research. As a framework for this paper, we address the AERA Democratic Citizenship in Education Special Interest Group’s (SIG) mission, which is “to promote democratic citizenship-development research in K-12 classrooms and to foster interdependence among citizenship-democratic researchers” (News release, 2010). Two questions we have asked that shape our dialogue here are as follows: What is the role of a journal editor in a democratic society? Can editors reasonably and effectively serve as editorial-mentors?

We hypothesize that the global nature of scholarly interdependence has shifted expectations about the role of researchers including, for example, the need to address challenges as well as opportunities that occur as people learn in different places, countries, and time zones (Lee & Rochon, 2010). The currency of the role of cultural leadership is therefore being called into account; noticeably, we pose this challenge to editors: In what ways might editorial work remain less a part of a hidden agenda and more forcibly assert transparency inherent in a democratic stance? As an outcome, we hope to provide strategies useful to editors and their executive teams and review boards.

**Editorial Responsibilities in an Open Society**

The far-reaching potential for enhanced global interaction and the visible challenges to political isolation inherent in non-inclusionary regimes (e.g., interpersonal
connections available via Facebook) are apparent in current worldwide expressions of citizen unrest. Communication venues serve to invigorate debates about political constructs, broadening opportunities for things such as freedom of speech or collective expression of group will; therefore, civic democracy thrives in an open communicative society. It is prescient to the topic of communication and social access that this discussion explores the nature of expectations and perspectives held within the United States and academic editors internally. For example, as LFD editors sought in 2006 to move the journal’s foundational home in the United Kingdom to the United States, the mission aims and scope, and explicit purpose of the journal, democratic thought and practice remained central. The editorial position shifted to a United States-based researcher who expanded the board to include numerous faculty members from United States institutions. Similarly, other journal boards, even those essentially United States-based, include a wide range of international editors or board members (see the American Educational Research Journal).

We turn to the role of journal editor from national and international perspectives. Building on Mullen’s (2011) essay, we analyze the role of the editor relative to its democratic function and to mentoring as an embodiment of that function, and conclude with a compendium of suggested editorial-mentor practices. We also draw attention to some of the benefits and challenges to that role with a quote from Berquist who, in writing for a medical education audience, noted Mainiero’s caveat that while mentoring is a time-consuming effort it is also a valuable endeavor:

We don’t get paid for mentoring . . . or do we? Our reward is the success of the mentee or, in the case of the journal, the satisfaction of a superior product that we all worked together to produce. Mentoring our authors, reviewers, and editors will result in a product that we can pass on to the next group of mentors. (cited in Berquist, 2008, p. 1626)

British researchers Wellington and Nixon (2005) note and many concur (see later section, Democratic Function of Editorship) that editors hold power to define constructs and boundaries of their publications, not dissimilar to the more generalized and passionate calls for liberty-freedom in academic publishing. Wellington and Nixon urge an enhanced vision of this role so that censure is less eminent in framing or expanding boundaries of thought. Editors in the United States appear to agree, as Stanley (2007) noted, who admonishes the profession [in general] for allowing editors to pursue a “gatekeeping” role. Editors perpetuate an often-mainstream master narrative that situates power and authority in the hands of a few and that resurrects communication barriers. Pragmatic issues might complicate the editor’s ability to engage fully with an author during the editorial review process and in fact might be limited by the expertise needed to execute it. For example, linguistic barriers might reframe a narrative where such was not the author’s intent. Burrough-Boenisch (2006) writes that many European authors employ language professionals to correct their English; thus, the linguistic editing by outside profes-
sionals could create an unintended interpretation of a narrative—unknown to both its author and the editor to whom it was submitted.

Moreover, Nickerson (2005) notes that standards among editors vary so greatly, that editors and their review boards differ widely in their use. Nickerson refers to several pragmatic issues such as how, within the same journal, reviews are conducted, standards are applied, type and quality of feedback is provided to authors, and interestingly, reviewers’ attitudes are portrayed. Provocative, and yet untouched by much of the research on this topic, Nickerson continues, is the very notion that authors often reap a backlash from reviewers whose personal or research experience differs greatly from that of an author. Vecchio (2006) analyzed more than 800 manuscripts submitted over 4 years, seeking information about bias, agreement, and predictive validity in reviews, only to conclude that monitoring the entire review process is critical to the editorial role.

It is left then to academe to determine what ideological frame might best present the role of the editor, particularly the powerful outreach to global interaction this role holds. To augment such outreach, we provide theoretical ideas based on Austrian-British philosopher Karl Popper’s (1902–1994) description of an open society. He suggested that a value of editorial communication and by way of extension the communicative work of editors is to operationalize belief in an open society. It is our hope that this theoretical discussion, along with responses by four editors, might generate strategies useful to a community of editors and the authors with whom they engage and mentor.

Democracy and the Open Society

Popper suggested two foundational ideals supportive of an open society: a government that is responsive and tolerant, and political mechanisms (e.g., practices and policies) that are transparent and flexible (Popper, 1945). Levinson’s concept of an open society has been interpreted as

... an association of free individuals respecting each others’ rights within the framework of mutual protection supplied by the state [e.g., the controlling authority], and achieving, through the making of responsible, rational decisions, a growing measure of humane and enlightened life. (cited in Magee, 1974, p. 92)

However, an association of free individuals is not always easily realized or even, in some cases, particularly desired. As a barrier to free associations along the lines that Popper (1945) articulated with respect to political processes, Swann (2006) suggests that processes constituting governmental power are not unlike the processes used in editorial power. Swann posits, for example, that what constitutes knowledge in an open society should be—if taken as conjectural—available and open to diverse perspectives and discussion with editors. Further, the processes editors follow should be constituted to foster conjectural protections. Should we then be thinking of the derivations of the editorial role as a political process?

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Democratic Function of Journal Editorship

The work of journal editorship, that is the public work of editors—writing, reviewing, responding to author queries—is not typically considered political. These efforts are less thought of as work framed by ideals than that of some transitory and pragmatic work-type responsibility, such as sending out a call to reviewers. Some authors on publishing (Dow, 2000; Hamrick, 2006; Harper, 2006; Lillis, Magyar, & Robinson-Pant, 2010; Lindle, 2004; Mullen, 2011) argue that editorial work indeed is an outcome of the foundational beliefs of who—and perhaps what counts as academic freedom—the freedom to gate keep the publications of academic scholars. Here gate keeping refers to the ability to provide access to authors or to restrict their access. We are drawing on Mullen’s (2011) work that is a sharing of an editor-mentor’s probing insights into democratic pathways of thinking and practice with respect to expansive mentoring-based editorial possibilities. For example, Mullen suggests that we envision the role of the editor as a mentor to the author-citizen who in many instances has experienced such vagrancies of editorial invective ranging from fairness, even inclusiveness, to mediocre treatment and, not uncommonly, undisputed abandonment.

To describe the democratic function of journal editorship, we refer to Mullen’s (2011) notion of outdated and traditional editors as “old school,” that is, actors who gate keep as their primary function. This orientation embeds a role not as colleague but as one who must—in order to be viewed as scholarly—provide the necessary regulatory mission that somehow fuses rigor into scholarship. Democracies, Mullen writes, should be particularly concerned with this concentration of power for two reasons, gate keeping (1) promulgates—the who of who gets published, and (2) frames the ensuing public norm of what constitutes the knowledges of importance.

Authors learn from their editors; they quickly read their own reviews and those of colleagues. They learn what to write and how to write it—yet inequities continue. The enculturation of journal work, such as peer review processes that limit communication with authors and that perpetuate particular knowledges (Raelin, 2008) challenge Popper’s call to the open society. Mullen’s (2011) review essay and her foundational work for this current paper suggest that we evoke the ideals of an open society by urging editors and other leaders associated with publication to critically investigate their practices and discuss them publicly. We suggest that an untying of the regulatory knot of journal editing could promote the vitality inherent in the role, and stimulate challenges to power inequities and other status quo-maintaining practices.

The suggestion for transparency and editorial support is not unprecedented in the United States and worldwide publication genre. Policies that promote both excellence and equity have long appeared in the literature. Pinar’s founding of the Journal of Curriculum Theorizing (circa 1970s) is but one example of editors turning their attention to their own policies that affect democratic community development and the inclusion of marginalized populations in critically important roles of leadership.
and service (Brown, Irby, & Yang, 2008). Visionary direction emanates from editors of many journals as they intentionally address cultural and institutional forces that shape the scholarly processes of their work (e.g., Mullen et al., 2008; Scheurich et al., 2004). Unsurprisingly, access and advantage of unbridling ritual continue to litter the pathway of democratic opportunity. An ideology that better aligns the editorial role with democratic goals such as the protection and perpetuation of ideals and practices supportive of liberty, social justice, and equality offers a new way of thinking that is propelled by open, inclusionary practices. Such a shift can provide editors with a genre that disentangles them from the regulatory function of gatekeeper (Brown et al., 2008), which might legitimize the groundswell of authors who have long been disadvantaged by exclusionary practices inherent in patriarchal processes.

Democratic Editorial Practices

What are some of the practices of a democratic minded editor? In part, these practices could include working closely with editorial teams to include junior faculty members and doctoral students (Mullen et al., 2008, 2011), or constructively critiquing manuscripts that are incomplete in terms of the conceptual framework, data analysis, or some other important dimension (Mullen & Kochan, 2000). Dougherty (2009) suggests that the democratic minded editor is inclusive of global perspectives, seeking dialogue and promoting it. Several of the editors in the vignettes to follow emphasize the importance of contentiousness in their editorial mentoring work. They expressed feeling that they must vigilantly serve as a kind of social justice compensator where authors are concerned, enabling fair treatment of their works, enabling the translation of their intended meanings, and being highly responsive throughout the entire review process. These and other practices are brought to the fore as we offer our perceptions and experiences of the role of the editor-mentor and the democratic juncture they support.

