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Black Students White Teachers: An Autoethnographic Analysis

A Capstone Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements of the Renée Crown University Honors Program at
Syracuse University

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Honors Capstone Project in Mathematics Education (7-12)

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Abstract

This paper explores the many factors at play in a classroom and how they impact students of non-white identities. Embedded with thought experiments for you to analyze your schooling experience, the paper calls to recognition the imbalanced treatment of students based upon individual demographic profiles. This paper calls particular attention to how teachers perceive students and how this manifests itself in disciplinary practices and tracking. This relates to an analyzes the school-to-prison pipeline and links to other forms of school segregation. The paper also calls into consideration the educational experiences of the author and how they were shaped by the perception that her teachers had of her.

Executive Summary

Educational researchers have demonstrated marked differences between the educational experiences of white students and their non-white counterparts. In this piece, I will explore the work of Ferri, Connor, Fine, Smith, Dohrn, Ayers, Laura, Lawrence III, Delgado, Crenshaw, and Leonardo to connect the ways in which education systems are structured to benefit students with majority status while excluding students that do not have majority status. Acknowledging this divide in educational experiences is imperative in order to improve the current school system for all students. In this paper, I will explore the school-to-prison pipeline, a term used to refer to the oppressive system that funnels students from schools into prisons by grooming students with low expectations and consistent, meaningless punitive action. (Laura, 2014). I propose a way of thinking about discipline in schools to avoid continuing this negative cycle.

As a future educator, I have been disappointed in the information regarding the educational divide in the treatment of white students and the treatment of non-white students. Repeatedly, I have been told in my education courses that when a conflict regarding race arises in a school setting, rather than dismissing the issue, I should recognize it and allow students to explain their experience, though it may differ from mine. While I agree that this practice is more beneficial to students and to myself, I do not believe that this approach to the problem is adequate. I am frustrated that educators seem to have settled with simply allowing students to speak about their experiences. Allowing students to communicate their perspectives can provide insight for teachers and may make students feel valued. However, educators need to

seek a solution beyond this. It is valuable to acknowledge the divide between majority and

non-majority students in schools but merely acknowledging the gap does not close it.

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Advice to Future Honors Students

Completing a capstone project is a rewarding experience. To ensure success when completing a capstone project, I encourage students to choose a topic about which they are passionate and to generate and actively adapt a timeline of personal goals for completion. During the final semester of work, it is wise to include smaller weekly goals rather than large goals over longer time periods to ensure that work is being completing in manageable increments, rather than large sections. Additionally, I found that research over many means helped me to stay engaged with my research. I included scholarly articles, critical analysis of personal experiences, and educational videos in my research for my project to maintain my engagement in my work.

About this Project

This project was inspired by a course I was required to take to complete my

undergraduate degree at Syracuse University. Titled "The American School," the course was a

critical analysis of the physical structure of schools, the dynamics that exist within schools, and

how some students benefitted from the system while other students were pushed away from

educational resources. The class was taught by a doctoral candidate whose research focused

on the School to Prison Pipeline- a rich topic that I will discuss in this paper. My teaching

assistant for the class, a self-identified Chicano, was passionate about the material discussed

and often opened our recitation to discussion of our own educational experiences.

I had never been so aware of my naivety. I knew that racism existed - we see it on the

news, in media, and in everyday interactions. As a future educator, however, my view at that

time was that schools were a wholesome microcosm where children and young adults were

supported and cultivated. Surely there was disciplinary action, but it was to better students, I

believed. I thought that disciplinary action reeducated the offenders while allowing the

surrounding classmates to proceed with their learning. I never thought that individual students

were targeted by a failing educational system.

Instead, I discovered, schools valued and favored some groupings of students over

others. The "others" received punitive action or lessened access that created a recurring cycle

of perceived necessary punishment. Consider, whether you remember who the "bad kids"

were in middle school? Did the detention room seem to host the same few students for

consecutive weeks? If the disciplinary system was supporting students, it would provoke

positive change - students would learn from their mistakes and have the opportunity to use

their personal growth to excel. Students would not continuously repeat mistakes and would

thus not be receiving repeated punishment for a recurring issue.

I will demonstrate with research-based statistics and personal anecdotes that the school

system, as it currently stands fails particular students by allowing for the maintenance of

oppressive practices. This project unfolded from my anger, frustration, and my constant asking,

"But what can *I* do?" My demography, as I will discuss, positions me as able to benefit from the

school system and makes some of these issues feel distant to me. I sought a way to connect to

an experience that I never had. I wanted to support, cultivate, and advocate for my students,

but feared that the moment I stepped forward I would be pushed aside. What do I know - I am

white? I know nothing about the experience of my students of color. What can I do? How do I

handle it when racial issues arise in my classroom, both explicit and implicit?

This work is created from my search to discover how I can best support all of my

students - particularly the ones who the system fails. It incorporates my experience in

education during my undergraduate experience. I completed my student teaching in a middle

school in the Syracuse City School District (SCSD), the district in the city that surrounds my

beautiful university, known for exceptionally high poverty rates among the Black and Latinx

communities and in a high school directly adjacent to the SCSD boarder, which I was repeatedly

reassured would be "better" than my first placement in SCSD.

My Demography and Schooling

Professor Beth Ferri of Syracuse University once suggested that a research piece cannot

have merit if its author fails to acknowledge her biases. I am a white, cisgender woman from a

lower middle-class family. My family does occasionally experience financial difficulty, most

recently during the 2016 Verizon worker strike that left my father with the decision to disobey

his union or remain out of work and without pay for seven weeks. Despite occasional financial

difficulty, my parents have always put my brother and me as their highest priorities financially.

We have never experienced a birthday or holiday without receiving presents and have been

afforded countless educational opportunities. My mother always reminds us that education is

her first priority for us.
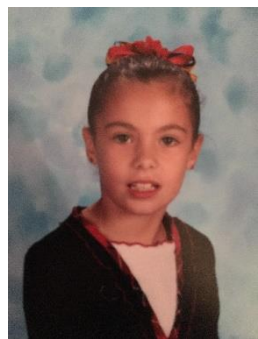
I attended my local public school from kindergarten to eighth grade. I was placed in

"enrichment classes" in the second grade based on my standardized test

scores and affirmations from my teachers that I "belonged" in upper level

classes. The classes met for about 45 minutes each day and presented

students with more engaging lessons on more specific topics. For example,

while our regular classes learned about different environments and

ecosystems by sitting in rows and listening to a teacher's explanation, my enrichment class

focused on discovery and understanding of the rainforest by doing research and creating crafty

presentations that included handmade rainsticks out of poster carriers, nails, beans, sand, and

paint. These classes likely yielded more learning because of their structure, not their students.

