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Toward a Community-Centric Approach to Address School Discipline Disparity

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TOWARD A COMMUNITY-CENTRIC APPROACH TO
ADDRESS SCHOOL DISCIPLINE DISPARITY

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Education

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Education

By

Jacqueline Roebuck Sakho

December 2014

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Jacqueline Roebuck Sakho

2014

DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
PROFESSIONAL DOCTORATE IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP
PROGRAM

Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Education (Ed.D.)

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**TOWARD A COMMUNITY-CENTRIC APPROACH TO ADDRESS SCHOOL
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ABSTRACT

TOWARD A COMMUNITY-CENTRIC APPROACH TO ADDRESS SCHOOL DISCIPLINE DISPARITY

By

Jacqueline Roebuck Sakho

December 2014

Dissertation supervised by Dr. Darius Prier

What you are engaging is more than a dissertation, but a dissertation in practice. It is a dissertation in community-centered practice for educational leadership. This is an agenda driven by the need to improve a problem of education practice that is a grave matter of social injustice. This is a response to the persistent call for educational leadership to be community work, to be community-engaged, as community-centric leadership (centered in the community and central to the needs of the marginalized). The agenda is designed to deliver “site-specific” examples of problems of practice occurring in school settings. Site-specific examples are demonstrated through auto-ethnographic reports and critical race counter-narratives from the worldview of the author of this agenda. I am a community-centric leader who engages the work as Black Activist Mothering, a perspective that is argued in this dissertation to be a unique and greatly needed vantage point.

The problem of how race is involved with the ways in which the practices of suspensions and expulsions are enacted in school settings has become a US Department of Justice imperative; as most school districts in the country stand in violation of the civil rights of its students. The urgency to address this problem in ways that are liberatory, emancipatory and transformative, is driven by the need to generate improvements in (a) educational leadership practice; and (b) the education research-practice infrastructure.

The problem of racialized discipline disparity is utilized through this agenda to illustrate how knowing is not always enough to transform practices; even when the practice has demonstrated in the research to cause harm both disproportionately and at a disparate rate. And often, deeper, and more critical methods are called upon to discover responses to problems of practice within the context of traditional and nontraditional school settings.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Deep peace to me, my Self, and my I Am.

Blessings to the good Ancestress and Ancestors as they watched over my progress showing me the ways to go and not to go, all while pouring into my courage and empowering my voice, and my truth to speak as a relevant and necessary perspective.

To my fruits: Joshua, Kimani, Khalil, Daved, Naomi and Naimah. A multitude of blessings to each of you for, growing and struggling with me on this journey by sharing your time, space and energy to complete this project. To BaBa, my balance, breadth, and reciprocity, my universal reflection.

Deep gratitude to my chair, Dr. Darius Prier, for following my work, ideas and processes around and guiding me toward methodologies that speak to my work and to my social justice identity. For my committee who served deeper and thicker than the guidelines; who served as mentors, and guiding lights. Drs. Generett and Levy-Pounds who added to their service the traditions of black women providing othermothering and strategic collectivism. To Dr. McCown, for providing a blank canvas and supporting all of the colors, shapes, and abstracts that became this generative agenda. To Dr. David Stovall for challenging me to reflect and respond to the question, “doctorate for what?”

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FOREWORD

This is an agenda of practice, the practice I intend to engage in as community work, as critical educational leadership. Critical educational leadership that leads from within nested cycles of systemic oppression as both an act of resistance and as an agent of sustainable transformative change. The entire scope of this agenda is too vast to present a completed work in just three years. However, what the reader will find are the cornerstones that form the foundation of the work. This is work I intend to utilize to recruit interested participants to build upon this agenda generatively, imaginatively and innovatively.

How are educational leadership preparation programs engaging the “school – to – prison pipeline”? How are school leaders involved with the ways in which racial disparity is enacted through discipline practices? These questions emerged from my community work prior to becoming a doctoral candidate in an educational leadership program that focuses on improving problems of education practice as a matter of social justice.

What follows is how I understand racially inequitable discipline practices focused by a critical restorative justice lens. Through this lens discipline disparity looks like a system producing harms and nested within structural systemic harms that are nested within a system of historical harms. The examination occurs from a space of reflective critical interrogation focused by a black activist mothering identity. *Reflective* situates me as the practitioner/observer who seeks to understand and improve my practice to be “self-knowing as well as other-knowing” (Neelands, 2006) in relationship to racially disparate discipline practices occurring in public schools.

Racially disparate discipline practices are examined in this project as an imbalance of power dimensions causing inequitable access to opportunity. Such a problem calls for *critical interrogation* to dig beneath the existence of the problem and discover how it came into being and what sustains the problem. Thus, unfolding this problem of practice in the frame of harm nested within unresolved systemic, structural and historical harms will require reflective practice, deep critical interrogation and critical dialogue.

The Blueprint

In year one, the work deconstructed what I thought I knew and understood about how race is involved with exclusionary discipline practices. I explored the literature and discovered that I really didn't understand the problem very well and that I needed to unlearn what I came to understand about the problem. My greatest learning from year one, that the problem of how race influences and both informs discipline practices in schools was first examined through a national study during the 1972-1973 school year (Children's Defense Fund, 1975). Over the 40 years, the problem has been explored interdisciplinary and by federal and non-governmental agencies. And within the 40 years, after research and suggestions, the problem has grown into a national imperative.