Intentional mentors can promote promising practices of alternative mentoring that serve to both interrogate and change traditional as well as technical approaches to mentoring (Galbraith, 2003; Mullen, 2011). Mullen (2005) writes that alternative or nontraditional practices include cross-cultural mentoring, inquiry, writing, or arts-based approaches, learning communities, mentor-based programs, peer coaching and learning, professional activism, staff development, electronic mentoring. She explains that journal mentors use such conduits to remedy the drawbacks of traditional mentoring relationships, such as the time and funds needed to attend professional conferences and learning from the organizational structures provided. Alternatively, Mullen offers, mentoring could include collaboration, co-mentorship, democratic learning, and shared leadership. Democratic mentoring can be a formal or an informal experience of mentoring wherein the editor or board members help authors satisfy their own desire to publish their work, therefore providing them the berth to act on a vision of personal and professional expression.
Mentoring Function of Journal Editorship

Newer mentoring models can enable journal editors to help address deficits in the academic work environment. For example, tenure-seeking faculty, in general, sometimes falter not because of inadequacies relative to their own motivation or capability but rather from a lack of access to designated mentors and, more importantly, a mentoring support system that is beneficial to their career and psychosocial development. Mentoring entails complexity in the educative process (Johnson, 2006; Mullen, 2005) that extends to the editorialship roles that involves the support and sponsorship of individuals’ scholarly, professional, and career development inclusive of people’s academic disciplines and professions (Mullen, 2011).

Mentorship can be seen as a framework of cultural negotiation, adaptation, and acceptance in which individuals with experience and expertise invest time in those who are less experienced, enhancing their capacity for growth and success (Johnson, 2006). Peer-based learning communities can develop from such relationships (Galbraith, 2003). As mentors and mentees collaborate, these interactions can generate new knowledges as part of an otherwise staid relationship of inequities within organizations, and professions (Hansman, 2002).

Challenges Confronting Editor-Mentor

The demand on an academic editor invariably compartmentalizes his or her attentions into contradictory roles, such as explorer-gatherer of innovative ideas and trends, and maintainer of traditional normative social and academic practices. To function as an explorer-gather, an editor might give wide berth to the ontological premise of an author’s vision of knowledge, especially to those novice researchers who challenge more established convictions (Wellington & Nixon, 2005). Conversely, as editor-maintainer, practices such as deciding the merits of manuscripts submitted for publication could be shrouded in beliefs in the importance of scrutiny and distance, as necessary strongholds of rigorous scholarship (McGinty, 1999). Yet, journal editors act on the authority entrusted to them, knowledgeable and/or understanding of the impacts their actions portend.

Compromises Supporting Editor-Mentor

Journal editors might be more attracted to deliberately blending the construal of their editorial role as institutions increasingly value the importance of mentoring (e.g., Brown et al, 2008). Team-based approaches across organizational and disciplinary boundaries in academe are beginning to permeate editorial policies and guidelines, practices, and activities (Bütt et al., 2006; Sá, 2008). Consistent with the belief of journal editor as mentor-leader is how such leadership might recast a journal reviewer’s role as critical supporter rather than judge. Taken together,
Munro-Turner’s (2003) premise of “mentoring on purpose” and lessons learned at AERA during 2008 and 2010 sessions hold great promise.

To learn more about this promise, eight experienced editors we approached responded to our questions about how their mentorship within the context of the editorial process infuses the ideals of democratic thought in the experience of authors. We next posit their responses as four vignettes, which are the outgrowth of synthesized and rewritten statements that aid in their readability. Following these brief portraits, we offer some initial suggestions for the field. By doing so, we endeavor to further editors’ beliefs about the possibilities and challenges that bridge imaginative and democratic civic participation, a role we believe editors hold as their responsibility and stewardship.

**Academic Editor-Mentor: Vignette #1**

Having served as the editor of an international refereed journal for 8 years and having guest edited 14 special issues of journals in addition to numerous other editorial roles, I felt called upon to initiate dialogue about the capacity that editors have to serve in an editorial mentoring role. Several years ago, I organized an invited journal editors’ session at AERA from which several themes emerged, including some responses a group of 12 journal editors in education had about challenges they face in editorial mentoring. While I suspected that challenges would indeed be identified, these seemed to overwhelm the potential for advantages. For example, the participating editors emphasized the difficulty of providing the extra time needed to mentor authors in manuscript development and of preparing others, particularly reviewers, on their editorial teams to mentor authors. They noted a learning curve involved in designing review guidelines and rubrics that fit with a mentoring approach to peer review, as well as the awkwardness of mentoring in a peer-review culture that is inundated in high-stakes scholarly rigor and assessment.

In addition to practical concerns, theoretical responses emerged from this panel session. The editors expressed concerns about their own leadership, since some viewed their role as a very public responsibility—a civitas of service. They asked, how might I serve to more democratically engage the scholars who submit manuscripts and what is my responsibility to them? Not surprisingly, the theme of democratic leadership as it might impact editorial role (e.g., a mentoring editor) emerged as the panel turned its attention to expressions of concern from the session audience, many of whom believed they had experienced negative, unfair, or dismissive treatment by editors. We, as editors, found the audience’s reactions both compelling and appalling, and we did not believe that we had had a hand in perpetuating the problems under discussion.

As I learned more about these editors’ beliefs and the concerns generated by our audience, I wondered if a more current reframing of the role of the editor was needed, and if this reframing should suggest leadership in which democratic
thought plays a more central role, particularly in the power-laden environment of a peer-review process. In an article that I then wrote, I read everything I could find written by journal editors about their roles. I examined trends within the journal editorial culture, in addition to areas of deficit and promising practices. I came to understand a bigger picture of journal editorship, that is, as a tripartite vision that has the potential to compel editors to serve as mentors to authors and reviewers. For it, the roles and responsibilities of academic journal editors from mentoring, democratic, and international perspectives is crucial, the point being that one dimension of the work builds on another.

Outcomes of this review essay indicated that editors need to embrace the mentoring, democratic, and international functions important in an open society. I feel passionately that journal editors need to lead the diversification of higher education systems by eliminating constrictive access and advocating for mentoring as an organizational value. The progressive ideologies of mentoring that underscore such activities feature collaboration, co-mentorship, democratic learning, and shared leadership. The function of internationalizing journals is intrinsically linked to the mentoring and democratic aspects of academic editorship. Needed, though, are international perspectives on mentoring and democracy that can serve as frameworks for guiding journal editors. Internalization efforts have thus far been localized within particular journals and with certain publishers, such as Routledge and Peter Lang. As one starting point for addressing these three functions, I tell stories about the importance of journal editors and other publishers constituting and reconstituting their editorial boards and review panels so that they are more highly diverse and interdisciplinary in scope, ethnicity, and nationality.

For years, I have felt inspired by the liberatory, empowering work produced by academics such as Shirley Steinberg, founder and long-standing editor of Taboo: The Journal of Culture and Education. The democratic body of knowledge she produces through her vast networks and sponsorship of under-represented groups, including the reclaiming of indigenous knowledges, has built communal synergy and helped mend racial, gender, and class divides. This intensive level of commitment to an open society reinforces in multiple directions the inclusion practices (e.g., diversification and representation of under-represented groups) of the making of a democracy, while shaping the important work in criticality and critical leadership. I have heard Steinberg call for criticality in scholarly cultural norms by evoking play with the use of “rigor/mortis” (i.e., scientifically based educational research can metaphorically equate with stiffness of death) to force deep reflection on status quo practices that block generativity within a democracy.

Authors share that they want seasoned academics, particularly editors of journals, to perform mentoring roles but that practices of editorship vary greatly. Based on the feedback I have received from authors of the journal I edited and the sessions I have organized and participated in, few academics have confidence in the overarching desire of editors to mentor authors’ work. Therefore, those of us
who wish to propel the democratic work of journal editors must work even harder to get our message heard, and it is incumbent upon us to share our ideas in writing and certainly in our praxis.

Academic Editor-Mentor: Vignette #2

I believe the principal responsibility of an editor is to fill the journal with material that is interesting, coherent, and pertinent. It is consistent with democratic values and the Popperian idea of an open society that an editor selects articles for publication that provide diverse perspectives. Similarly, when a manuscript that has been reviewed is evaluated by an editor, such established criteria as coherence and pertinence should take precedence over whether a reviewer agrees with an author's argument. A journal should be a forum for debate and, as such, diverse arguments and perspectives will be fostered.

Although I feel it is, generally speaking, good to be helpful, as the editor of LFD I did not consider mentorship to be part of my formal role. But I did take the view that all would-be contributors should be treated with respect. When they had provocative and pertinent ideas that were not being presented to best advantage, it was worth devoting time and effort to edit their submissions to achieve greater coherence. Mentorship, at an informal level, took place because of my editorial activities. Treating authors with respect included giving them a timely decision as to whether their manuscript has been accepted. A speedy decision is much more important than the provision of detailed feedback. Three weeks seems to me to be long enough for an author to await the decision. Any feedback given should be honest and to the point. It is desirable for the feedback to indicate what the author might need to do to make the article publishable in the journal, but it is not always possible to provide such feedback.

As the editor of an international journal, I thought it important to publish material from authors from many countries, including manuscripts whose first language was not English. I encouraged submissions from authors with interesting ideas whose command of English was such that their work required a significant degree of editorial intervention. The work of contributors for whom English was their first language also required heavy editing. For example, a paper submitted with the structure of a master’s dissertation required significant revision. In all cases, I was careful to avoid altering meaning, and copy was sent to authors for approval prior to publication.

Most of my editorial time was spent working on accepted typescripts—too much time, in fact. What I did was not sustainable, in the sense that I could not find sufficient time both to edit the journal as I was doing and continue with my own writing. After providing editorial service, in time, I chose the latter.
Academic Editor-Mentor: Vignette #3

In my original work with this LFD editor (vignette #2), as a United States author inquiring and then submitting an article for review and possible publication in this journal, I found her to be a true mentor, although she might have summed up her scholarly service as editorial work-tasks. The first indicator I had that she would provide an “open-opportunity” along the lines of Popper’s advocacy for transparency became visible to me by her willingness to respond to my inquiry about my manuscript topic. She provided me thoughtful detail, such that allowed me to revise large sections of text. She also acknowledged that she had read my submitted manuscript and sent me reviewers’ comments, again in enough detail to allow me to address needed revisions for a successful final submission. She augmented her comments with summary points—editorial cues. Our email exchanges, while addressing the manuscript details, were also reflective about the journal mission (e.g., what might constitute democratic practices) and this type of interaction was, in my experience, unique. Not surprisingly, I wondered about the hierarchical nature of the editorial role: Should this editor really be telling me all this? After all, she would have to make an editorial decision on the worth of my manuscript as a published piece, which seems inevitably to summon forth barriers between journal editor and author.

Ultimately, the editor decided that belief in an open-society mandates the need to reveal, not suppress information, which might enhance social–industrial opportunities. She published my article; however, the greater impact for me occurred when I realized that an editor-mentor could foil traditional barriers by serving the scholarly community with a broader vision than gatekeeping. So I ask, if we as editors and leaders of boards do not share helpful information to those who submit manuscripts to us, are we remiss in our duty? Although some individuals might suggest this mentor approach lacks the integrity needed for scholarly rigor, as a democratically oriented academic, I disagree.