My tracking followed me throughout my elementary career. By the sixth grade, I was

pulled out of my mainstream classes daily to complete advanced studies in many subjects.

Upon my transition to the local middle school, I was put in advanced and honors level classes

and was fast tracked in mathematics. At the end of eighth grade, I took a standardized

entrance exam and was accepted to a private preparatory high school. My parents had

encouraged me to take advantage of this opportunity as the local public high school had low

graduation rates and even lower statistics for students attending two or four-year colleges. Because of our financial standing, I had the opportunity to pursue private education.

I previously thought that my educational triumphs had been products of my own success, allowing for some credit to my parents. While I now have peers that cringe at the word "graduation" due to fear of an experience ending or fear of what comes next, I find myself wondering why I am here, how I got here, what experiences shaped my concept of my future as a teacher, and how much of my upcoming accomplishment is from my work rather than my privilege.

Though it is simple to perceive that my financial flexibility provided me opportunities that followed me as I grew and developed my education, I assert that there are other factors that positioned me to be successful, in ways that other students do not benefit. I find that the way I process information and the way I present myself gave me significant advantages as a student. The way I processed information as a child was exactly what a traditional school would want and require of a student. I was able to sit still, listen quietly and attentively, raise my hand and answer a question with verbally articulate response. I preferred to work independently and though I had friends, I never cared to speak during lessons. I valued the information that I learned and even more highly, I valued grades and therefore, I spent as many hours studying, working, and concentrating as I needed to spend in order to achieve the highest marks. In short, I was a typical nerd.

In hindsight, I can recognize that I was privileged to be able to learn and behave in the ways that my teachers and my school community expected of me. While I may have learned better if I had the opportunity to challenge the traditional framework of the school system, I

could fit in and learn in the environment surrounding me. As you navigate this paper, you will

be encouraged to question what makes a learning community a school. If school systems were

customized based on student uniqueness could we create learning environments that are

better for our students and do we have to uphold the values that have been imposed on the

space that we trust to cultivate learners?

Consider also how my appearance impacted my perception

within schools. I've mentioned that I am a white, cisgender woman.

When I attended grade school, I was a small, white girl who often

wore dresses and nearly always had a bow in my hair. My parents

always sent me to school looking neat and in clean clothing. Consider

the origin of the word "smart," which originally referred to appearance, as in "A smartly

dressed gentleman helped us at the counter". How did my appearance impact my teachers'

perceptions of me and therefore their decisions regarding my class placement or disciplinary

interactions. Recall that one of the reasons I was placed in enrichment was teacher affirmation

of my "belonging" in the classes.

I will argue that my success within academic settings is a result not because of my

academic ability, but because my academic ability was recognized in ways that a student in a

non-dominant group may not have been. I also had resources available to me that other

students do not. By fitting in with school norms and common perceptions of "goodness" I

positioned myself to be successful in my schooling (Broderick & Leonardo, 2016).

School-to-Prison Pipeline

"School-to-prison pipeline" is one of a few phrases challenges the traditional disciplinary policies that schools have previously touted and calls to attention to the disproportionality and injustice in schools and its long-term impact on young individuals (Laura, 2014). This video provides an overview of what the school-to-prison pipeline is and how it formed: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HoKkasEyDOI. According to Crystal Laura (2014) and in alignment with the information in this video, the school-to-prison pipeline began with zero tolerance policies. I recall my elementary school bragging of such policies. The idea of the zero-tolerance policy sounded great. If a student said or did something wrong, they were punished and in a consistent way. The practice implied equal punishment for equal infractions - if a student misbehaved in a particular way, the punishment was given regardless of who the student was or how they typically behaved in school. In a sense, this nearly makes zero tolerance policies sound like a progression towards less stratification of students in schools because all students would face the same consequences for the same actions.

Zero tolerance was thought to be a way to stop behavior problems before they began. As a preservice teacher, I can understand the intention of this broad policy. I recall my advisor telling me once, you need to stop an issue in the classroom before it reaches its boiling point. I assert that it is only fair to students that they are made aware of their misbehavior as soon as the wrong doing arises. If I allow a student to continually speak over other students until I can no longer tolerate it and send him to the office, I have not treated him fairly. If instead, the first time he does this, I remind him of the respect that we are expected to show one another in the classroom then he is given the opportunity to correct his behavior before a serious action needs to be taken. Although zero-tolerance policies may present the illusion of the "great equalizer,"

Crystal Laura (2014) draws attention to the extremely skewed reality of punishment in schools in her work, *Being Bad*. For example, in Chicago, black young men are five times more likely to be suspended than their white counterparts. While 23% of students in Chicago schools are black, black students compose 44% of suspensions in Chicago schools and 61% of expulsions. Generally, black youth are more likely than any other demographic group to be punished in schools (Laura, 2014). If you read these statistics with skepticism, believing that perhaps the numbers of black youth receiving disciplinary action are high because black students are more likely to earn these punishments, I challenge you with the following: beyond being significantly overrepresented in disciplinary systems, youth of non-white identities are significantly overrepresented specifically in response to subjective disciplinary infractions such as "rudeness" as opposed to more objective infractions, such as "fighting".

Another important facet of the school to prison pipeline is the form of punishment. Fine and Smith (2006) commented that "[Current disciplinary practices] do not make schools any safer; they produce perverse consequences for academics, school community relations, and the development of citizens; they dramatically and disproportionately target youth of color; and they inhibit educational opportunities" (pp.16). If a student is never told what they did to earn a punishment, they cannot correct their behavior and are likely to continue such behavior. Similarly, if a student is aware of their incorrect behavior but is not given methods to correct their behavior they cannot correct it. Consider again, the student that speaks over classmates. If I simply send him out of the classroom by saying, "Go to the office," it is not reasonable of me to expect that he understands why he is sent out. If I say, "You're speaking out of turn. Go to the office," I have provided him with more context, though I still have not helped him to

improve. If I pull this student aside after class or during independent work in my class and explain to him that speaking over other people makes it difficult for myself and students in the class to hear both ideas and can be perceived as disrespectful, I am giving the student the opportunity to understand why his actions are wrong. To best serve the student, I can also offer him alternative actions that help him to avoid the negative action. For example, I can sometimes blurt thoughts out if I am afraid I will lose track of them and plenty often, if I wait to be called on, I forget my thoughts. In my classes, I keep an index card and a pen in front of me at all times. When I have an idea come into my head and I anticipate that I may forget it, I will jot down a word or symbol that helps me to remember my idea. If I offer this experience and alternative course of actions to my student, I can convey to him firstly, that it is normal to experience his situation and secondly, that he can handle it in a different way that does not make his classmates uncomfortable.