Year two, involved me going to listen and practice in the context of an urban middle school as a community worker/researcher; while serving as a Heinz Fellow. I was also serving as the Graduate Assistant for the Carnegie Project on Educational Leadership at the School of Education, Duquesne University; and observing the problem as a participant observer in the context. Now in year three, I am writing about what I learned, who and what assisted my learning and how my agenda unfolded.

The greatest discovery through working with this agenda is simply, “knowing is not enough” (Ball, 2012, p. 283). It appears that for the researcher engaged in researching inequitable practices, it becomes problematic to understand that empirical research illustrating grave indicators of inequity alone is not enough to disrupt disparities; and foster policy change and ensure the implementation of alternative approaches that improve the learning environment. For practitioners, it appears that simply knowing race influences and informs the inequity of exclusionary discipline practices is not enough to engage their resistance to normative practices.

It became clear that (a) I needed to learn differently and that (b) I needed to explore the problem from within the context. I nestled myself in learning about design thinking praxis and qualitative interpretive research along with exploring critical race methodology and the black feminist thought paradigm. I incorporated these frameworks into how I examine problems of injustice and inequity.

Essentially, what the reader will discover is a call to others to join an agenda that moves beyond normative practices and privileged solutions toward sustainable transformative improvements. Through this agenda, I seek to demonstrate methods of responding to problems of practice that produce inequitable outcomes that impact students’ ability to access educational opportunities. This agenda presents deliverables that are examined, tested and improved upon through critical collaborative methods, which unfold within the context of the problem.

The agenda is constructed as a design-thinking journey, a qualitative bricolage that is multi-method and “border work,” moving across and between disciplines. ***Section I: The Listening Project***, readers should be able to discern what is known about the problem, the practice, and how who and what I am shape the way I practice and understand problems of

practice. Chapter One, *A Civil Rights Imperative*, renders an account of discipline disparity in schools as a civil rights violation and thus a problem of practice producing inequitable results. Chapter Two, *A Grave Matter: Discipline Disparity in Schools 1972-2010*, the literature review, foregrounds race in the system of discipline disparity impact on African American students and concludes with the influence of the research-practice gap on this problem.

In *Section II: Design for Engagement* explains the methodological journey of this agenda. This is a distilling process of what I discovered about the problem of racially inequitable exclusionary discipline practices, while investigating (a) as a “Black activist mothering” (Naples, 1992; McDonald, 1997) engaged in community work, (b) as a restorative justice¹ practitioner; and (c) as a doctoral student of educational leadership. Chapter Three: *Engaging a Design Thinking Process*, I use the qualitative bricolage as an umbrella framework, which creates a critical inquiry matrix. The qualitative bricolage allows this agenda to quilt together an inquiry-based network of methods consisting of autoethnography, critical race methodology, restorative justice framework, and design based implementation research.

Next, in Chapter Four, *Examining Discipline Disparity through Counter-Narrative Storytelling*, the discourse of the problem, the practice and the author of this agenda as practitioner are situated through narrative and counter narrative methodologies that (a) welcomes “extant sources” or prior knowledge inclusive of the practitioner; (b) authenticates narratives as data meaning, “narrative discourses...are parts of most situations, and situations need to be analyzed inclusively” (Clarke, 2005, p. 181); and (c) can be complementary with other methods of interrogation when rendering an account of problems of practice. *Coach TJ, The Taskforce & The War of the Narratives*, a counter-narrative chronicle; and *The Mighty One & The Forgotten*

¹ An alternative approach to responding to conflict and issues of harm.

One, an autoethnographic narrative approach; are chronicles to situate the problem of discipline disparity on black students through a lens focused by critical race methodology.

In ***Section III: Generative Innovations***, readers learn about the design for action for this agenda. Chapter Five, *The Sankofa Project* capitalizes my learning from a Community Learning Exchange experience. Through this experience I delved deeper into thinking about and examining critical tools to assist educational leaders with interrupting the discipline disparity in collaboration with communities. Finally, Chapter Six, *When Black Activist Mothering Meets Educational Leadership*, presents community centered strategies for educational leaders to respond to problems of practice in schools.

Section I: The Listening Project

CHAPTER 1: A CIVIL RIGHTS IMPERATIVE

The organization of education has a problem; a grave research-practice gap is contributing to racialized discipline practices occurring in PreK-12 schools nationally (Losen & Skiba, 2010). A steady increase of out-of-school suspensions continues to gravely impact African American students at a greater propensity compared to their peers. Since the 1972-73 school year African American students as a group are out performing their peers in exclusionary discipline practices, representing 6% of the data during the 1972-73 school year and 15% in the 2006-07 school year (Losen D. , 2011).

Speaking contextually from urban centers inclusive of schools and community, it seems to me that at best we are witnessing the potentiality of a tipping point and at least, a ripe opportunity for sustainable transformative change. Some argue that the organization of education is in the throes of processes that could dismantle how we have come to know and understand the system of public education, specifically urban schools (Alexander, 2012; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Giroux, 1984; Giroux, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 2012). Further, United States Attorney General Eric Holder affirms a continued commitment of the “unprecedented” joint efforts of the US Department of Justice (DOJ) and the US Department of Education (DOE) in reforming counterproductive disciplinary policies – and disrupting the so-called “school-to-prison pipeline” (Holder, 2014).