Academic Editor-Mentor: Vignette #4

As a new professor, I had published several articles in the National Council of Professors of Educational Administration’s (NCPEA) sponsored journal Educational Leadership Review (ELR) and begun developing a working collaboration with the founder of that journal and then-editor. After having spent time industriously reviewing for this journal, I was invited to serve as a guest editor. This led to an invitation to serve as editor of the ELR. The editor had nurtured me into this role, and this experience greatly influenced how I saw my role as editor.

As ELR editor, it was my responsibility to publish well-written, timely articles consistent with the journal’s mission. However, in doing this, I kept in mind this primary question when acting as mentor-editor: What could I do to support this writer as we worked together to strengthen this submission? This same question
framed my work with reviewers as together we sought ways to strengthen the manuscript.

Consistent with my orientation as journal editor, I expected feedback from reviewers to be timely, substantive, and respectful. Reviewers were expected to complete their review within eight weeks. If a reviewer could not meet this timeframe, I invited someone else to review. Once a reviewer committed to the manuscript, I provided support by reminding him or her in an electronic mail message a week before the review-completion deadline. The number of reviewers who thanked me for the reminder and then within a day or two would send a completed review often surprised me. This experience taught me that it was not necessary to provide reviewers with turnaround timeframes of more than a few weeks, so I adjusted my expectation.

I believe that substantive feedback is necessary to improving a paper under consideration. It was not unusual for three or more reviewers to reflect a wide range of responses, which only served to underscore the importance for editors to select reviewers who were diverse relative to a paper needing review. For example, I tried to select one reviewer who was very familiar with the topic and another who had expertise with the methodology. I often selected a third reviewer whose area of expertise was different because I felt that his or her questions and comments would prompt crucial aspects of what the paper might need in order to capture a wide readership.

Respectful feedback was important, and I was often pleasantly surprised how reviewers framed the most negative comments in ways that were respectful and even encouraging to the author. When this did not happen, I considered it my responsibility as editor to rephrase reviewers’ remarks so that authors received comments oriented toward improving their paper rather than discouraging them. When a paper was rejected for publication in the journal, I made every effort to provide the author with other possible publishing outlets after considering reviewer feedback. While my responsibility as an editor was to see that the journal published high quality, strong interest material, I had an equally important commitment to support the writer.

Another experience of editor mentoring involved a guest-edited issue of the LFD journal. As guest editor, I issued an international call that emphasized democratic educational leadership and democratic schools, but I was also able to invite colleagues working in the area of democratic schooling to submit their work. A new assistant professor in my department joined me in co-editing this issue, a mentoring step that was taken purposefully. While a fine developing scholar, I wanted to extend this collaborative, beginning opportunity for him to be an editor, which I believe has had a direct influence on our own academic skills and professional development. I endeavored to demonstrate many of the principles involved in guiding authors, such as timely, substantive, critical feedback given in a respectful manner, in this collaboration. Such principles undergird my editorial mentoring perspective and continue to frame my work on behalf of and with authors, junior faculty members, and doctoral students.
Initial Suggestions for the Field

From our review of perspectives from the relevant literature, and our joint construction and contemplation of these vignettes, in addition to our collective experiences as editor-mentors and authors, we suggest a compendium of ideas. It is our hope that editors and their boards consider the efficacy of these in framing the role of editor-mentor.

- Use team-based approaches in journal policies, guidelines, and practices. (Bull et al., 2006)
- Institute online or electronic training for reviewers. (Bull et al., 2006)
- Create editor networks to learn how others form democratic-open policies.
- Develop a multi-tiered mentoring structure inclusive of gender and under-represented populations. (Garcia-Retamero & Lopez-Zafra, 2006)
- Provide pathways for authors and other mentees’ access to expanded, diversified networks through such opportunities as serving authors, reviewers, and assistant editors. (Mullen & Kochan, 2000; Mullen et al., 2008)
- Encourage multi-modalities for publishing worldwide for which open access journals are uniquely poised. (Brown et al, 2008)
- Demonstrate supportive and timely editorial review and detail in written responses. (Johnson, 2006)
- Encourage author inquiry and interaction, suggestive of an ethic and respect for an open society. (Gattei, 2006)
- Provide previews or informal reviews of manuscripts online to inquiring authors. (Mullen, 2011)

Parting Thoughts

Because little empirical analysis of the journal editorial culture exists, what is known about the myriad roles and responsibilities of journal editors is mostly, albeit not exclusively, informal and anecdotal in nature. Notably, researchers and practitioners have produced prolific numbers of guidebooks that authors use for professional publication (e.g., Henson, 1999) and mentoring program descriptions and guidelines are posted on university websites (e.g., University of Colorado Denver, 2007) and provided in books and articles (e.g., Mullen, 2008). Moreover, as shifting beliefs about the role of the editor envision a more encompassing and participatory global-citzenry, it is imperative that practices inside democracies divest themselves of regulatory solitude and report impacts of the editor-mentor role.
In our follow up to this discussion, we have prompted an audience of editors and authors (our participants at the 2011 conference) to respond to the following questions:

• What feedback do you provide to authors (or have you personally received) before, during, and after a manuscript submission?

• What guidance do you provide (or have you received) for revision and re-submission to a journal?

• What challenges or roadblocks might we be overlooking in this hypothesis that the role of the editor broadens opportunities in the open society?

We plan to forge ahead by analyzing responses to these questions aimed at changing the power imbalances in academe and allowing for much greater diversity through the emerging role of editor-mentor.

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Postcards of the Familiar: A Meditation on Memories, the Magical, and Self-Realization

Diane Ketelle

Sometimes the decision to choose a destination is practical and other times travels come about quite magically. During my 2010 sabbatical, I traveled to several destinations including Armenia, India, Greece, and Italy. Unlike other trips, this particular journey caused me to think a bit differently about new places and how I engage with them. In the process of exploring these places I purposefully bought postcards for they portray more than the daily lives of people; these sometimes iconic images often portray the more idealized images of places. Often, postcards reflect a country’s milestones, history, and cultural legacies. I am intrigued by the portrayals reflected on postcards because they urge me to shift the pace with which I navigate the world.
When I returned home it was to the familiar. But, my camera caused me to re-focus somewhat differently on the everyday, as though it was a postcard. Suddenly, I found myself exploring the meaning of the familiar, for I realized I had been engaged in a meditation for more than 34 years. It took leaving the familiar and encountering the new to realize this. My vision was now directed towards Mills Hall, the heart of the meditation. From earthquakes to student rebellions, this iconic structure has withstood hardships, loss, and the pains of separation by students, staff, and administrators. The elegant strength and endurance represented in this 160-year-old centerpiece of the Mills College campus reminds me of many of the buildings on those postcards I purchased while traveling. Mills College is a place where I lived my student life and now, where the trajectory of my professional life has expanded my intellect, teaching, and leadership skills. It is also the place where my vision of education has been informed and transformed.

Mills Hall comes into my view with multiple layers of the familiar, but even though it is the framework around which my daily life is centered I still meditate on the question: How do I seek meaning in the familiar? Is a lack of reflection, a lack of meaning? As I follow the meditation, I see new reflections and details in what is almost taken for granted as the familiar. As a result, I enter new portals related to sites that are part of my daily life. It is as though a new door is placed on an old building, and there is a renewal within me.

My son, Lucas, a photographer, insisted I become familiar with Martin Parr’s work after viewing my photographs of the Mills College campus. Parr, a British documentary photographer, is an avid collector of postcards. Martin Parr’s book Tutta Roma (2007) depicts postcard-like photographs of Rome. He documents Rome through the sites, as well as the millions of visitors who cast their gaze on this historical city. His work also reflects how visitors become part of the city and make it, to some degree, what it is. In this way, he forces the viewer to look at more than just the sites by turning the lens back on the visitors.

After I studied Martin Parr’s work, I looked at my photographs again and realized that although I may have intended to turn the photographic lens back on myself, I had not done so. As I continued roaming around the Mills campus, I had placed myself in the role of a tourist, venturing through a most familiar place. Perhaps this is something we all do, as observing is easier than participating.

I look at the photograph I took of Mills Hall and I am struck by how it is centered, with equal parts of sky and lawn. There is a balance in this photograph that often is not achieved in life, for imbalance is more familiar and more of a driving force in the daily course of our lives. Even though this terrain is the axis on which my daily routine turns, there is always the possibility that I will lose myself in the landscape. I am reminded of the lyrics from “Feel Like a Stranger,” a song written by Bob Weir and John Barlow, and made famous by The Grateful Dead on their 1990 Without a Net album:
Inside you’re burning
I can see clear through
Your eyes tell more than you mean them to
Lit up and flashing
Like reds and blues
Out there on the neon avenue
But I feel like a stranger
Feel like a Stranger

I wonder if I actually always see my surroundings. Does the formality of my picture indicate a feeling of alienation or a lack of reflection? Are new, exotic places really more likely to inspire me to reflect? While I want to experience that level of inspiration in my daily life, I still often feel like a stranger in my own skin as my professional and personal evolution continues. I am a purposeful traveler who has experienced foreign lands only to realize I can be a stranger in the familiar. In this way, everything I encounter can become a postcard.

Photographs of my familiar world allow me to observe my surroundings in relation to myself through a new and often clarifying lens. The exercise of seizing and freezing such moments calls up the past and creates new memories in much the same way. My life is transformed into traces of postcards placed in the photo album of my mind where I re-order my life so I may reside within it. I want to capture time in perpetuity in order to author my narrative, reordering images and experiences. I go deeper and deeper as I explore how meanings change over time. I flashback to when I was a high wire walker in the circus. There is a familiarity and comfort that comes with high wire walking for me. I do not feel like a stranger in my skin when I walk the wire. Ultimately, what others perceive as death-defying is familiar, and one of my most treasured postcards. High wire walking seems so simple to me now, the lessons learned were carried forward into ever increasing complexity. Mental postcards drift through my mind. In the first image I am a child standing next to my three sisters, in the next I am a grown woman and then I see myself as teenager running long distances. All of these images merge in an instant to give shape and purpose to my life. My quest can be lonely as I search silently through caves within myself which hold my dreams and experiences. I am recreating understanding in order to reveal possibilities.