Unfortunately, most teachers do not handle disciplinary actions in their classrooms in this way. I anticipate firstly, because conferencing and problem solving with students often takes more time. Because of increased accountability measures and high stakes testing, teachers are pressured to complete as much instruction as they possibly can. Therefore, forcing a student to leave class is an efficient way to handle a problem so that the other students of the class have the opportunity to move through the maximum amount of content possible. However, as teachers, we are required to teach every student as best we can. While it might seem that removing an individual student from the class serves the rest of the class, it removes that individual student the opportunity to engage with the lesson content and is disruptive to that student's opportunity to learn. Additionally, talking to a student that has

caused problems in class can be intimidating. I did not realize until I became a student teacher how intimidated teachers can feel at certain times. I now know how difficult it can be for a teacher to meet a new class or teach a lesson that is filled with difficult content. Similarly, confronting disciplinary issues can be intimidating and awkward for teachers, particularly across racial and cultural divides. Speaking individually with a student about why their actions are disruptive and how the student can alter their behavior may not work for some students, particularly if the teacher has not established a collaborative and respectful working relationship with the student previously. Some students may feel upset that the teacher is trying to understand, relate to, or focus on them or feel that they have been treated unfairly and teachers are aware of this risk. However, it is the teacher's responsibility to attempt this line of discipline before resorting to other methods, which I argue are less focused on student improvement.

The Vox video on School-to-Prison Pipeline also focuses on the increase of out of school suspensions. Based on my experiences as a preservice teacher, I assert that out of school suspensions do extremely little good for students. It conveys to students that they do not belong in a system meant to better them. It communicates to students that they are not worth teaching and are not worthy of an education. Further, in most cases, it offers no rehabilitative opportunity or communication of improvement methods. Possibly more damaging is the particularly common in-school suspension (ISS). ISS removes students from their classrooms but requires them to continue attending schools. They are typically required to complete their regular classroom work in an isolated area, monitored by a school security guard or resource officer. The reason that I describe ISS as more damaging than suspensions that do not require

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the student to continue attending the school is because of its environment. What the Vox video fails to acknowledge is that we not only funnel our students into disciplinary systems but those systems directly mimic that of our prison systems as we know them. Sitting in an isolated room being monitored by a school security officer directly shadows the American prison system: a person sitting in a room monitored by an officer.

What is Race?

According to Lawrence (1993), ". . . race is a social construction. The meaning of 'Black' or 'White' is derived through a history of acted-upon ideology . . . the cultural meaning of race is promulgated through millions of ongoing contemporaneous speech acts . . . segregation and White supremacy . . . constitutes and maintains a culture in which non-whites are excluded from full citizenship" (pp. 62).

Analyzing the word critically, race is a social construction. As humans, we aim to justify race by aligning it with physical attributes such as skin color, face shape, or hair texture, but if we consider how we sort individuals into these categories, we can quickly recognize that these are what Professor Beth A. Ferri refers to as "elastic categories," or categories that stretch to include the individuals that we perceive as within the label. I attend the weekly Dean's Convocations hosted in Hendricks Chapel. The weekly Convocations are structured as interfaith services to share perspective surrounding a common theme. On the theme of unity, the Buddhist Chaplain presented a message focused on unity as naturally occurring and divisions as social constructions. Her thesis was bold, but meaningful when various identifiers are

considered. Most characteristics that we use to identify individuals are spectrums or gradients, but as humans we construct thresholds to create categories.

In *Smartness as a Property: A Critical Exploration of Intersections Between Whiteness and Disability Studies*, authors Zeus Leonardo and Alicia A. Broderick (2016) dismissed the notion of smartness as a false and meaningless ideology that serves only to oppress. This is a powerful assertion, but follows naturally from the information presented in the previous section. We sort students into classes based on their perceived ability, determined by grades, tests, and teacher recommendations. Leonardo and Broderick (2016) draw connection between "whiteness" and "smartness". Consider the information presented on school-to-prison pipeline: when schools began integrate, teachers and administrators looked for ways to maintain segregation in their schools. Because special education was generally isolated from other classrooms in the school, students could be placed in special education to be kept out of mainstream classrooms. In other words, special education allowed segregated spaces within schools that were abiding by legal requirements to integrate. Building on the work of Losen and Orfield (2002), Ferri and Connor (2005) state, "Black students are overrepresented in nine of 13 disability categories and are more likely than white peers to be placed in high restrictive (exclusionary) educational settings." (Ferri & Connor, 2005,pp.454)

In *Smartness as a Property*, Leonardo and Broderick (2001) state that smartness is a relative term because an individual can not be smart if there is no individual that is considered less smart than her. This ties closely with segregated special education environments. Special education students are often incorrectly regarded as the less smart students. I note that this is

incorrect as it is not unusual that a student in special education is as "smart" as any of their

peers, but may need content presented to them in a different manner, for example.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality is a term commonly used to refer to the many identities at play within

any unique individual. Consider my own demography. I am white. I am a cis gendered woman.

I am from the lower middle class. Just between those three labels, I become unique and

different from, for example, a white, transgendered man who is from the upper middle class. I

had the opportunity to experience an interactive exhibit at Syracuse University titled "The

Tunnel of Privilege." The exhibit began with bags in the entrance and encouraged participants

to take a bag before progressing through the exhibit. The exhibit then presented many lists of

social status points. For example, an item on the list might be, "I've had to enter through the

back of a building or restaurant because the front entrance was not accessible to me." For

every five items that resonated with me, I was to collect a stone from a pile and put it in my

bag. This was meant to simulate carrying the weight of my social disadvantage. I appreciate

that the exhibit challenged me and the other spectators to consider our privileges. However, it

is imperative to recognize that there is no metric of privilege and different kinds of oppression

cannot be easily compared or simply added up. This is to say that one cannot exit the exhibit

and compare how many rocks they have gathered to someone else and have a clear

understanding of their social status. Having said this, analyzing our intersectionality allows us

to consider a more holistic representation of our social presence. Kimberly Crenshaw (1989)

described social disadvantage as working like a group of people trapped under a trap door.

Crenshaw describes individuals who exist with majority status for all but one of their identities

as the ones nearest to the trap door, closest to escaping their containment and joining those with full majority status. Thus, within every social category, there are lines of privilege and power that work to fracture any easy notion of privilege or oppression.