The Losen & Gillispie (2012) report published through the Center for Civil Rights Remedies at UCLA revealed that from the 2006-2007 to the 2009-2010 school year rate of suspensions for African American students increased from 15% to 17%. Embedded in the data is

a disparate and disproportionate impact on the subgroup of African American students with disabilities. The newest data stirred a fiery mobilization of nationally recognized community-based organizations. The Children’s Defense Fund, Dignity in Schools Campaign, PowerU Center for Social Change and many others organized communities to push for change in exclusionary discipline practices (Shah, 2012; Templeton & Dohrn, 2010). However, it is the mobilization of federal civil rights attorneys to file a lawsuit against both the school district in Meridian, MS, and the state of Mississippi for violating the civil rights of its students through discipline practices that makes for a ripe opportunity to converge interests. Further, the “Dear Colleague Letter” issued to K-12 schools nationally from the Civil Rights Division of the DOJ and the Office of Civil Rights of the DOE warning of implicit racism and of the “unlawfulness” of the discipline disparity – framed as a national crisis. The following is quoted from the DOJ, DOE letter:

The administration of student discipline can result in unlawful discrimination based on race in two ways: first, if a student is subjected to different treatment based on the student’s race, and second, if a policy is neutral on its face—meaning that the policy itself does not mention race—and is administered in an evenhanded manner but has a disparate impact, i.e., a disproportionate and unjustified effect on students of a particular race. (Holder, 2014)

The potential legal disruption to the system of education is also triggering variations of leadership decentralization. Education leaders are taking action out of necessity/policy directives; they are also engaging in emancipated leadership (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002; Giroux, 1992) to mobilize with community organizers and parents. This is a process, described by Templeton & Dohrn (2010) that has produced “activists-turned-educators” (p. 431).

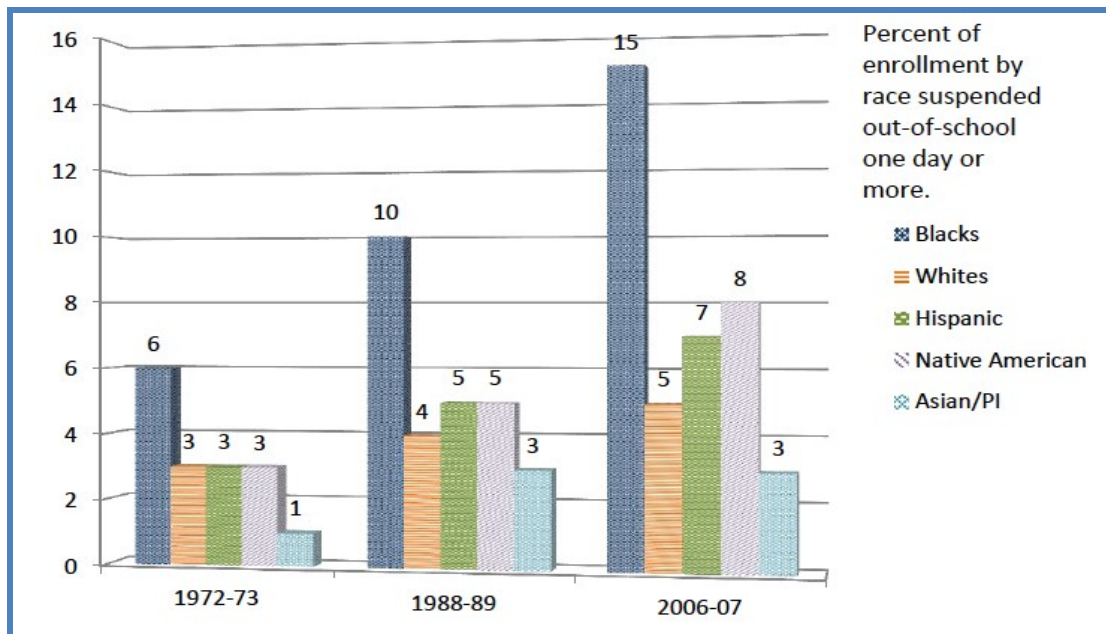
A ripe opportunity to respond in innovative ways to racial inequity in disciplinary practices is on the horizon for the organization of education. However, the work will require educational leaders to develop a critical understanding of the problem. This is a critical understanding that is inclusive of staff, students and community interests, and how these interests are in relationship with the systemic issue of disparate discipline practices. The work will require a type of educational leadership that expands beyond the current scope of leadership in schools to evolve into what Maxcy (1995) describes as a leadership that is “decentered and dispersed” (p. 473); creating intentional space for community leaders, parents and others from the school community to be knowledge producers. This is a new framework designed to develop a system informed by an “emancipatory theory of leadership...that speaks a common language of critique and possibility” (Giroux, 1992, p. 18). To engage in emancipatory leadership that is generative (Giroux, 1992; Cambron-McCabe, 2010; Starratt, 2004); is to engage in processes of critical examination, critical inquiry and critical ways of understanding problems of practices. Emancipatory leadership that is generative can produce systematic discourse that can set educational leaders, leadership, and practice free from the systemic interlocking of legal, social and political restrictions acting as barriers to improvement.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW – “KNOWING IS NOT ENOUGH”