My next photograph represents my stop on the interior steps of the School of Education, my academic home. As I look out of the familiar windows, I long to capture the feeling I have about this place and hold onto it. My life in education began when I was a student of Jane Bowyer and Anna Richert on the Mills campus. Jane, an accomplished scholar and now retired dean of the School of Education, played a formidable role in shaping me. Anna, whose primary work focuses on teacher reflection, is now my colleague and friend. Her influence is ever present in my work. These women encouraged me to write powerful polemics, take risks, and brush myself off when I failed. The history I share with these
esteemed scholars and colleagues is ripe with the familiar, but still calls me to forage for new meaning.

Why do I desperately long to go places despite the many obstacles that must be negotiated on any given trip? John Urry would argue I long to travel in search of visual experiences that differ from the everyday in time or culture, an activity that expresses itself in the creation of illusions. The *tourist gaze* according to Urry is the tourist’s, the traveler’s, most important activity. The tourist is constantly preoccupied with collecting and comparing symbols of tourist spots by means of
constant photography. It is through experiencing the new that sites become sights, land becomes landscape, and scenes are framed as picturesque. Busloads of tourists visit churches and museums in order to separate themselves from the familiar. I too was a tourist, visiting churches, museums, and monuments with busloads of others. I am now situated in familiar locales that can be made new through reflection.

Am I sometimes an emotional tourist? Do I find a certain strange comfort in the unfamiliar, the same kind of comfort I find in walking the wire? As an emotional tourist, I travel through time using my gaze to construct my emotional self. These emotional postcards are embedded within me and become a tapestry woven with the threads of emotional understanding I have built over a life time.

My next photograph records the walk to my office, the third door on the left. This hallway is sometimes busy, sometimes quiet, but always a part of me. The beauty of the building, especially the ways in which light filters in creates a magical mosaic of dancing shadows from which meaning often emerges along with a lens of clarity.

In Anne Tyler’s 1985 novel, *Accidental Tourist*, Macon, the protagonist, is a man so disengaged, so submerged in the familiar, and so afraid of the new, that he lives his life in a cocoon. The photographic images surrounding me are by no means a cocoon, but they do allow me to retreat and reflect in ways that help me craft a narrative with deeper meaning. Macon writes travel books that outline how Americans can find all they are familiar with in foreign countries. He seeks the kinds of places where facing challenges for a tourist will not be an issue. He instructs the American businessman in Paris where to find Burger King or the Marriott. Like Macon, I find solace in the familiar, but unlike Macon I am willing to take risks
beyond the familiar reflected in my postcards, as well as the touchstones of my daily life.

I enter my office. A charcoal drawing is a sentimental keepsake. This is the place where I work, talk with colleagues and students, laugh and cry. This small space is more than a room; it is a home, a refuge, a part of me. Not visible in this photograph are the over stacked bookcases and file cabinets. Out of view, those elements fill the office and reflect my exploration of ideas and thought.

From my naissance as a young student on the Mills campus, to a place of achievement as a tenured faculty member and former associate dean of the School of Education, I ponder how to create my future. The tourist is positioned as a voyager setting out to understand the world, to mold experience into a sequence, a route. Ultimately, I am a seeker longing to unfold the mystery of myself. I look beyond Facebook, Twitter and technological gadgets. I can make genuine connections to places and people even though it seems nearly impossible in a world that moves at an insane pace.

I leave the School of Education and walk across the campus. The next photograph is of the campanile. It was designed by late nineteenth early twentieth century architect Julia Morgan and has a definite elegance. The chiming clock tower sections my work day into fifteen minute increments. I am forever appreciative.
My photographs as they were re-seen, re-placed me in familiar settings, but in so doing, the same visuals re-instill the past through a process of re-ordering. In this way, I was allowed to re-author past mistakes, actions and even hard learned lessons emerging with fresh ways of viewing what my life has meant and may hold moving forward.

As if waking from a sleep my meditation concludes, having learned about myself I become like the molten lava flowing from an active volcano. I create new earth under my feet. The act of turning the camera lens on to elements of my daily environment, the things which due to their familiarity have become near-invisible to me, caused me to create postcards that provided an opportunity to re-envision the stills in my life, thus creating new meaning, a personal history that helps to place me in the context of the social and professional spheres. My life, in this way, became a meditation that needs to be investigated to be kept relevant and real.
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Who and What Should We Educate Our Students To Be?
An Inquiry into the Curriculum of Multiculturalism in Education

Liping Wei

“I’m American, not Chinese! Don’t mistake me as Chinese! I’m fed up being thought by others to have anything to do with Chinese!”

Upon hearing these words, intuition may tell you that this is a person who has been wronged many times in terms of who he is, swollen with grievance and indignation, and nearly driven beyond the limit of his endurance! Nevertheless, are his words true? Let’s pause and ask: Does he really have nothing to do with Chinese in any way?

Actually, the student was born in China and immigrated to the United States of America with his parents at eight years of age. Having received his school education all in (U.S.)America, in his late 20s now, the language he speaks has turned into English-only from Chinese-only. He has become antipathetic towards associating with Chinese or being identified as Chinese, though he grew up in a Chinese immigrant family, was raised on Chinese cuisine, with all his relatives still in China, and all his parents’ friends being Chinese. This is Allen, the only son of our friend Lao Zhang, who feels hurt, but more helpless. (All names are pseudonyms.)

As a former educator and a current doctoral student of education who is an immigrant myself, I couldn’t help but wonder: Why does an immigrant child enter the (U.S.)American educational system as an immigrant and exit as only “an American”? Why hasn’t this immigrant child grown up taking pride in where he comes from? Why can’t he composedly proclaim “I’m American with my roots in another place?” Do immigrant children have to abandon their connections to their points of origin to better integrate into (U.S.)American culture and fit into that society? What role has (U.S.)American education served and continues to play in cultivating in children from various ethnic backgrounds the self-identification of who and what they are? Is (U.S.)American education aiming to uphold diversity or dilute the diversity and Americanize everyone regardless of where they are
originally from, ethnically, linguistically, culturally, and religiously? These are the questions that deserve the consideration of every educator.

Multiculturalism: A Call from Assimilation

In a letter to the president of the American Defense Society in 1919, Theodore Roosevelt made the following statement:

There can be no divided allegiance here. Any man who says he is an American, but something else also, isn’t an American at all. We have room but for one flag, the American flag… We have room for but one language here, and that is the English language, for we intend to see that the crucible turns our people out as Americans, and American nationality, and not as dwellers in a polyglot boarding house; and we have room for but one soul loyalty, and that is loyalty to the American people. (Theodore Roosevelt, 1919)

What turns out as reality doesn’t disappoint Roosevelt: American education has been doing well at Americanizing its diverse population from generation to generation, which can even be traced back to the early times of New England when the earliest public, tax-supported school system took on the responsibility of transforming the children of European immigrants and Native Americans into American citizens (Frey & Whitehead, 2009). Since then, public schools have become the primary institution charged with assimilating the heterogeneous masses and creating a suitable workforce for a developing American nation (Tyack & Hansot, 1982).

Assimilation, aesthetically named “melting pot,” has remained the dominant strategy in (U.S.) American schools, with a ruling White Protestant elite setting the curriculum, standards, and assessments for each succeeding generation, imprinting students with white middle class values (Ferguson, 2001). Those students who resist this assimilation are doomed to go through psychological and emotional struggle and are frequently labeled “at-risk,” leading to their educational marginalization and subsequent failure.

Fortunately, a growing body of educators is rising to challenge the ingrained “assimilation,” appealing to public education to foster multiculturalism within schools. However, despite an increasing voice for questioning the validity of assimilation and advocating multiculturalism in education as never before, the effects in schools are far from transparent. An important reason is that a false, rather than a more genuine, multiculturalism is being implemented.

False Multiculturalism

Many educators, while espousing the ideals of multiculturalism verbally, actually think and act in contradictory ways. The words most often heard with reference to “multiculturalism” may be “respect,” “appreciation,” and “tolerance,”
with the most commonly used pedagogical strategy being to expose students to a wide range of customs, traditions, and religions different from their own. This approach may help promote students’ awareness of cultural differences, but with “White dominance”—the most fundamental ideal of “assimilation”—left untouched and unquestioned, it does little to contribute to multiculturalism in a real sense, because the assumption underlying such an approach to multiculturalism is that Anglo Americans are representative of the norm, and that others, although deviant from this norm, should nevertheless be acknowledged too.

Rather than cultivate multiculturalism, this mentality actually cements existing divisiveness and inequality. As Banister and Maher (1998) pointed out, what should be called into question is not whether to celebrate non-Anglo Americans, but the notion always taken for granted: There is only one choice standard, entitled, and desired; it is the dominance of Whites, Christianity, heterosexuality, English language, and loyalty to America.

To perpetuate the existing system conferring power and privilege on Anglo Americans, students, regardless of who and what they originally are, are “educated” to take on whatever is “filled in” by teachers and completely internalize without question whatever image is projected onto them. Consequently, education in the interests of the “mainstream” only results in the “non-mainstream” adapting to the world as it is and identifying with the “mainstream.” This is how Allen, and probably many other “Allens,” have come into being. With few educators realizing and reacting to it, (U.S.) American education will continue to mold countless “Allens” who will be stamped with the same identification regardless of race, ethnicity, home language, culture, gender and sexual orientation, religion, and social class.

Remaining blind to or in denial of taken-for-granted White norms denies the potential of policies and practices of multiculturalism to function as a genuinely democratic equalizer. How should educators implement a true multicultural education?

### Ways to Move toward True Multiculturalism

*Encourage students to challenge the concept of “assimilation.”*

As a vital driving force of multiculturalism, educators should engage students in a critical investigation of the deep-seated system that features homogeneity rather than diversity, and Euro-centered values without equal acknowledgement of other contributions to human civilization. Unless young people are empowered to critically investigate “assimilation,” question the false perceptions of “reality,” quest for the truth, and fight for transformation upon critical reflection, they will not realize the structural inequality underpinning the ideals of “assimilation,” and multiculturalism cannot be advanced radically.
Help immigrant students develop a positive self-identification.

Schools are an important venue in informing students about their ability, showing how other people see them, and ultimately contributing to the development of complex student identities. Educators should help students see that people may come from different ethnic backgrounds, speak different languages as their mother tongue, hold different religious beliefs, form different gender and sexual identifications, and develop different ways of thinking and approaching the world. Formal education needs to promulgate a view that no particular trait is superior or inferior to, or more or less entitled or desired than others. With diligence and talents, all can bring a contributing force to make the United States of America a better place. Only on this basis can immigrant students develop a genuine appreciation of their origin and a positive identification with who and what they are.

Teach multiculturally rather than multiculturalism.