Because the categories we use to label individuals are socially constructed, the categories are often dynamic and change to include individuals as best suits the individual applying the categories. Similarly, it is not unusual that one demographic is used to justify another. As previously explored, smartness is a property that is assigned to an individual, relatively based on perception. Black students and particularly black young men were commonly placed into special education when schools became integrated. Thus, the special education label has become associated with black students, which perpetuates their overrepresentation in these categories. Particularly, Crystal Laura (2014) writes that young black males are more likely to be represented in subjective disability categories. Statistically, black males represent 17% of the student population but 33% of students labeled as cognitively disabled and are two times as likely as their white counter parts to be indicated with this label. Similarly, black young men are two times more likely to be categorized as emotionally disturbed.

Intersectionality causes individuals to make assumptions of others based on association of identities. Hence, individuals are not always treated as individuals but as members of a group. In schools, this plays out as a lowering of expectations for groups of students based on their demography and the associations that connect with their demography.

White Savior

Image retrieved from: <u>To Teach: The Journey in Comics</u> (Ayers & Tanner 2010)

I encountered the term "white savior" while taking The American School course and quickly realized that some of the "feel-good" teaching movies I admired had been ruined. Take for example, *Freedom Writers*, a drama based on a true story. The film features Ms. Gruwell, a prim, spirited, white English teacher who takes a job in a district that has recently enacted an integration program. Her students are therefore varied races though she has only one white student in her non-honors class – the class the film focuses on. The film opens with images of the Los Angeles Riots, followed by one of the students explaining "the war" in her town. The student's monologue can be heard in the beginning of the trailer for the film, found here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JhXMJlm852A. Although the film depicts some research-based teaching methods employed among a group of students that learn and develop passions for the content taught to them and their school community, it has flaws that cannot be ignored when considering its core message.

The film portrays every nonwhite student as a member of a racial gang or clique with no overlap prior to the teacher's intervention. Observe this depiction of the school courtyard as described by one of Ms. Gruwell's students: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JgJhdTJ7Cm8.

She makes it clear that students do not transcend barriers and are assigned only as members of the groups to which they racially align. Beyond the lack of commonality, the characters in the film refer to groups of students as "gangs," a word with apparent negative connotation that gives the viewer the sense that the students are inherently rambunctious. Although some students in the film reveal that they are gang affiliated, many of the students do not. Yet, they all seems to be lumped into the "war" that is described during the opening monologue. According to the depiction, all students seem to have the potential for violence, aside from the ones described as "Wonderbread land" – the white students. Note that in the trailer (link previously included), the white student asked to move his seat pleads, "I can't go back there alone," implying that he perceives the other students as dangerous.

If you are not yet convinced of the broad-sweeping depictions of students of color, consider the moment when Ms. Gruwell interrupts class to ask how many of the students have been shot at. Every student in the classroom raises their hand except for the one white student. The white student in her class also serves as the juxtaposition of how the students should act in opposition to how the remainder of his class does act. He remains seated and on task throughout the film, even appearing in a montage as the only student on task while the rest of the class is rowdy. In short, the film portrays all of the nonwhite students as punks before the intervention of their white teacher while depicting the only representative of white students as a "proper" student.

Freedom Writers portrays a change in the non-white students of Ms. Gruwell's classroom. The students are able to bond, connect, and express productive conversations by the end of the film. However, the film concludes with a concerning implication that the

students need Ms. Gruwell by introducing the potential issue of Ms. Gruwell no longer being the teacher for that group of students. The students are upset and argue that room 203 has become their safe space and the place where they can have open dialogues. Most damagingly, Ms. Gruwell pursues her supervisors and administrators. She fights on behalf of her students, presenting the argument of community in the classroom. By doing so, Ms. Gruwell speaks for her students, instead of allowing them to speak. This implies that the students do not have a voice without their teacher speaking for them. Further, by Ms. Gruwell keeping her class for the following year, she conveys the message that they need her and that the space they have created does not exist without her. This robs the students of potential autonomy to move into their community and apply what they have learned. In short, the way that the movie concludes implies that Ms. Gruwell not only the reason for the positive change for the students but that the students cannot apply what they have learned without Ms. Gruwell and that the change will not exist when Ms. Gruwell is removed from the setting. Instead it seems that everything they have learned does not exist without her. This removes potential autonomy and independence from the students and implies that without her they will act inappropriately.

The conclusion of the movie seems to leave the viewer with the sense that they, like Ms. Gruwell, can make positive change in the world. This is a dangerous notion as it can be misinterpreted as a call to action for white teachers to help non-white communities, thus making students from urban schools seem like charitable causes, rather than diverse and unique populations that have unique struggles and triumphs like all communities. This unfortunate notion is reinforced by some of the words Ms. Gruwell says in the film, including, "When I'm helping these kids make sense of their lives, everything about my life makes sense."

She is finding her purpose by helping students rather than valuing their experiences and acknowledging their differences.

This dynamic can also be seen in other films, commercials, and media when they are viewed critically. It is a common trope as it leaves the viewer feeling hopeful and empowered but this positive feeling relies on stigmatizing a population or placing them in a lesser position. Further examples of the white savior dynamic are easy to track down- a simple google search produces many lists of examples.

Understanding my Students

"The first thing you do is to forget that I am black.

Second, you must never forget that I am black."

-Pat Parker, "For the White Person Who Wants to Know How to be My Friend"

This poem calls attention to the importance of neither dismissing, nor ignoring pre-established conceptions of individuals based upon an individual identifier, such as race by juxtaposing the importance of both acknowledging and appreciating diversity, without assuming it is the sole aspect of a person's identity reflects the complexity of how we identify ourselves. Though this poem specifically refers to black identity, it can be used to consider other identities—I was first introduced to the work in a disability studies course. The complete poem can be found here: http://condor.depaul.edu/mwilson/multicult/patparker.htm.

I recall discussing this project with a mentor that I have in the School of Education and explaining that part of my struggle is wanting to use culturally relevant pedagogy within the classroom. I worried that as a student teacher working in a black majority urban district, I would not be able to relate to my students. He laughed and said that some white teachers try

too hard to make content relevant to their black students. By doing this, teachers can

subconsciously create boundaries between themselves and their students. He used the

example of a word problem presented in math class: He said some teachers will try to construct

word problems like, "Deshawn is selling crack on the corner. If his selling rate is …" Consider

this word problem: "If a boy rides his bicycle at a constant rate, how much distance does he

cover in a given amount of time?" Black boys ride bicycles, too! When teachers strive too far

to make content relevant, they may overlook obvious relevant content. Though his example of

drug deals may seem extreme, consider the more common assumption that black students like

rap music. Teachers often work to incorporate rap music into their lessons - recall the rap

lesson in *Freedom Writers*. Some black students enjoy rap music, some students of non-black

identities enjoy rap music, and plenty of black students do not enjoy rap music. When teachers

are constantly trying to alter work to be relevant to their students, they may be excluding the

possibility that their students can relate to the same content as peers of other identities.