A Grave Matter: Discipline Disparity in Schools 1972-2010

It appears that the organization of education has a problem; a grave research-practice gap is contributing to racialized discipline practices occurring in PreK-12 schools nationally. This problem is growing despite both literature and empirical studies identifying the potentiality of racial disparity and disproportionality impacting African American students (Losen & Skiba, 2010; Losen D. , 2011; Losen & Gillespie, 2012; Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010) both within the organization education and across disciplines. Even with recommendation to adjust policy and practice, African American students continue to outperform their White peers in out-of-school suspensions. Figure 1 demonstrates a steady increase of the out-of-school suspensions as a discipline practice that appears to impact African American students at a greater propensity and steady rate compared to their peers (Losen, 2011). Since the 1972-73 school year African American students as a group continue to outperform their peers in exclusionary discipline practices. During the 1972-1973 school year African American students represented approximately 6% of the discipline data and double their white peers. By the 2006-2007 school year, the rate of suspensions for African American students increased to 15% and three times the rate of their white peers (Losen, 2011).

Figure 1: Racial Discipline Data (Losen, 2011)



The inequity of disciplinary practices is interrupting African American students from accessing education opportunities, a problem of practice that appears to create negative impacts on achievement, "...civil rights issues and questions about fundamental fairness" (Losen & Gillespie, 2012, p. 6), that lead to disruptive post-secondary outcomes that include contact with the Juvenile Justice system (Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002; Losen & Gillespie, 2012; Losen, 2011; Skiba, Eckes, & Brown, 2009-2010). Further, while the conditions and contexts that define low socioeconomic status are contributing factors to racially disparate discipline practices, "there is no evidence to suggest demographic factors are in any way sufficient to 'explain away' the gap" (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010, p. 60).

The awareness of race having an impact on discipline practices surfaced approximately 40 years ago through a published report based on an empirical national study. The report published by the Children's Defense Fund (1975) unearthed a national disparity of discipline

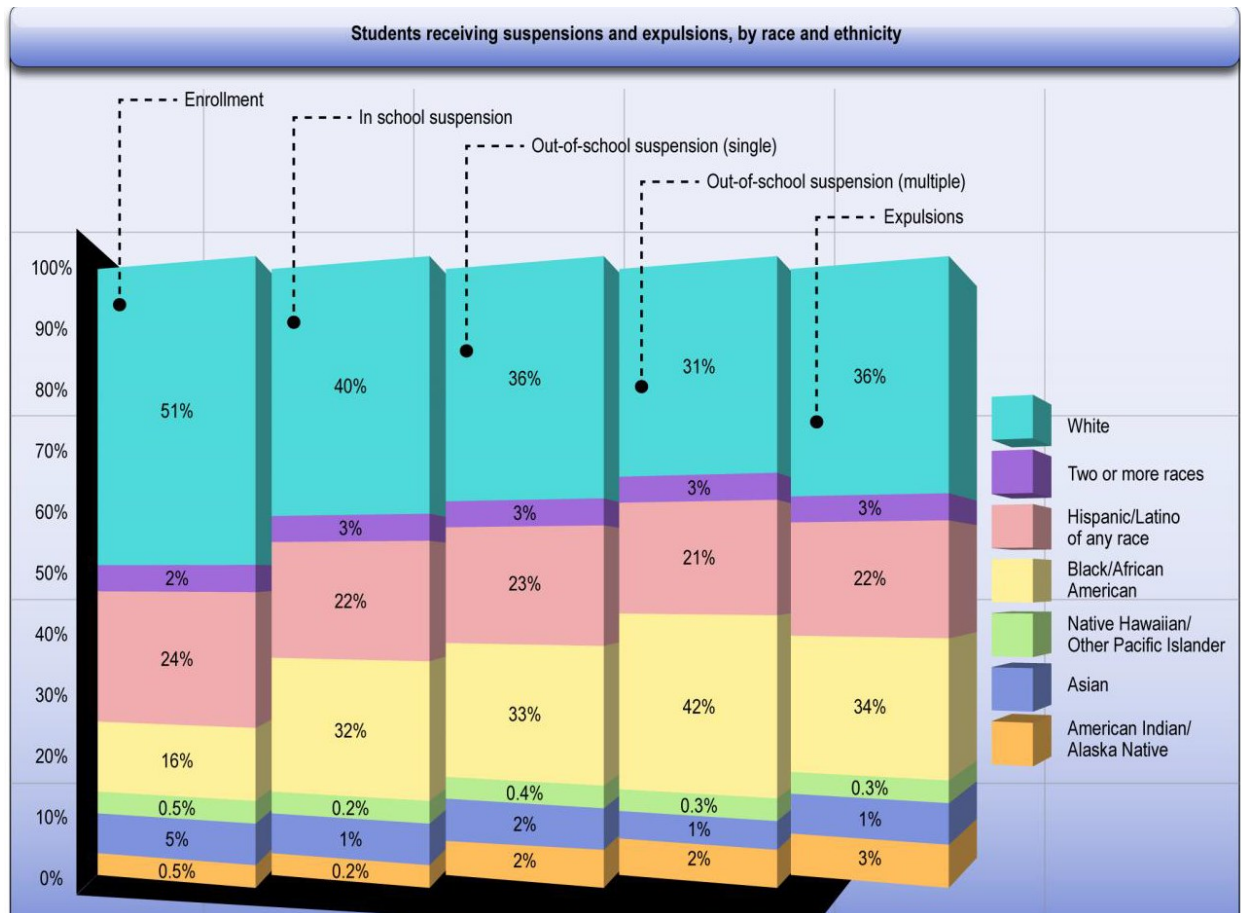
practices as suspensions and the problem was described in the report as “mammoth proportions” (p. 22). The Children’s Defense Fund analyzed the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Office of Civil Rights, 1972-1973 school year data, collected surveys and conducted interviews. The final report estimated that of the 24 million students enrolled in over 2800 school districts, approximately 1.1 million students were suspended one or more times (p. 68). While the report noted discipline to be an issue for all students; an embedded racial disparity was revealed within the suspension data. The report indicated that African American students were the “most severely affected by suspension” practices (p. 61). As noted in Figure 1 above, the disparity of discipline practices that push African American students out of school and potentially into contact with high secondary risk factors has continued to increase.