Multicultural education should be conducted as a critical perspective embedded throughout the curriculum rather than as a separate subject. This means teaching itself should be and can be multicultural, which is reflected in how each student is treated, how teaching content is presented, and how dialogues are engaged. Multiculturalism should be incorporated into the existing curriculum; no matter what content a teacher teaches, multicultural perspectives should constitute a primary theme.

Who and What We Seek Our Students To Be

Who and what we seek to educate our students to be are informed citizens who take pride in the diversity they bring to this country. Educating immigrant children to be simply American without maintaining their original languages and cultures is not an indication of how successful American education is. Instead, it is a roadblock to the sustenance of the prosperity of the nation.

Education is a battleground of the larger war for civil rights and social justice. It is also the best hope for the fulfillment of all individuals, regardless of race, ethnicity, culture, social class, gender, ability, and language. In order for all “Allens” to be able to see who they are and what they are positively without sliding into extremes, it is incumbent upon educators to construct “an empowering school culture” by “creating a learning environment in which students from diverse racial, ethnic, and social groups believe that they are heard and are valued and experience respect, belonging, and encouragement” (Parks, 1999, p.4). This is not a goal individual educators in isolation can attain. Only when the entire society—policymakers, community, parents, together with educators and students—commit to this undertaking can the change occur to cultivate true multiculturalism in education.
References


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Twenty years ago, in an interview, Keeter (1987) asked Professor Shirley Chisholm, the first African-American woman elected to the U.S. Congress and the first to campaign for the presidency, if she knew of faculty behaviors that alienate African-American students or communicate uneasiness or if faculty sometimes communicates that they have different expectations of African-American students. She responded by saying that “Blacks have become very sensitive, and rightfully so, about attitudes of over-protectiveness or someone’s bending over backward to accommodate them. Whites—along with Blacks—must realize that the era of beneficent paternalism is over” (p.15). In the two decades following Chisholm’s remarks, sorry to say, due to the proliferation of programs such as affirmative action, some still believe that students of color are being coddled and receiving preferential treatment, and are being admitted even though they are not qualified or prepared for the rigors of college (Antonio, 2003; Keeter, 1987; Locks, Hurtado, Bowman, & Oseguera 2008; Turner & Myers, 2000).

Nonetheless, the professorate plays an important role in the academic achievement of underprepared students and the college student of color—a pivotal and crucial role in both their social and academic success. With the increasing complexity of campus ethnic and racial demographic profiles, we are beginning to see a widening gap between the professorate and particular student cohorts, namely, college student cohorts of color. The question then becomes, how do we respond to an increasingly diverse, underprepared, and unprepared student population? The answers are complex and multilayered.

In response, one plausible solution is for colleges and universities to seek out and embrace diversity and multiculturalism, cultivating the attitude that the more knowledge of the diversities presented by their campus clientele, the better prepared they will be to meet their needs (Neville, Heppner, Ji, & Thye, 2004; Hale, 2004;
Preparation for White Campuses

Watson, Terrell, Wright, Bonner, Cuyjet, Gold, et. al., 2002). Another possible solution is for faculty to develop a greater sense of flexibility and cultural sensitivity in their teaching styles as well as a better understanding of student learning styles regardless of the level of academic preparedness or cultural background.

Nonetheless, students of color (African American, Native American Indian, and Latino/Hispanic) entering four-year Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) compared to their White peers are more likely to be identified as underprepared for college (Institute of Education Sciences [IES], 2004; National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES], 1995). In reality, African Americans who attend PWIs have problems with preparing for the experience as well as adjusting to their new environment. In fact, research even further suggests that regardless of levels of academic preparedness, a disproportionate number of students of color who manage to get through the doors of PWIs often find themselves ill prepared to thrive on these campuses.

For that reason, it is imperative for colleges and universities concerned about the academic success of students of color to recognize that academic success or failure is in part directly related to unmet cultural and developmental needs. Additionally, success is impacted at the microlevel through faculty attitudes and interactions as well as at the macrolevel through institutional culture and climate toward these students.

There has been a subtle paradigm shift over the last four decades in remedial and developmental education. That is, there has been a shift from the deficit being students of color to the deficit being predominantly White institutions (PWIs). Previously, there was carte blanche labeling of students of color as the ones in need of remediation and developmental services without regard to institutional preparedness for culturally diverse students. A trend exists toward the assessment of institutions of higher education as the ones lacking culturally sensitive curricular, programs, and activities to meet the needs of students of color. This paradigm shift has been largely influenced by multiculturalism and, to a greater extent, by the financial constraints placed on many institutions including Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) that necessitate that financial survival of the institutions depends on their ability to recruit, retain, and graduate all students.

Unfortunately, in 2013, African-American students still face some of the racism, discrimination, alienation, and academic and social barriers that African-American students of yesteryear faced (Allen, Teranishi, Dinwiddie, & Gonzalez, 2000; Allen et al., 2000; Cleveland, 2004; Cureton, 2003; Harper, 2009). Understandably, the negative experiences affect African Americans’ developmental process while attending college, especially at a PWI. In this article, we use our personal narratives and the lens of developmental education to prepare PWIs for African-American students.

Thus, we begin with a brief dialogue on developmental education as a theoretical lens to discuss the preparedness for completing college of this group in PWIs. We then provide reflections on the emotional, social, intellectual, mental, and psychological effects of our own higher education experiences attending PWIs.
We conclude with a proposed set of holistic strategies designed to meet the developmental education needs and facilitate the academic success of students of color on PWI campuses.

Theoretical Framework

Developmental education is used as a theoretical framework and to aid in discussing the academically underprepared college student and the experiences of African-American students in PWIs. Historically, remediation education has always existed in American higher education, and time has proved that it has never left. However, developmental education should not be centered on its history nor should its solution be closely tied to selective admission or the raising of admission standards as predictors of academic success. Neither should its occurrence be identified and traced to groups of color, but rather on its effectiveness in helping students complete their education and find decent, satisfying employment. The truth is developmental education is still alive and kicking and doing a darn good job with unprepared and underprepared students. Although remedial and developmental education are often used interchangeably and are closely related, they are defined differently.

By definition, the term remedial applies to any student, regardless of race and ethnicity who has completed high school, but did not complete a mathematics course during their senior year curriculum (Boylan, 1988). At the college level, remedial education courses are defined as courses in reading, writing, or mathematics for postsecondary students lacking the necessary skills to perform at the level required for successful matriculation at a respective institution (Merisotis & Phipps, 2000). Meaning, students enrolled in remedial courses are not just students of color.

Although developmental education is broadened to encompass remedial education, it is more generally defined to include the cognitive and affective growth of all postsecondary learners, at all levels of the learning continuum (Boylan, 1988). Developmental education is sensitive and responsive to individual differences and special needs among learners and it commonly addresses academic preparedness, diagnostic assessment and placement, development of general and discipline-specific learning strategies, and affective barriers to learning.

Thus, from a remedial perspective, developmental students currently comprise almost 30% of all students entering the nation’s colleges and universities (NCES, 2003) and this number has remained relatively unchanged since the early 1900s (Boylan & White, 1987; Brubacher & Rudy, 1976) and since 1983 (NCES, 2003). This seems valid because, most students continue to lack college-level proficiency in at least one skill area, be that mathematics, reading, writing, or sciences, therefore, a large majority of all U.S. colleges and universities continue to offer some formal developmental or learning assistance program to the students they accept (Merisotis & Phipps, 2000; NCES, 2003). Therefore, developmental and remedial education envelops both White students and students of color. Yet, in present contexts, we
often find it difficult if not virtually impossible not only to disassociate the terms remedial from developmental, but also academically underprepared student from minority status.

The role of higher education in teaching students who enter with academic deficiencies has expanded and become increasingly important, making the need for remediation an intricate and continuing force in academia. Therefore, colleges have the responsibility of both creating a more racially diverse campus and providing opportunity for the academic achievement and educational attainment of a less prepared student population.

After all, students who are remediated are as successful as or more successful than their academically prepared peers (e.g., National Center for Education Statistics, 2003b). America needs all of its citizens prepared for the technological, information-rich environment of the 21st century, for that reason, access to higher education is a must. Thus, we believe the disconnect for most students of color, is not taking remedial courses or the lack of diagnostic assessment and placement or academic preparedness, but rather PWIs campuses lacking sensitivity and responsiveness to individual differences, strategies for special needs among diverse learners, culturally responsive learning strategies, and addressing the racist and affective barriers to learning.

For that reason, we will use developmental education not only as a framework to explain and describe PWIs’ behaviors toward the remediation of students of color and all remedial students, but also, to take the bright light off of students of color as the only ones needing remediation and put the light on faculty and institutions as the ones really in need of remediation. We embrace this framework not as an explanation for racial and cultural biased or biased institutional practices within the academy, but rather as a self-study tool to aid PWIs and their professoriate with future initiatives to aid in the academic success of African American students and students of color.

**Academically Underprepared College Students**

The face of the underprepared student becomes reified in the minds of the academy’s inhabitants, mainly, that of the student of color. Realistically, data reveal that the underprepared student has no specific racial or ethnic identity, nor is there is a typical remedial student profile (Merisotis, 2000; NCES, 2003). Still, students of color, compared to White students applying to college, especially those who apply to PWIs, are more likely to be labeled as academically underprepared and in need of remedial education at levels significantly higher than their non minority peers. (IES, 2004; Antonio, 2003). This in turn leads to students of color being placed at the bottom of the academic hierarchy.

The resultant effect is that these students are not only blocked by barriers of ethnicity, race, racism, language, socio-economic status, and other cultural barri-
ers, but they are also blocked by the attitudes and perceptions of those who make key decisions regarding their matriculation (Clark, Anderson, Clark, & Williams, 1999; Cleveland, 2004; Morton 1992).

Therefore, we offer the previous caveat as a precursor to our discussion of both remedial and developmental education which will be based on an approach that affirms the achievement potential of all students with a special focus on meeting the needs of African-American students.

Closely related is the myth that remedial education is incompatible with the purpose and functions of the university; in other words, a strong belief that open access and quality education cannot coexist (Boylan, 2002). Hence, there is a perception that African-American students and students of color, thought to be deficient, only enter college because of open door admission policies, ultimately diminishing the quality of education.

Furthermore, some see affirmative action as reverse discrimination, regardless of its intent to make right unfair treatment that has historically disadvantaged certain groups. Perhaps, this litany of defensive beliefs and behaviors are put forth in order to avoid finding real and viable solutions to the wide disparities between White students and students of color. In spite of the defensiveness, as previously mentioned, it is important to note that college remediation is a core function of higher education for all students; and it has been for several centuries.