Consider this clip of Stand and Deliver, another movie centered on the education of "troubled"

youth: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LauRAuoFO0U . It can be argued that the math

problem posed to the class in this clip is intended to poke fun at the students' interests and that

the teacher has an established rapport with the students as is indicated by the rally at the

beginning of the clip. Further, this movie portrays that the teacher is Latino and the students

are dominantly Latinx, thus altering the racial dynamic in the classroom from what I have

described above. However, the students surely have interests other than dating and having

multiple partners. Why couldn't the problem focus on a different interest or focus on the same

topic in a more respectful manner? For example, the problem could have asked how much

money is spent on dates instead of how many girlfriends are assigned to each individual.

I recently saw a video on Facebook of a teacher being recognized on the Ellen

DeGeneres show. The video can be viewed at:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fiGjxl3XKJQ. The teacher was praised for leaving his home

in California to work in one of the poorest areas in Baltimore, Maryland. Though the teacher

does not address the issue of race, he repeatedly emphasizes the importance of getting

resources for his students. He explains that students often do not have access to the learning

materials they crave, including books that he personally purchases and field trips that he must

pursue. The video can be found here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fiGjxl3XKJQ&t=8s.

While the teacher is clearly emotionally invested in his students, I noticed something unique

about his vocabulary. He never once refers to himself as an "advocate." He acknowledges

meeting with the city council and other resources but does not describe his efforts as

advocating actions. I find that many people want to identify as advocates for various

communities and I believe that their intention is commendable. Unfortunately, it seems that

many times, individuals believe that labeling themselves as advocates is enough. Ellen

Brantlinger wrote *8 Slippery Shibboleths: The Shady Side of Truisms in Special Education* in

which she addressed the issue of programs or ideas that are labeled with buzz words. She

asserted that terms such as "special" or "exceptionality" can be reduced to little more than

pejorative labels, or worse can obscure failing programs that simply sound supportive. In short,

while I believe that advocating for my students is imperative, I believe that all teachers must be

mindful of putting forth effort to support their words. It is not enough for educators to stand in

front of classrooms and tell students that they are advocates. We must show it though our actions.

<u>The American School</u>

The American School, as I mentioned previously, is the course that inspired my work on this project. The class forced me to question the school systems in which I had previously dreamt of being a teacher. The reality of teaching is that the job incorporates more than speaking in front of a room or passing out worksheets. At minimum, it includes captivating and motivating students, modeling honor and morality, and differentiating and switching dispositions at a moment's notice, as best suits your students. Yet, many teachers lament that they wish the students could just learn without requiring the acrobatics of selecting, planning, and executing a lesson that engages students. What if the issue lies neither in the way that students learn and behave, nor in the lessons crafted by the teachers? Rather, it is the school systems in which students exist that cause the struggle that students and teachers face.

Peter Whitfield Horn (1922) wrote a piece titled, "What is an American School" in which he analyzes that characteristics that make a school part of the system in place in America. He opens his work by acknowledging that what he refers to as an "American School" does not necessarily have to exist in America. Instead, the term "American School" refers to a school that teaches a certain set of morals, which he outlines. In discussing the idea of an American school as not inherently American, Horn introduces the idea of patriotism as a value of the American school. He states, "It is a commonly accepted idea that a school cannot be a good American school unless the children go through the ceremony of saluting the Stars and Stripes at regular intervals." (pp. 346). For context, this piece was written in the early 1920s. This was

long before Colin Kaepernick sat during the national anthem and later adapted to kneeling during the anthem to express respect while still representing his perspective. Nonetheless, Horn presses the importance of patriotism and later in his work, of respect for authority. To Horn's praise, he does not encourage individuals to be compliant.

Possibly more relevant is Horn's concluding remark regarding the American school as characterized by the teaching of lessons by "American methods". This remark isn't expanded upon and therefore allows for interpretation. In my studies, I have heard the American school as an identifier for a traditional classroom: one with desks in rows with corresponding chairs in which students are expected only to speak when given permission and follow along with the classroom content as it is presented to them in a traditional, lecture format. At first brush this might seem understandable. However, for many students, learning in this format can be uncomfortable, thus creating distraction as they try to learn.

<u>Challenging the American School</u>

Before I present ideas of how to challenge the American school system, I encourage you to consider: who deserves to learn in schools? As teachers, we are charged with the duty to educate every student in our classroom. Currently to complete a New York state certification, a candidate must pass Educating All Students: a certification exam on which the candidate must display adequate knowledge of diverse student populations and how to adapt assignments in a way that best supports these populations. Why then do ideas of unique learning experiences cause such discomfort for many teachers and parents? It seems that change can be intimidating but it may allow for more students to feel comfortable with their learning process.

Because every student learns in unique ways, it is impossible to make every classroom

and lesson perfect for every student. The idea of planning a lesson that incorporates all

adaptations possible to therefore support any and every learner that could ever take part in the

lesson is referred to as Universal Design (UD). When I was first introduced to this concept, I was

frustrated by it. I recall asking in a lecture on inclusion how this could ever possibly be done.

Consider for example, a student who is made notably uncomfortable by the fluorescent

overhead lights used in a classroom. A teacher might try bringing lamps into the classroom and

using the lamps for lighting while leaving the overhead lights off. The teacher then discovers

that the lamps are not bring enough for one student to read the board well nor to keep another

student awake and engaged. Many contradictory needs exist in any given classroom and it is

impossible to address them all fully. However, teachers must continually strive to provide

lessons and environments that support all of their students to the best of the teacher's ability.

Professor Beth Ferri once referred to UD as comparable to the North Star - a teacher

continually moves toward it but will never actually reach it.

As I write this section, I am seated at a student desk in a high school classroom as a part

of my planning period. I am ahead on my planning and have completed

my grading and therefore have the opportunity to analyze my

classroom critically. This classroom is one of the best models of

challenging the American School, thus allowing students to make

adaptations and customize their learning experience. The American

school features desks in neat rows. The only time that I have seen this

classroom configured as such was during Regents state exam testing. The desks here have

wheels on the legs and my teacher encourages students to move and arrange the desks to be best for them. The desks are oddly shaped but it allows the desks to fit together in a variety of ways. In the back of the classroom are two standing desks that are raised for students who prefer to stand while working. There are stools throughout the room with rounded bottoms that allow for a rocking motion for students that may find this most comfortable when learning. This differs from how we might envision a traditional classroom and is surely outside the bounds of the American school classroom set up, yet it allows students to choose how they learn based on what suits them best.