The most recent suspension and expulsion data collected from the 2011-2012 school year included all school districts PreK-12. The 2011-2012 school year marks the first effort since the inception of the DOE, Office of Civil Rights (OCR) to track discipline data inclusive of both preschool data and data from every school district. The OCR report substantiated that school districts utilized suspensions and expulsions as disciplinary practices and that African Americans students represented the highest disparity rate of the data (US Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights, 2014, p. 7).

African American students only represent 16% of the total public school enrollment nationally (approximately 7, 840, 000 students): however, they are 32% of the total in-school suspensions (approximately 1,120,000 of the 3.5 million students); 33% of the single out-of-school suspensions (approximately 627,000 of the 1.9 million students); 42% of the multiple out-of-school suspensions (approximately 655,000 of the 1.5 million students); and 34% of the total

expulsions (approximately 44,200 of 130, 000 students). See graph below from the OCR 2014 discipline data snapshot issue brief.

Figure 2: US Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights 2011-2012 Discipline Data by race and ethnicity



Inclusion of preschool numbers in the scope of the discipline crisis in public education comes after a committed collaboration of the DOE and the DOJ announcement in 2010, and on the heels of the report of national discipline data from the 2009 – 2010 school year published by the Civil Rights Project at UCLA in 2012. Three key points from the Losen & Gillespie study unearthed that (a) students falling into the “super subgroup,” meaning those students who intersect across high risk factors of race, disability, low socioeconomic status and low

achievement; were the most impacted by the disparity of discipline practice, (b) African American students continue to be hit the hardest by discipline practices that exclude them from accessing equitable education opportunities and (c) that the percentage of African American students impacted continues to increase since the 1972-1973 school year. In the study, a national examination of roughly 7000 school districts' K-12 suspension data for the 2009-2010 school year, African American students represented the greatest impact at 17% of the suspension rate (Losen & Gillespie, 2012). Losen & Gillespie state, “the high risk [of exclusionary discipline practices] is not borne equally of all students...one out of every six Black students was suspended, compared with about one in twenty White students” (2012, p. 6).

Seeing the System: The Impact of Discipline Disparity on African American Students

The convergence of interest around violations to the civil rights of students between the academy and federal agencies has sparked the interest of private not-for-profit agencies. For example, Atlantic Philanthropies focuses on judicial inequity; and the Open Society focuses on Black male achievement in education and disparity in the judicial systems. These funders resourced a project, the Discipline Disparities Research-to-Practice Collaborative – a group of 26 established voices in research, education, advocacy, and policy analysis. The collaborative spent three years gathering and convening conversations with,

...groups of stakeholders – advocates, educators, juvenile justice representatives, intervention agents, researchers, and policymakers – in order to increase the availability of interventions that are both practical and evidence-based, and to develop and support a policy agenda for reform to improve equity in school discipline. (Carter, Fine, & Russell, 2014, p. 1)

The overarching discovery by the Collaborative is that zero-tolerance policies are the greatest instigator of disparate discipline practices to date.

Discipline Disparity: Zero Tolerance & Other Implications

The “zero tolerance” school policy grew out of 1980’s federal drug policies. After the 1994 Gun-Free Schools Act – required a one year expulsion of students in possession of a firearm at school – 50 states had adopted the “zero tolerance” policy and expanded it to include all weapons, illegal and over-the-counter drugs, gang activity, and nonviolent school violations. While there does not exist an official definition of “zero tolerance,” it is generally understood to be a harsh predefined mandatory consequence applied to a violation of school rules without regard to/for the “seriousness of the behavior, mitigating circumstances, or situational context” (Skiba, et al., 2006). During the height and tipping point of the “zero tolerance” policy enforcement – between 1991 and 2005 – the rate of suspensions and expulsions of African American students increased; however, this trend was not seen with other racial and ethnic students (Wallace, et al., 2008). The “zero tolerance” policy requires mandatory suspension or expulsion of drug, weapon and serious violence related violations.