The reality of students needing multiple types and levels of assistance in order to be academically successful implies that the research as well as colleges and universities should focus on predictors of success for students (Boylan, 2002) such as HBCUs. Historically, HBCUs have had a solid foundation of providing educational opportunity for all. Regardless, the contributions of HBCUs have been largely ignored in the field of developmental education.

Even before the use of very selective assessment tools, professors in Black colleges were aware that education for a number of Blacks required the type of professors who could deal with a variety of deficiencies of a social, emotional, and academic nature (Jones & Richards-Smith, 1987). According to Jones and Richards-Smith (1987), the one exception to how students learn in PWIs as compared to Black colleges and universities is that at HBCUs they learn in a concerned, caring atmosphere where each student becomes a special person—special to himself, to the college, and to the professors. Fleming concluded that it was the people factor in education that distinguished the experience of African-American students in HBCUs from that in PWIs (Weber, 1992).

Further, Fleming stated, “It seems to me that remedial programs without a strong affective component are ineffective, because what really works for minority students is being in an institutional atmosphere that encourages them” (Weber, 1992, p. 21). Students attending HBCUs have higher retention rates, higher grade point averages, and are more likely to acquire graduate degrees and to report less discontent and isolation than those attending PWIs (Fleming, 1984; Gurin & Epps,
1975). We believe that there should be more research on HBCUs’ success with students regardless of the level of academic preparedness or their racial status. Those lessons gleaned from HBCUs ought to provide a model for understanding how students of color’s college life affect their academic success.

Unprepared for PWIs—Students of Color’ College Experience

Any attempts at unbundling the college student’s of color experience is at best challenging and at worst highly complex. The Good News is that HBCUs success with African Americans and other students proves that institutions of higher education can provide a nurturing, supportive environment with a faculty that have positive expectations and attitudes, with or without remedial interventions, that can facilitate the academic success of students of color and White students; they simply do a better job of helping students of color and underprepared students make a successful adjustment to college (Allen, 1992) That is, HBCUs have a positive influence on Black students’ cognitive, academic, and interpersonal development. In any case, African-American students attending HBCUs are more successful academically than those students at PWIs (Fleming, 1984; Hughes, 1987; Sedlacek, 1999; Thomas, 1981).

According to some scholars (Bonner & Evans, 2004; Mendoza-Denton, & Page-Gould, 2008; Museus, 2008; Strayhorn, 2009), a number of factors serve as important contributors to the undergraduate experience: campus climate and environmental factors; academic integration and mentoring; and social integration experiences. Each of these factors individually and collectively play an important role in how minorities choose to interface with their respective institutions.

Important to not only the recruitment but also the retention of students of color to institutions of higher education are the ways in which students experience the campus environment. The literature is replete with descriptions offered up by individuals of color who describe these contexts as racist, stressful, chilly, depressing, and unwelcoming (Harris & Molock, 2000; Neville et. al., 2004; Smith, 2004; Turner & Myers, 2000; Watson, et al., 2002); thus, creating an exigency on the part of institutions to seek ways to change these perceptions.

Additionally, many students of color who attend postsecondary institutions continue to experience what Tinto (1975) has referred to as the lack of “student-institution” fit. Essentially, what Tinto concludes is that the more congruent a student is with the institutional context—the better the fit—the more likely the student will persist to graduation. Lastly, other than racial identity theorists (e. g., Cross, 1991; Helms, 1995), developmental theorists (e.g., Kohlberg,1969; Maslow, 1954) have been remiss in applying development theory to persons of color in general and student development theory to student of color specifically.

Existing developmental theories that ignore cultural differences, erroneously assume that environment, culture, and backgrounds of students are the same. In essence, differences in race, ethnicity, and culture-related factors such family roles,
child-rearing practices, cultural values, and growing up as a person of color in American should create different developmental dynamics for students (Herndon & Moore, 2002). In other words, the cultural differences are too strong to be ignored.

Factors Contributing to the Academic Success of Student of Color

Regardless of levels of academic preparedness, a vast majority of students of color who manage to get through the doors of PWIs often find themselves ill-prepared to survive on these campuses. Students of color who do not hold positive racial identities may be especially vulnerable. Several factors such as race-related stress, psychological/interpersonal stress, and academic stress; poor self-esteem; negative racial identity, low academic and social self-concepts, and family background and the institutions themselves contribute significantly to students of color academic success or lack of success (Cureton, 2003; Fleming, 1984; Herndon & Moore, 2002).

For example, students of color enrolled in PWIs report feeling isolated so that the need for affiliation outweighs need for achievement or they feel that they must choose between need for academic success and need for affiliation or social integration. Other factors that strongly impact the academic success of students of color include psychosocial and racial identity development, family, and culture (Herndon & Moore, 2002; Neville et al., 2004; Wilson & Constantine, 1999). These factors compounded with their previous academic experiences with racial inequities (e.g., glass ceilings, admissions policies, culturally biased testing; unfair grading policies) destroy students’ of color abilities to achieve academic success.

As expected, students attending HBCUs are better adjusted and have better successful psychosocial adjustment than African American students at PWIs (Fleming, 1984; Hughes, 1987; Thomas, 1981). Success is impacted at the micro-level through faculty attitudes and interactions as well as the macro-level through institutional culture and climate towards these students. For that reason, it is imperative for PWIs concerned about the academic success of students of color to recognize institutional factors (e.g., the lack of attention to multicultural education in classes, academic preparedness, and student relationships with faculty, other students) can influence the achievement of students of color.

As African Americans who attended PWIs and as faculty currently employed in PWIs, we offer our narratives, four different journeys as African-American baccalaureate students up through the ranks of acquiring master’s and doctorates in PWIs as illustrations of the experiences of African-American students in PWIs. Our struggles and experiences are consistent with the literature presented in this article and the experiences and feelings of other African Americans and students of color attending PWIs. Therefore, we hope that this glimpse of our real life experiences will provide inside perspectives that make the other information presented in this article real and human for our readers.
Narrative One: Why Don’t Y’all Go to Your Own Schools

At 7:55 a.m., September of 1975, I vividly remember feeling extremely frustrated and sweating bullets as I rounded the corner for the tenth time, trying to find Biology 100 lecture hall, on the humongous campus on the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) then Chicago Circle. I was a bright-eyed undergraduate of 18 years, freshly (two months and two days) thrust into Chicago from the backwoods of Southern Arkansas during the height of the Black power era. This marked behavior of circling around aimlessly trying to find my way and negotiate and access the necessary resources (financial aid, advising, mentoring, academic and social enclaves became a metaphor for my experience during my 13-year undergraduate and graduate tenure at predominantly White institutions (PWIs). Circling and the following two painful and degrading incidents from my doctoral program set the tone for my experience on PWIs.

The first incident was during a doctoral course in higher education. The second author, then a doctoral student in higher education, was presenting his paper on the glass ceiling and racial and gender bias relating to graduate admission policies and the recruiting of women faculty and faculty of color. He compared these practices of HBCUs and PWIs. One of the White female students, after hearing the success HBCUs have had with African-Americans students remarked, “Why are you all trying to come to our schools? I don’t see why you don’t go to your schools.” The professor said nothing.

The next semester, while sitting through an Educational Psychology course, listening to a White male psychology professor try to explain why White men would not be a minority in the year 2020, I was once again insulted as a student of color. The professor concluded in his remarks, “If you have less than 1% Indians, about 3% Asians, 12% African Americans, and 24-25% Hispanics and add them all up, there would be 40% and hell, half of those are damn women.” The White students turned to me for a reaction as an eerie quite silence loomed over the room. I swallow the lump in my throat along with a lethal remark, a morsel of dignity, and buried my pride in that eerie silence—waiting for the others to say something, say anything. Disappointingly, no one spoke up—not for me or for my people or other people of color.

Reflecting back on my experience, I naively thought then that my initial transition into college life was difficult because Chicago was a big city and I was merely a country bumpkin. Now looking back 30 years later, through multicultural lens, with an understanding of White and gender privilege, I know the PWIs, though maybe not intentionally, were unprepared and ill-prepared for African-American students. This was evident by the small isolated pockets of courses, programs, and activities labeled African American such as Black student organizations, ethnic studies programs, courses, and a handful of faculty and administrators. Similarly, at the graduate level few of the education, psychology, and counseling courses that
I took made any reference to the experiences of people of color (people who look like, thought like, and acted like me) in education or mental health.

It wasn’t until I entered the doctoral program that I felt included. I was immediately adopted by the African-American community within the university. In addition, I was part of a strong Black graduate student peer group and we looked out for each other. In my program area, I was embraced by White faculty who were supportive, culturally responsive and sensitive, and provided excellent mentoring. My doctoral counseling cohort, although I was the only African-American student in the program, were supportive and like the Black student group, we too, look out for each other.

Nevertheless, outside of the program and my peer groups, the campus was not prepared for students of color. Like the other PWIs that I attended, there were some faculty and administrators of color, minorities programs, activities, and groups, but without any university-level integrated holistic approach or roadmap focused on the academic and social success of students of color. This left me and other students of color to fend for ourselves often without the resources or knowledge to access resources in our academic environment.

Based on my subsequent coursework and experiences in culturally monolithic academic environments, I now realize that was not part of the equation, or my people, or other people of color. As a consequence, my experience on White campuses compromised my growth as an African-American person, and most importantly ill-prepared me to work with other people of color. Hence, when I look back over my 13 years of academic coursework, for sure, by Eurocentric standards, I received top-notch education. From an Afrocentric perspective, however, I was cheated out of a cultural experience, one that included having students of color and faculty of color in classes, having White professors and students who were culturally sensitive and responsive, and reading textbooks and other instructional materials included and reflected the experiences of my people.

**Narrative Two: Girl Raised in the South (G.R.I.T)**

Realizing that education is the key to success, I left home in pursuit of a college degree. As a first generation African-American female, my collegiate experiences during my undergraduate and graduate years posed several challenges at each of the predominantly White institutions (PWIs) in the South and the Midwest. Moving away from home and living on campus for the first time was overwhelming. I needed a cultural community that would show me the ropes and help to smooth my transition. I was out of luck because there were no “programs” designed at this university to meet my needs. My only source of finding this community was in the Black Greek letter organizations. I joined one of the fraternity auxiliary groups and later a sorority. These organizations allowed me to feel connected culturally and socially, explore my leadership and interpersonal skills, and to develop personally and academically.
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During my graduate study at the master’s level, there were a total of ten members in my cohort and I was the only African American, female or male, in the program. I struggled both cognitively and developmentally in the course of Basic Statistics. I had to pass this course to graduate. There were no “tutoring programs” in place at the university at that time. I had heard “stories” from other African-American students about this professor and did not want to speak with him for fear that he would view my situation as a “stereotypical African-American student” who did not study but yet expected to be “given” everything as a result of Affirmative Action programs. I shared my challenges in the course with one of my White male cohort members and he spoke to the professor (they were fraternity brothers) on my behalf. Acting as a conduit, my cohort member communicated the material that the professor wanted me to study so that I could pass the final exam.