Of course, challenging the American school is not limited to seating configurations. The American school also expects that students learning traditional ways, using worksheets and listening attentively to lectures. The classroom I am in now has white boards on every wall except for the window side wall. My host teacher often allows students to choose between working at a desk on paper or at a board as they prefer. In a traditional school setting, the board is reserved for the authority of the teacher. My host teacher also teaches some of her classes as flipped classrooms, asking that students watch videos of instruction for homework and use classroom time as workshops to complete problem sets that would be typically used for homework. This allows students to interact and support one another more than a traditional classroom model. Though it can be noisy and even seemingly chaotic, I recognize the sense of community represented in these classes as the students strive to learn from one another.

Consider also, discussion classes. The American school requires that students raise their

hands before speaking. I challenge you to consider what to do with a student with vibrant and

interesting contributions that he cannot withhold until the teacher selects him. Rather, he

blurts out his contributions immediately. Should this student's contributions be stunted? The

traditional American school would say so, as the student is not contributing in a way that is

proper. However, the student is being thoughtful and analyzing or questioning the information

presented to him. Is this a behavior that should be discouraged?

Consider simply, how you like to learn. Many teachers dislike the desks in their

classroom, complaining that they are ugly or uncomfortable. Is it not reasonable, then, to

anticipate that many students likely feel similarly? I often use the student desks in my

classroom and have even recognized that at different times of the day and for different

activities, I prefer different seating options. It is reasonable that my students feel similarly.

When I think of interesting learning experiences, I do not generally think of lectures, which can

become boring and disengaging for me. Rather, I like projects. Having said that, I also like

structure so I find that projects with clear connections to class content and clear agendas help

me to learn. Generally, I like to know what will happen from one day to the next so that I can

anticipate how activities connect. These are all reasonable resources to provide to my students

as well.

While considering my students' learning by considering my own can form a productive

starting place for building an environment and creating lessons, it vastly underestimates

classroom diversity. As previously stated, every learner learns uniquely and therefore has a

unique way that they work best. When I began working at my second student teaching

placement, I asked students to complete informative surveys to expedite the process of acclimating to my students. One of the questions on the survey required students to briefly describe a lesson that they most enjoyed in any subject. I anticipated that many of my students would reference songs, skits, and projects as their favorite lessons, leaving me, a preservice math teacher, to crack the code of generating upbeat and game-like lessons for my classroom. I was surprised to receive feedback from many students that the best lessons were sometimes ones that were direct, concise, and clear, thus making content and expectations clear to them. One way to work towards generating lessons that work best for all students in a given classroom is to focus on three dissimilar students every time a lesson plan is generated. This forces you to consider how different learners will interact with the same content and requires the planner to give the lesson multiple access points.

Dr. Bettina Love is a "hip hop" civics education teacher whom I had the pleasure of hearing speak during my sophomore year at Syracuse University. Dr. Love explained that the America school setting was not supportive for many of her students, thus she found ways to communicate with her students in ways that they found engaging and familiar. She spoke of her hip hop civics education class as a social studies class in her school and how it connected with her students in a way that traditional lessons could not. Her webpage can be found here, complete with a tab focused on her hip hop civics education classes:

http://www.bettinalove.com/

School to Prison Pipeline in My School

NO HATS

NO HOODS

NO CELL PHONES

NO WAY
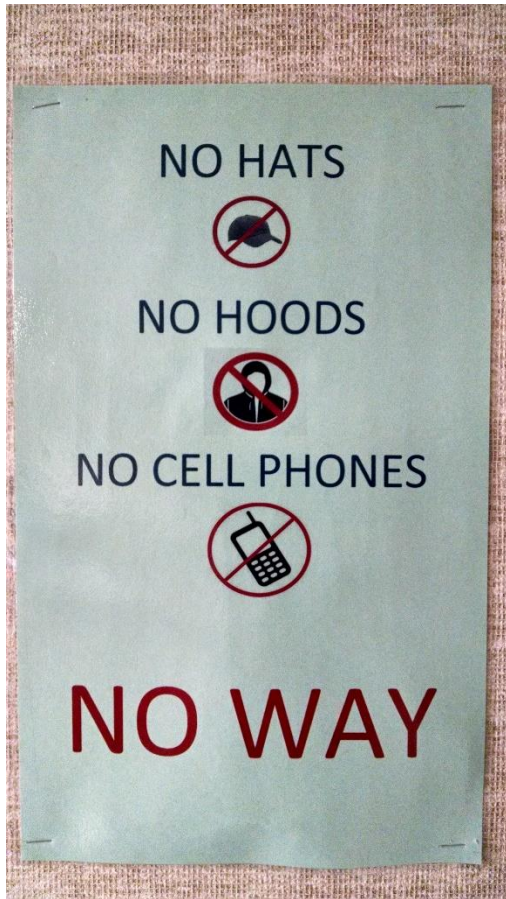
When I was in high school, school security was something I saw on the news. It only existed in the "bad schools." There was a short time during which my high school had a police officer stationed within the building for the entire school day, but the town complained that a public officer paid with public taxes was working in a private school, not funded by public taxes. The officer who was stationed in the school chose to retire when the town voted to change where he was posted and took a job at the school in the dean's office - he effectively continued with the same responsibilities within the school. It was odd that the officer was stationed in my school. As a preparatory school, we rarely had anyone break any of the rules because we knew we would be forced to transfer schools. Consider this - during the fall of 2015, the students and faculty of Syracuse University received an "Orange Alert" that there was an active shooter in the vicinity of campus. The campus was put in a temporary shelter in place until the situation was handled. Some residents of the Syracuse city area were outraged following this happening because the students were made aware of the situation, but city residents were not. Some people called race into the issue, questioning if the main concern during the happening was the safety of the white university students and not the residents of color. At the time, the complaints annoyed me. We were alerted because there was a system put in place to alert us. It was not my fault that the city did not have a system in place for such

happenings. Now, I am able to analyze the situation more critically and wonder why no such system existed in the city.

Regardless of your vantage point regarding the SU shelter-in-place incident, I use it in my writing to explain my perception of my high school. I believe that the officer was stationed in my school to keep the prep school students safe from dangers that did not truly come near them. A nearby public school was said to have a gang problem, though a "gang problem" in my suburb means students wearing coordinating colors. I believe that while we were in no danger, the officer was in the school to protect the students that the town valued most - the ones that fit in at prep school.

Let us juxtapose the officer in my private preparatory school with the officers I see in the schools in the SCSD. My students are familiar with the school resource officers as they are at the front of the school as students enter the building. The school has both centuries and resource officers, which are very similar positions, designated as different mainly by their apparel. The officers in my school are not police officers, but wear uniforms that appear so similar that I was confused about their position titles when I began working in the school. Their uniforms present as button up shirts tucked into trousers. Their shirts have badges on the shoulders, indicating their school district, similar to police badges that indicate their city, town, or borough. The officers wear radios so that they can be contacted regardless of their location without the school being interrupted by the intercom system when officer intervention is necessary.