The Collaborative (Skiba, Arrendondo, & Karega Rausch, 2014; Carter, Fine, & Russell, 2014) discovered many other significant pearls from listening and exploring through the project. The following are some of the gems that give voice to the aim of this agenda: **(a) the need for more and deeper research** – that alongside the lack of substantial researched-based interventions that effectively respond to and both reduce discipline disparities that “promising examples do exist and require more investigation and dissemination” (Carter, Fine, & Russell,

2014, p. 5); **(b) educational leaders to be included as relevant stakeholders** – to lend voice to research design, implementation and evaluation; **(c) “critical” research-practice gaps exist** around school climate and the ways in which discipline practices are implemented, assessed, and evaluated; **(d) the need to expand the inquiry table** – the role of youth and community in the research of the practice; **(e) investigating how restorative justice might be utilized** – the use of restorative justice approaches to engage the problem and as an alternative practice/approach; and **(f) race matters** – race among other variables of marginalization must be centric when exploring responses to the problem of discipline disparities.

The Implication of Race

We know large bodies of robust empirical work exist and (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Children's Defense Fund, 1975; Losen & Gillespie, 2012; Losen & Skiba, 2010; Losen D., 2011) continue to demonstrate at best, the overrepresentation of African American students followed by students from “othered” (Kumashiro, 2000; Dantley & Tillman, 2010) groups; and at worst, a combination of disparate and disproportionate rates of discipline with consistently increasing occurrences in school practice settings. We know that research has been conducted and data collected to critically interrogate the propensity, key drivers, social theories and the causality of race and racism on the disparity (Skiba, Horner, Chung, & Rausch, 2011).

We also know that disparate exclusionary discipline mechanisms (suspensions and expulsions) have manifested into subsequent negative outcomes and social vulnerabilities impacting African American students at greater rates. For instance, when African American students are excluded from accessing equitable education opportunities their risk index increases for poor academic performance; increased drop-out rate; and contact with the Juvenile Justice

system (Skiba, Horner, Chung, & Rausch, 2011). Skiba and colleagues warn that, “the overrepresentation of African American students in such high-risk procedures must be considered highly serious” (Skiba, Horner, Chung, & Rausch, 2011, p. 88).

Losen (2011) explores the avoidance of enforcement agencies to examine race as a factor through Disparate Impact Theory (DIT). The report outlines two key opposing knowledge systems that push back on DIT: (a) an issue of safety; and (b) poverty as the driving variable as opposed to race. Losen notes,

[t]he disparate impact approach enables enforcement agencies to address intentional discrimination hiding behind apparently neutral practices as well as unconscious or — “implicit” bias, where there is no conscious attempt to discriminate. The prevalence of implicit bias, including racial bias against Blacks, is well supported in psychological research. Such bias may affect the choice of a policy or practice resulting in disproportionate suspensions for children of color. Similarly, disciplinary decisions made by individual teachers with unconscious racial bias may cumulatively add up to large racial disparities at the school or district level. (p. 13)

I’m looking to Lacy (1996) to gather a deeper understanding around Losen’s Disparate Impact Theory. Lacy believes that critical engagement with a problem is required “[w]hen the demonstration from the research indicates a disinterest or avoidance of systemic change” (Lacy, 1996, p. 134). When avoidance and/or disinterest in changing systems surface it becomes a necessity to forge a critical understanding of the problem and the social structures in relationship with the problem. She defines this type of critical engagement as the “primacy of critique” (Lacy, 1996, p. 134).

Therefore, the primary foundation of the research design must critically interrogate the social institutions and relationships where the problem is situated (Dantley & Tillman, 2010). Skiba, an extensively cited education researcher examining racial inequity in exclusionary discipline practices and his colleagues (Skiba, et al., 2011) also recognize a gap in knowledge. They spoke to this need for critical research in order to engage in “deeper work” to understand the personal perceptions of teachers and administrators. The authors suggested utilizing qualitative methodologies to dig beneath surface variables.

The Ties that Bind: Race, Education & Discipline Disparity

Foucault (1979) warns of the inseparable and intimate relationship between knowledge and power that becomes inscribed in a specialized discourse. The African American student enters the organization of education within a deficit-thinking paradigm reinforced by social, political, and legal discourse. In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Foucault has an image of a bent tree bound by rope to a stick. The image was taken from an *Orthopedic Surgery Manual*. In this work by Foucault (1979) on discipline and punishment, is an illustrative symbol of the plight of African American students’ education journey. The stick, stable, strong and grounded, is representative of the organization of education to which the African American student as the uniquely bent tree enters the system of public education. Uniquely bent from their experiences; representing his/her own narratives and cultural lenses – as the counter-narrative to the straightness or normalized culture of the systems, beliefs, and structures. Therefore, the uniqueness of the African American student is thus defined in deficit discourse as defective and/or dysfunctional (Valencia, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2012). Thus the rope, the bind, represents the corrective methodologies through education practices implemented to eradicate the uniqueness of the tree. In this process of normalization, the rope becomes symbolic of

inequitable practices; the “education debt” (Ladson-Bilings, 2006, p. 3) accrued in serving African American students.