Heading back to school at the age of 40, as the research terminology prefers to phrase as “re-entry into the academy,” I began my doctoral studies. My major anxieties focused on writing scholarly research papers in each class and finding a community that would meet my cultural, spiritual, social, and recreational needs. These anxieties were realized during various stages of my doctoral studies. For example, when one of my professors instructed me to get tutoring with my writing at the university’s Writing Lab because she did not like my writing style, I had no idea that such a place existed since I had not had this type of service available to me at the master’s level. I attended the writing lab and was given a tutor. After three revisions on the first six-page assigned paper, the professor finally accepted my assignment. I felt that this professor’s request was unusual because how did I write well for three other professors and not for the fourth one? She was the only professor during my entire doctoral studies of three years, including writing the dissertation, who requested that I attend the Writing Lab. My experience with this professor proved to be a negative one with thoughts of racism as a possibility for her unfavorable treatment towards me in class.

The challenges that I faced at each of the PWIs are not “atypical” to African-American students or students of various ethnic groups who experience a lack of tolerance for diverse groups, feelings of mistrust among university officials, a sense of isolation and loneliness, and a place to carry out their own customs and traditions. Resources and services for African-American students at these types of colleges were not a top priority for university officials and administrators despite the efforts of Affirmative Action programs. College administrators and faculty must be intentional in identifying and implementing services and resources that would assist African-American students and all students of color to be successful during their collegiate years.

With a lack of resources and services during my undergraduate years, feelings of insecurity and inadequacy in the classroom during my master’s study, and blatant racism in my doctoral studies, I found these challenges to be unacceptable at each of my institutions but was able to persist and persevere despite the odds.
Although I was successful in pursuit of each of my degrees, services and resources such as tutoring, cultural organizations, and mentoring proved to be valuable and empowering during my collegiate experiences.

**Narrative Three: Beyond Expectations—Surviving My Freshman Year at a PWI**

As I reflect on my experiences in predominantly White institutions, I am reminded of an unforgettable moment in my life that happened during my first year experience as a freshman. I had just graduated in June from a public high school located in the largest urban school district in Indiana. I was an African-American female who was counted as one of the 30% racial minorities attending this college preparatory institution. I knew the cultural climate wasn’t the best, but during my four years I didn’t experience any racial discrimination.

I remembered my excitement about leaving home and finally gaining my independence. I was enthusiastic about and interested in making new friends, especially with my roommate. Well, that moment finally arrived!! I checked in to the dormitory early that afternoon. I settled in and waited for several hours to meet this wonderful person. I envisioned a friendship that would last forever. Finally, late evening, the door opened and there they stood a young Caucasian woman, her mother, father, and boyfriend with looks of disbelief, disappointment, and dismay. They finally entered the room, casually spoke, and carefully placed some of her clothes in the closet. Of course, most of her clothes remained packed for the next few days and there was absolutely no, I mean no, conversation.

After about a week, my roommate came in early that day and discovered an African-American friend sitting on the edge of her bed. She was livid! She ran out of the room downstairs to the office screaming and hollering lascivious words and accusing me and my friend of having cooties and tails like monkeys. She imagined her bed filled with bugs because my friend had sat on the edge. Shockingly, the dorm mother offered little or no support for me and insisted that I move into another room. What a great introduction to independence and the college experience! Fortunately for me, through the love and supported of my family, I not only learned the significance of the struggle to our literal and spiritual survival, but I also learned to embrace it and appreciate the struggle of being an African-American in a predominantly White institution enough to continue my educational path to and throughout graduate school.

Similarly, I entered my graduate studies with the same level of enthusiasm. Although the experience was different at the graduate level, I still felt left out. I was at the beginning of my teaching career and had to take night courses when I enrolled in my Master’s classes. As a consequence, I was not on campus enough to feel included, to bond with other students, and to develop those necessary networks.

This was the same situation in my doctoral program with the added factor of
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having to commute about seventy miles one way to take classes while still maintaining a career and a family. As one can imagine, this was an arduous task! I found rather quickly that I had to be instrumental in finding mentoring and support outside and inside the university environment.

Like my undergraduate experience, I found myself being isolated and alienated by many of my White peers. That is, isolated literally and isolated because my interests and area of focus was different from mainstream students. However, the isolation that I experienced, along with my multicultural interests, created stress and a feeling of not belonging.

Therefore, to combat this isolation and loneliness and keep me motivated, I sought out students of color in other program areas and discovered they were experiencing the same isolation and loneliness. Eventually, I developed a strategic plan for myself in order to overcome the obstacles and hostile environments which included developing my own research agenda so that I would not be dependent on collaborative efforts. Fortunately, as a faculty of color in a predominantly White institution, I am still interested in education and I am still excited about making new friends. However, I even more fortunately have the same strategic plan focused on overcoming the obstacles in hostile environments.

Narrative Four: Past Reflections to Elicit Forward Movement

From my undergraduate mission to become an orthodontist to my graduate and post-graduate desires to become a college president, finding some sense of agency and a niche in the academy that would afford me the luxury just to “be me”—an African-American male—serves as the theoretical perspective from which this narrative is constructed.

As an eager new undergraduate student at The University of North Texas (then called North Texas State University), I entered the institution with a heightened degree of excitement as well as trepidation. Although I graduated with honors and in the top 10% of my high school class, coming from a small, rural town of less than 1,500 people in Northeast Texas—was I truly ready to tackle this hydra called higher education?

It was not until the conclusion of my freshman year that I gained some sense of comfort in my abilities to not only do college level work but to also excel in my endeavors. I was awarded the University’s top honor for academic achievement—The University Interscholastic Services Award—a coveted prize presented to the African-American and Hispanic student in each class with the highest overall grade point average. Receiving this award was the true beginning of combating my feelings of inadequacy.

Perhaps what led to my solid undergraduate record was the mentoring and guidance I received from my Department advisor. From the first day I sat down in his office—a space befitting a chemist with beakers, Bunsen burners, and a bumper
sticker that stated, “Honk if you passed Physical Chemistry!”—I knew that I would find a constant source of support. As a professor in the field of higher education, I am keenly aware of the literature in the field that speaks to best practices in retaining students of color in academe. Yet, it was my authentic experience as a student of color—sitting knee-to-knee with an advisor, who said—“I am invested in your successful completion of this program, and if that means providing you with individual tutorial sessions, I am willing to do that…” which made the difference.

After completing my undergraduate studies, I secured a graduate fellowship in engineering. This experience rapidly proved to be my first true foray with overt racism. It was the opening informational session for students enrolled in the College of Engineering. The conference room was filled with students, faculty, and administration. The Dean opened by providing a “State of the College” address and in his concluding remarks mentioned his plan to initiate an exchange program with a local HBCU—providing students with an opportunity to cross-enroll in courses. Suddenly, a student from the back of the room retorted; “I’m not going over there with those niggers!” I have learned, primarily through teaching graduate courses in college student development theory, that we typically make three key choices when we are in unfavorable environments—we change the environment, change ourselves, or flee—in this case I chose to flee.

Leaving this catabolic environmental context proved to be one of the best decisions I made. I left the engineering graduate program, returned to my hometown, and worked as a substitute teacher for an entire year. This respite provided me with the time I needed, the time I didn’t take between my undergraduate and graduate program, to truly find out what it was that I ultimately wanted to do with my life. Little did I know that this time of reflection and deep contemplation would lead me to the College of Education at Baylor University.

I found my experiences at Baylor to be quite affirming. As an institution with pretty low enrollments among populations of color, I was somewhat skeptical of their commitment to diversity. After all, I had just escaped an institution that I perceived to be at best inhospitable to students of color. Yet, my Baylor experience was diametrically opposed to my previous engagement—the students that I encountered in my classes seemed to readily welcome diversity and the faculty seemed to overextend their hospitality and sense of concern for my academic well being.

Graduate school in general and Baylor in particular taught me some very important lessons. I continued to benefit from these strong lessons in my final engagement as a doctoral student at The University of Arkansas. Perhaps the most critical lesson being the importance of administration, faculty, and staff creating institutional environments that welcome students of color. As the age-old axiom asserts, “Hindsight is twenty-twenty,” but if we are to presently make strides in the recruitment and retention of students of color in institutions of higher education—we better find a new pair of glasses.
Preparing Me for My Future

It was 1984, and it all began at a small private college, Westminster College. Westminster College had a student population of 800 people—13 of which were Black. I can remember walking through the columns, a sacred ritual that symbolized the beginning and end of one’s passage through the college. As I walked through the columns, I remember scanning the faces of my fellow classmates, searching for faces that looked like mine. In my mind, I kept asking, “Where are the students who look like me?” Finally, my eyes rested on three who fit the qualification. It was as if we were little Black dots in the crowd. Little did I know, that this was just the start of my educational experience—an education that taught me not only about academics but also about how to be comfortable with being different.

I can recall going through rush that first month of college. There were only two sororities on campus: Kappa Alpha Theta and Kappa Kappa Gamma. Prior to arriving on campus, I was so excited. As I read through the brochures on sorority life, I could picture myself as a sorority girl. It was then, I determined that I would be a sorority girl—after all, isn’t that a part of college life? As I went through rush week, I noticed I was the only Black person there. There were no other Blacks pledging as members of either sorority. As it came time for us to commit to actually choosing one sorority or the other, I remember asking myself these questions: “Do I really want to do this; can I really do this; and do I really want to be the only one?” My response to my own questions was a resounding, “No”. It was too much for me to be comfortable with this trailblazer role of being the only one.

This would not be the only time I would find myself face-to-face with a dilemma. In fact, in my short two-year stint at Westminster College I was forced to deal with convert racial insults of my personhood, such as being the only Black person or person of color in many or most of my classes, having to prove to people that you were actually worthy intellectually to be there, or having to answer questions such as “Why don’t you wash your hair everyday?” To add insult to injury, I remember trying to unsuccessfully blend in with other students. In particular, I recall attending White fraternity parties and feeling uncomfortable and out of place, feeling like everyone was looking at me, and wondering if there would be music I could dance to or even if I would be asked to dance or my going on excursions to other college campuses to get cultural fulfillment or simply to maintain my sanity.