The school centuries typically reside in the Behavioral Intervention Center (BIC). Within this title, I think the word "Intervention" carries particular merit. What does "intervention"

imply? Take a moment to create two images in your mind. First, consider what it means for a

family to intervene when a family member needs support. Picture a family intervention. Now,

picture law enforcement intervention when responding to a complaint. Picture the interaction

between the responders, the caller, and the individual in question. The interventions you

imagine in these two scenarios are likely very different. When I imagine a family intervention, I

picture a family seated in a circle speaking with the individual in crisis. When I imagine a police

intervention, I imagine pursuit of a person, labelled as the "bad guy". The "bad guy" is not

perceived as a human during the pursuit, but as a threat. Use this to inform what you hope for

in the Behavioral Intervention Center (BIC) of a public middle school.

The SCSD school that I worked in has a small BIC room with a few desks inside and little

more. The space serves also as a sort of teacher lounge at some times as it hosts the only

copier on the third floor. One day, my host teacher and I were finishing stapling some copies

for a class during our prep period when one of the students from our previous class was

brought in to the BIC room. My host teacher, having an established rapport with the student

joked at her, "Did you punch someone?" She giggled and replied, "No!" "Then what'd you do."

She shrugged and the resource officer explained that she was in music class when the music

teacher placed drums in front of the students, but told the students not to touch the drums.

Apparently, this student touched the drums and was therefore escorted from the class. The

resource officer acknowledged by the way he shook his head and explained what had happened

that he thought the student's removal was absurd, but he was forced to either escort the

student from the class or undermine the teacher's authority in front of her class by refusing to

take the student from the classroom. Naturally, he removed the student. In short, a teacher

put a drum in front of a middle schooler - a 12-year-old- and then told her not to touch the drum. Tempting, isn't it? Naturally, this student did what any 12-year-old would do and played with the drum. I could spin this as an inspirational, "The student was just so excited to engage with the content of the lesson," but I'm willing to accept the skeptical vantage point that perhaps this student was making a conscious decision to be disrespectful to her teacher.

I handle situations such as the issue of this student touching the drum with a simple mantra: They are here to learn. This makes it rather easy to analyze the success of a disciplinary action. Did this student take away from the learning of the classroom by playing with the drum? Could the teacher have addressed the situation concisely before returning to the lesson without taking away from the learning of the students in the classroom? Does casting a student away to "think about what she did" in the BIC room take away her opportunity to learn? It is clear that the student was cast out of the room and therefore robbed of the content that was taught during the lesson while she spent that time in a punishment space.

This is why I bring forth the different ideas of intervention. What is our goal when we intervene with student behavior? Are we acting from a well-intentioned, concerned place that maintains a hope for improvement within the individual, as a family would? Do we police students to teach them that their actions are wrong without allowing them to process the meaning of discipline?

The first day I attended my student teaching placement in SCSD was a professional development day for staff to prepare for the students' arrival at school the next day. The vice principal proudly announced that there would be no "train" this year and the adults in the room cheered. I was intrigued to know what was being discussed. Later that day, my host teacher explained that "the train" is a system of transitioning students between classes. He said that students walk with their teachers in a single line down the hallway, stopping at every classroom door, allowing the students that needed to enter that room to "un-board the train". In teacher education programs, we are taught the importance of positioning students as competent. If we expect students to develop responsibility and independence, we must position them as responsible and independent. In light of the school to prison pipeline, the idea of a train seems reminiscent of a chain gang - a group of individuals required to remain together and in sight of their officer. Why do we assume that students are not competent to walk to their classes themselves? Some teachers will argue that the train was in place because of fighting that took place in the hallways during previous years. I assert that instead of creating a system that removes autonomy from students, teachers become more proactive in monitoring hallways, thus dismissing fights before they begin while allowing students to walk to their classes independently. I believe that teachers should be able to handle the responsibility of overseeing a section of hallway.

In my host teacher's classroom, a line of tape pointed to the door of the room. He explained that students he has previously taught struggled to form a straight line when it is time to exit the classroom, so he used tape on the floor to indicate where students are expected to stand. The school administrators felt that this idea made this expectation clear to students and therefore felt that it should be used as a consistent visual aid for understanding of expectations throughout the building. Therefore, all hallways in the school have lines of blue tape down their centers, indicating to students that they must remain on the proper side of the hallway. This, again, removes responsibility from students, thus positioning them as incompetent. Further, I question the necessity of the right-side policy. Is it necessary that all students remain on the right side? What if we instead cultivated a positive school community in which students interacted with one another appropriately and therefore could pass through the hallways in ways respectful of their classmates?

Goodness

In *What a Good Boy*, the chapter coauthored by Alicia A. Broderick and Zeus Leonardo (2016), the reader encounters "goodness" as described as ideological system boundaries. Broderick and Leonardo make the bold assertion that, "In the United States, education is racialized to reinforce the goodness of Whiteness." (p. 56). Put this in perspective with what we know of the American School. The American school outlines a set of expectations and rules that are imposed upon students seemingly arbitrarily. If Broderick and Leonardo's statement has merit, then the expectations correspond with whiteness or white American culture.

Admittedly, I can understand how this might seem unreasonable or unrealistic. Is sitting quietly at desks that form rows and only speaking when given permission to do so a white value? Perhaps not. However, I consider a recent conversation I had with a friend of mine - an international student at Syracuse University. Somehow, I got him talking about education and specifically about code switching in the classroom. Code switching refers to changes in linguistic subtleties that allow an individual to fit in to a given environment. When the term is used to education, it typically refers to the slang that students might use when speaking to their peers and the formal language that students use when participating in class or writing papers. I acknowledged my discomfort when students used inappropriate cultural slang in my classroom. I said that, at times, I want to encourage my students to speak in a scholarly way but I sense that if I revoice their contributions in a way that sounds more professional, I dismiss the way that they are comfortable communicating and their communication may give them a sense of identity. I voiced my frustration with the example, "If I have a student that wants to become a lawyer, I know that they cannot advance in that career when they present statements with double negatives and fail to code switch into professional language when appropriate. But how

do I tell them that I appreciate the diversity they represent through their language but the professional world does not?" My friend respectfully disagreed and said that in his first language he has slang, but he knew to use "proper language" when in the classroom. It bothered me that he used the word "proper" many times when expressing his perspective. I pushed the point that "proper" English is labeled as such because it follows the grammatical rules constructed in England. When the colonists came to America, they brought the language with them. How did we determine that the aspects of English language that evolved as our country grew and diversified were not valid? I pushed the idea to him that perhaps cultural slangs that evolved are considered improper because they lack Whiteness and that if we dressed such changes as white culture, they would be considered part of the growth and change of the language. If you don't believe me, consider searching Merriam Webster's online dictionary for the words "selfie," "hashtag," and "ginormous". "Selfie and "hashtag" are commonly used words in reference to modern technology and "ginormous" became popularized by a line in a movie. Particularly, I notice that selfie and hashtag are fairly novel references yet they are already formalized elements in our lexicon. Why did these words become a part of American culture while culturally unique grammatical structures such as double negatives did not?