The Tree: The Deficit Other

I argue that a space has been created, a praxis, a space for theory-action where the deficit-thinking paradigm incubates. The deficit-thinking paradigm can be understood as a culmination of the impact of social science frameworks on the research and practice within the organization of education. Deficit-thinking is a process that explains away systemic inequity and gives credence and support to a “structure of hierarchy and inequality” (Ladson-Billings, 2012, p. 117) in the organization of education. Ladson-Billings describes her discovery of the deficit-thinking knowledge practice continuum in education during her Spencer postdoctoral fellowship:

Our entire field was resting on a deficit paradigm that makes it difficult to uncouple the work we want to do from the centuries of work handed down from ideological positions that emerged from constitutive disciplines that insist on the inferiority of entire groups of people. (2012, pp. 117-118)

Valencia (2010) provides a blueprint expanding the deficit-thinking model to include what he frames as “families of explanatory paradigms” (p. 24) that work together creating a space for the African American student. The paradigm incorporates communication, a caste system, and social reproduction resistance that join the deficit-thinking models to support structural inequity in schools (Valencia, 2010). Here in this historically structured space we find racial inequity existing in disciplinary practices that are disproportionately excluding African American students from education opportunities.

The Stick: The Master Narrative

Historicity is used to describe the authenticity of events; I use historicity here not as jargon but more as a dramatic notion to emphasize both the historical authenticity and significance of the relationship between race and education – a relationship that has developed its own historical framework that exists within and outside the broader context of the organization of education and the social construct of race.

The organization of education and race have been engaged in a love hate co-dependent relationship that can arguably be observed as a manifestation of the United States' legacy as a slave society. The United States legacy as a slave society established dominant and subordinate social structures specifically, the role and identity of the slave (African descendants) and the master. These roles evolved into subordinate social structures for Black folks and a dominant social structure for White folks. While this work is far too expansive to engage within the scope of this project, it is significant to establish a connection between the legacy of slavery and the relationship of education and race. Patterson (1982) described – from his research of various cultures that create slave societies – how a polarized social structure is created within a slave society. He names the process “social death” (p. 38), a transformation of a human being into a “nonbeing” (p. 38).

The slave is violently uprooted from his milieu. He is desocialized and depersonalized. This process of social negation constitutes the first essentially external, phase of enslavement. The next phase involves the introduction of the slave into the community of his master, but it involves the paradox of introducing him as a nonbeing. (Patterson, 1982, p. 38)

The “social death” of the African slave framed their identity and place while legitimizing their subordinate social status through legislative and political institutions of power. Education as a

tool to substantiate social death began with criminalizing education of enslaved children during the 19th century. A process that Ladson-Billings (2012) describes as a “policy decision plac[ing] a line between literacy and freedom, education and humanity” (p. 116). This establishes the historical context of the relationship between education and race. Education an object of social advancement, and a resource of citizenship, would not be useful to the “desocialized” and “depersonalized” enslaved person described above by Patterson. However, education as a privilege is only entitled to the whole man, the full citizen.

The Rope: Race & Education

Ladson-Billings in her 2012 Brown Lecture highlights key historical observations of key social science scholarship and practices as drivers of contemporary inequitable practices in education settings to further solidify the link between the organization of education and race. She names three key theoretical frameworks that have informed and influenced the organization of Education and established a foundation to build a bond relationship between race and education. These frameworks are: (a) the rise of Eugenics, establishing a conceived genetic inferiority based on race and ethnicity.

...Eugenics is the study of the agencies under social control that seek to improve or impair the racial qualities of future generations either physically or mentally
(Quotes Galton (1883) p. 116);

(b) The development of the Stanford-Binet Intelligence test, a social assessment system for education or “a stratifying practice for providing or denying access to resources” (p. 116) in this case a higher quality of education for students in the “gifted and talented” program and; (c) The field of Anthropology has produced key scholarship that “is so heavily implicated in forming our ideas and thinking about race [and]...in the formation

of race as a worldview” (p. 117); that the American Anthropological Association launched a 4 million dollar re-education campaign “debunking prevailing thinking about race” (p. 117).

Ladson-Billings specifically maps an observation of how racialized scholarship in social science disciplines have both influenced and informed education practice. This began with the establishment of the “social death” (Patterson, 1982) of the enslaved as a method to desensitize social worthiness and then criminalizing the act of education for enslaved children. Finally, it was the manipulation of “product[s] of scientific investigation to both legitimize and substantiate a permanent deficit space, a place to permanently locate the “othered” (Ogbu, 1978; Kumashiro, 2000; Valencia, 2010). Consequently, this is a place and space fostered by “public pedagogy,” defined by Sandlin, Schultz & Burdick (2010) as “spaces, sites, and languages of education and learning that exist outside of the walls of the institution of schools” (p. 1). It is a place and space that is nested within inequitable structures of power and between dominate and subordinate structures of power where education serves as the vehicle to produce, reproduce, and legitimize inequity.