Another incident that remains vivid in my mind was the Black Students Association protesting a White fraternity’s racist depiction of the annual ceremony of the Old South, specifically, having a White fraternity student dressed as a slave with Black shoe polish on his face driving a horse buggy down fraternity row. However, the final straw and the time I started to seriously consider transferring schools came when a fellow Black classmate and I were leaving the library and stumbled upon the word “Nigger” written on steps of the college library.

The next year, with help of new African-American friends that I had made
during the summer, I set out to seek greener (at least, more colorful) pastures. In fact, with persuasion from some friends, I transferred to Texas Tech University sight unseen. I was so excited because to me going to a university meant a diverse student body with plenty of students who looked like me. I did not know that this would only be a continuation of my previous experience. What I found indeed was a larger Black population, that is, if you consider 500 students out of 20,000 students a large Black population. Although, in numbers there were more Black students, it was still like being little Black specks and to my disappointment, it was more of the same racist stuff that I had left behind in the other institution, namely, being the only or one of a few Black students in the class and proving your intellectual worthiness. On a positive note, this would just be a continuation of my education and my preparation for the future.

Our Experiences Looking through the Lens of Developmental Education

“In the end,” says Dr. Martin Luther King, “We will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends” (Washington, 1991). The same themes of social isolation, hostile, unwelcoming environments spoken about in books and articles on the experiences of students of color at White institutions resonate in our narratives. However, from a developmental education perspective, that is, the cognitive and affective growth of all postsecondary learners, at all levels of the learning continuum (Boylan, 1988), next to racism, Dr. King’s words capture one on the most powerful and deadliest enemies to our development as African-American students—silence.

In that vein, we reflected on that silence in the multiple examples of racism that we encountered, and there were no interventions on our behalf. The first narrative author recounted painful memories when White professors and White students and her fellow doctoral students said nothing when she, her race, her African American history, value systems, and culture were verbally attacked. Similarly, the second narrative author described a racist incident during her undergraduate dormitory experience where she felt unfairly accused and verbally attacked by a White roommate who ran screaming from the room because she thought she and her African-American friend had “cooties and tails like monkeys.” Instead of speaking out on her behalf, her resident supervisor, the dorm mother, insisted that she move into another room.

Or more subtle silence, as the fifth narrative author has never forgotten the emotions that she experienced when she and her fellow Black Student Association members were the only group protesting a White fraternity’s blatant racist depiction of the annual ceremony of the Old South. In particular, the second narrative author shared an incident when in an open forum in the middle of a Dean’s State of the College speech, a White student was allowed to blurt out the words “I’m not
going over there with those niggers!” with no public outcry or discourse of any kind in response to this incident. Sadly, both the second and fifth narrative authors fled institutions where White students, faculty, and administrators failed to speak out against blatant racial epithets and incidents.

On the contrary, there were also experiences that have facilitated our developmental growth. Case in point, the second narrative author shares a positive experience as a student of color with a White advisor, “sitting knee-to-knee with his advisor assuring him that he was invested in his successful completion of this program, even if that “means providing you with individual tutorial sessions.” The author of the third narrative had a fellow White male doctoral student intervene on her behalf with her White male professor, his fraternity brother, in order to help her pass a course. Evidently, by our degrees and faculty positions, we are all considered academically successful—but not without scars or cost.

Thus, as seen in our reflections, from a developmental education perspective, the deficit blocking our progress was not in us, but rather the institutions that we attended, strictly speaking, lack of preparedness for African-American students and a lack of culturally sensitive curricular, programs, and activities to meet our needs. That is, not to say, that there are not African-American students are not in need of remedial developmental education. Regardless of their academic status, academic preparedness, or the type of institution, sensitivity and responsiveness to individual differences and special needs among learners, assessing cultural differences, providing diagnostic assessment and placement, using general and discipline-specific learning strategies, and understanding the affective barriers to learning are key elements to African American students’ success. This means that developmental education, a continuing force in academia must take an important leadership role in higher education with African-American students who enter with or without academic deficiencies.

Cultural Responsive Holistic Strategies for Preparing Students of Color for PWIs

As evident in the above anecdotes, academic success is a complex and persistent problem and the authors’ experiences of racism, discrimination, conflict, social and academic isolation mimic the same experiences of students of yesterday as well as those of today. Facilitating the academic success of African-American students at PWIs requires intensive efforts on the part of faculty and the predominantly White institutions, as well as a partnership between the faculty and administrators at PWIs and African Americans. Thus, from a developmental perspective, we believe that the time has come to rethink the traditional transition from high school to college. This could mean moving from a principle of remediation to acceleration, moving from a principle of seeing diverse students not as liabilities but as assets.

One example of this principle in action is the Early College High School,
where underrepresented and underserved high school students have access to college. Usually these programs are collaborations between community colleges and school districts; they compress together high school and the first two years of college. These high school students have access to college instruction, advising, and advanced credit or remediation. By the time students graduate from high school, they also get an associate’s degree. Also, college faculty and advisors get a better idea of the conditions of learning. This type of initiative can have multiple advantages starting with vastly heightened articulation between high school and college curricula. Articulation is simplified because high school and college teachers find themselves in the same department.

Other advantages of Early College High School include improved early identification of academic problems, improved college entry advising, and increased speed through both the high school curriculum and any needed remediation. A feature of these programs could be college-bridge programs modeled on Upward Bound, starting at the summer prior to the junior year. The goal of these programs would be to extend the year provided by the Early College High School, with more focus on nurturing and preparing students for college. Perhaps the most important effect is that having access to college curriculum, faculty, and advisors can help to promote a culture college on the high school campus and White college faculty having early (and more) access to students of color.

Developmental education advisors should work with schools to encourage students’ college-readiness by guiding juniors to plan on rigorous senior years. Earlier identification of skill deficiencies could help developmental education advisors lead students to summer bridge programs during their junior and senior years. Such efforts must require increased sensitivity on the part of developmental education advisors because of the second set of predictive factors in this article, those associated to poverty.

Whether the interventions are cognitive, social, or emotional, it is certain that they cannot come early enough, and developmental education advisors have a critical role. Just as important, there is a need for a student development model for African American students and holistic institutional-related strategies that focus on curricular and environmental modifications so that the classroom and the institutional environment is not only conducive to optimal learning and engagement, but address the social, affective and cultural needs of students of color and of all students. Successful strategies must also include an acceptance of a diversity of students’ learning styles, students’ interests, and most importantly, the affirming of students as culturally diverse individuals with diverse needs and concerns in philosophy and in action. In addition, we offer the following culturally responsive holistic and developmentally appropriate strategies for preparing and facilitating the academic success of students of color on predominantly White college campuses.

For optimal effects, we recommend that institutions develop mental health and social, identity and leadership development strategies to meet the students’ of color
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academic, developmental, and cultural needs. As witnessed in the above narratives, other key areas that must be considered when attempting to shed light on African American college students in the academy is the degree of academic and social integration and mentoring that these students receive. Therefore, holistic, culturally responsive strategies for African-American students must integrate psycho-social, family, peer, and institutional factors such as the following:

(a) requiring diversity sensitive training for everyone (administrators, faculty, staff, and students) specifically about African-American life; this training should include strategies for improving faculty expectations and cultural biases, the classroom and institutional climate, and ultimately, faculty-student relations, student-student relations, and student-administrator relations;

(b) mandatory and monitored curricular (with multicultural considerations) that is nondiscriminatory, free of cultural bias, and speaks to the strength of African-American students;

(c) clear strategic plans to create a critical mass of people of color;

(d) acknowledging the presence of privilege, “Whiteness,” and White-American ethnicity in curricular and cultural activities;

(e) exposing students to activities, events, and organizations that reflect their cultural backgrounds;

(f) institutional practices that reflect non-Eurocentric paradigms, for example, practices that are collectivistic rather than individualistic;

(g) encouraging students to form networks in their social community, familial, and clergy-based institutions; and lastly,

(h) developing partnerships with the African-American community and other communities of color.

Conclusion

How do we bridge these barriers of race, language, culture, and attitude for the success of African-American students and other students of color? We sincerely believe the disconnect for most African-American students is not the lack of diagnostically assessing and placement or academic preparedness, but rather PWIs campuses lacking sensitivity and responsiveness to individual differences, special needs among diverse learners, culturally responsive learning strategies, and addressing the affective barriers to learning as set forth by the tenets of developmental education. Thus, another important role of developmental education should be to hold colleges and universities accountable for creating a more racially diverse
campus and providing opportunities for the academic achievement and educational attainment for these students, rather than “blaming the victim.”

Finding a sense of academic comfort can be a formidable task for African-American students who often lack key role models and mentors to assist them in navigating the academic terrain. Also, locating a social niche in an environment that does not even remotely reflect the interests of African Americans is equally disheartening. Therefore, we believe that a concerted effort on the part of campus-based officials and community people who capture and validate the authentic voices of African Americans will be key.

Dr. Hodgkinson’s (Former Director of Center for Demographic Policy at the Institute for Educational Leadership) response of, “not to lower the standards but to increase the effort” (George, 1993, p. 23) can still be applicable today. Further, he continued, “When we increase the access, people assume the quality is going down; and when we work on quality it is clear that access does go down because that’s how we define quality. I think we need a teeter totter where both ends can go up simultaneously; then access and quality can go up together, and certain kids will not be systematically excluded in the process” (p. 23).

Perhaps, through the writing of this article and the sharing of our personal experiences as African-American students we can shed some light on the cognitive, affective, and spiritual realities of what being African-American students on predominantly White campuses is like and help find solutions to what is needed to prepare students of color for predominantly White campuses. Ironically, at the conclusion of writing this article, each of us discovered that the same negative experiences and factors that blocked our academic success as students of color in PWIs are the exact same ones, some 20 to 30 years later, now blocking our success as faculty of color in the promotion and tenure process in PWIs.

Nevertheless, we feel that our experiences as African-American students are consistent with the literature and research on students of color and our experiences in many ways epitomize the experiences of so many African-American students on predominantly White campuses, both yesterday and today. Thus, we hope that our experiences as African-American students provide validation for the experiences of other African-American students, and that the information gained from reading this article will aid not only in meeting the developmental needs and the academic success of African-American students, students of color, and students in general, by preparing PWIs for their diverse student body.

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