I also encourage you to ask again the goal of the classroom. In my eighth-grade mathematics classroom, if a student contributes, "This function ain't got no zeros," and the function, in fact, has no zeros, did my student contribute a correct answer? Perhaps you are thinking to yourself, "But as the teacher, you need to *teach* them, even if the content is outside of your lesson." Teachers are seemingly taxed with the responsibility to raise students with

values and maturity in addition to content. But teachers are also responsible for conveying

content within an allotted timeline. As a preservice teacher, I have been repeatedly taught that

my main focus for the class period must be the lesson objective. If I correct a student's

language, I not only may cause discomfort or resentment for that student but I also derail the

lesson with a tangent about grammar. I will concede that revoicing is a teaching skill that could

be used in this situation to remind student of classroom expectations of language while

confirming that the student contributed a correct answer. From the example above, revoicing

might be stated as, "That's correct! This function has no zeros." By initiating with a

confirmation of the response, the teacher validates that student's response but proceeds with

the expectation reminder. The success of this method relies on teacher-student rapport. If the

teacher is known by the students to be supportive and encouraging, this slight reminder will be

perceived as additional support for student success.

Goodness in My School

We seem to avoid recognizing the construction of goodness in our schools. In reality, it

is not difficult to find examples of it in many different places. The most obvious place that we

can recognize the polarization off students into the categories of "good" and "bad" is the

teachers' room. The preservice teachers in my cohort have agreed that the teachers' room is

an uncomfortable setting in which teachers tend to complain and label students as either good

or bad. We hear things like, "Well, you know how that group of kids is," or "Well, you know, his

brother was always getting into trouble." I believe that it is human tendency to wait to sort and

group things to make sense of them in our mind. However, to sort students into a binary of

good and bad robs them of their dynamism.

Consider goodness in my demography. As I mentioned, I was a small, white, cisgender, girl with clean appearance. My teachers easily labeled me as a "good student". This is a term we hear echoing across every teacher's room in America. I would like to hang a poster in each teacher's room that reads, "No kid is good or bad." Think of yourself on your best day- you do many things right, you are productive, you even flash a polite smile to your barista before that first sip of coffee. You've been good today. Now, consider yourself on your worst day. You put your headphones in your ears and look at the ground, maybe even bumping in to a person on your walk to the coffee shop. You're visibly impatient in line waiting for your coffee and as you leave, you grasp the cup so swiftly that you spill a splash of coffee on the counter, leaving it for someone else to clean as you exit the shop. Are you inherently good? Are you inherently bad? Do you interact with external factors every day? This only allows you to think of how you are perceived based on your actions.

The reason the good/bad label matters is simple. Teachers may believe that they are unbiased and may have the best intentions of carrying out fair classroom procedures and expectations. However, when we label students as good and bad, we change our expectations for them. Firstly, we may become more generous graders, justifying student work with, "I know what she meant to write," or dismissing work with, "She has no idea of what she's doing." We can also relax disciplinary repercussions. For example, when a "good" student is overly talkative in class, he is just goofing around but when a "bad" student does the same, he is a distraction and deserving of disciplinary action. It may seem difficult to discern whether a teacher is giving disciplinary action because a student is deserving of such action of because the teacher, perhaps inadvertently, perceives the student to be bad. In short, we cannot

understand the intention behind an action, particularly when the teacher may not even recognize their bias.

What Does It All Mean

All of this information combined produces schools that systemically oppress some populations while putting other student populations. Admittedly, I experienced difficulty recognizing the issues within school systems when I was first introduced to the idea. I had not experienced oppression in school and belonged to a part of the population that benefitted from the traditional American school system. Admittedly, I was even frustrated when I first learned about the slant of the system when I began learning about it. Consider the on-going argument of standardized testing as a way to assess student knowledge. Many people argue that standardized tests are not fair to all students as many students may experience test anxiety or varying other limitations when testing that are not related to their knowledge or understanding. When I first learned about this, I did not want to agree with it because I was a strong test taker. I wanted to believe that even though some students may be smart but cannot express it on paper, my smarts should be valued as greater because my smartness fit the mold of what was expected from a traditional student. I now question how certain smarts can be applied to the professional realm and therefore can now recognize that my smarts were not more valuable than the smarts of my peers.

Similarly, I did not want to believe when I began to learn of the system's student preferences. I wanted to believe that all students were afforded the same opportunities and that I was simply more qualified for them or more dedicated to taking advantage of them. I can now realize that I was labelled as good from a young age and therefore was afforded more

opportunities to learn in unique ways. I also was positioned as competent, a self-fulfilling

prophecy.

What Can We Do?

If nothing else, awareness imperative to changing the current systems. Be critical. The

situations that unfold in schools are always complex and multifaceted, which can often mask

injustice. As educators, we must do more than claim ourselves as advocates. We must listen,

learn, grow, and challenge every situation we witness. To rest upon listening is not enough.

Racialization of education has a rich history that manifests today as exclusionary practices of

special education and disciplinary settings. Search all happenings for their intentions. The

intentions of schools should always be education: whether the content is academic or

disciplinary. Students are in school to learn. If we as educators believe this, we must consider

our practices critically and consider what if our actions align with our intentions. We must

looks for opportunities to educate rather than scold and times to listen instead of speak.

Beyond all this, we must be aware that at times we will fail. We will hold biases that we do not

intend. We will wrongly anticipate behaviors or achievements based upon skewed

expectations of students rooted in our subconscious perceptions of their identities. Be mindful

of this. Take a moment to question what you expect from students and on what basis did this

expectation form. Know that it is okay to make these mistakes only if we pledge to use them to

fuel us to become better educators and individuals. Remind those around you to think

similarly. Know that no two educational journeys are identical. Many educators say that to

combat racism in education, we must act as good listeners. This is inadequate. We must first

listen. Secondly, we must think critically. Thirdly, we must act to rectify injustice and prevent

similar such instances. Only then are we moving beyond the complacency of listening and

labeling ourselves as advocates. By doing this, we instead challenge ourselves and those

around us to be more mindful of our actions and intentions to best serve every student who

enters our classrooms.

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