Ladson-Billings (2012), Valencia (1997, 2010) and others, demonstrate how systemic inequity becomes legitimated in education through research that is anchored on historical conditions and public pedagogies (Stovall, 2010; Sandlin, Schultz, & Burdick, 2010; Giroux, Lankshear, McLaren, & Peters, 1996; Zamudio, Russell, Rios, & Bridgeman, 2011). Ladson-Billings informs that,

“...[e]ducation research borrows psychology’s notions of normal and exceptional individuals, sociology’s notions of normal and exceptional groups such as families and communities, as well as institutions and anthropology’s

notions of normal and exceptional cultures with implicit beliefs about the classification and ranking of cultural groups.” (2012, p. 117)

These historical conditions have produced public pedagogies and lay a sturdy foundation for building the deficit-thinking paradigm undergirded by a strong argument of low socio-economic status as the genuine culprit for inequity in educational practices and thus explaining away the need or possibility of improvement.

Thus far, the agenda has exposed ways in which racially inequitable exclusionary discipline practices are embedded in cultural, political and historical structures and systems of conflict and harm. Also, if racism is not in a causal relationship with discipline disparity, as a variable, it certainly is producing varying degrees of harmful relatedness with the practices.

“Knowing is Not Enough”

Situating the problem requires seeking out what is known about the practice by listening to the current status of research in the field. The purpose of this critical inquiry is to engage in deeper work, work that examines how social institutions, relationships and personal perceptions inform the ways in which PreK-12 education leaders enact suspensions/expulsions and how race matters. Robinson (1998) recommends that when setting out to participate in critical inquiry from a problem-centric vantage point, that the problem be engaged by placing the examination of the practice as the primacy of critique.

Making the problem of practice the starting point of the critical inquiry process narrows the scope of the inquiry to the reasoning supporting the practice. Robinson argues, “the adequacy of a practice cannot be reached without evaluating the adequacy of the reasoning that supports it” (1998, p. 23). A critical inquiry into the problem of practice seeks to discover what

type of knowledge is being generated. How do practitioners know and understand and come to know and understand discipline practices and whether “policy and practice communities” (Ball, 2012, p. 288) are empowered through its use? The vantage point of both Ball and Robinson aid in setting this agenda to be one that is critically inquiry-based. This agenda sets out to interrogate; (a) the practice; (b) the “constraint structure” (Robinson, 1998, p. 23) of those policies and/or procedures that govern how the practitioner engages in practice within the system that frames the practice; and (c) the intended and unintended consequences resulting from the practice. Conceptually, critical inquiry is also utilized to dig beneath “normative disagreements” (Ball, 2012, p. 288) – those multiplicities of truths about practice and the reasoning undergirding it’s use – and unearth the personal narratives and social scripts informing the disagreement. This scholarship supports the need and use of critical research methodologies that are performative (Denzin, 2010) to enlist the capacity to dig beneath the problem into the practice and the deep work to engage in critical inquiry of understanding.

With vast amounts of research around racial impact on exclusionary practices and the consistent finding, I believe that the knowledge-practice gap in the organization of education is a substantial barrier...that with all the knowledge that we have accumulated as education researchers, and with so few of our methodologies, suggestions and insights being applied within the field of education, we must recognize that there is a gap between what we know and what is widely done in the educational arena. (Ball, 2012, p. 285)

Ball (2012), examining problems in education research, outlines five possibilities that offer some insight around why the knowledge-practice gap exists in the organization of education. Ball names, (a) the tangibility of research reports; (b) a lack of standard

implementation protocols for educational practitioners to work with findings; (c) educational practitioners rarely are involved with the research implementation phase; and (d) a lack of genuine participatory collaboration between educational practitioners, policy makers, and researchers in context.

Ball quotes from Susan Furman – “Research is often used to justify political positions already taken rather than to set new direction for policy” (p. 285). On the ground, we still learn that educators look to meritocracy, deficit thinking paradigms, and low SES as the primary and key drivers of racially inequitable discipline practices. Positioning research as political and as public pedagogy add different dimensions that are informing the gap in education. Robinson (1998) adds yet another dimension to the knowledge-practice gap in education that shines a light on why 40 years of knowing might not be enough. She argues,

Narrowing the research-practice gap is not just a matter of disseminating research more effectively, or of using more powerful influence strategies. Such approaches assume that our research does speak to practice, if only the right people would listen. By taking a methodological perspective, I am making the more radical claim that research may be ignored regardless of how skillfully it is communicated...while researchers’ criticisms may be grounded in numerous high-quality studies, such research may still be declared irrelevant if it ignores the factors that convince those who control the practice of the continuing value of the activity. (p. 17)

Here Robinson is unearthing what we understand as the “politics of place” and the power of public pedagogy, as significant drivers informing problems of practices unfolding in school

settings. Stovall (2010) describes the “politics of place” as those “site specific policies” acting as influencers both outside and inside the traditional school setting that raise voice in powerful acts of interfering and interrupting the libratory efforts of “community-engaged” research scholars (p. 410). Stovall provides real-world examples of how public and policy dimensions of power discussed previously by Robinson and Ball actually play out in the work of educational leadership. He describes the interactions of these types of dimensions of power in school settings as “politics of place” (Stovall, 2010, p. 412). Stovall shares,

With regard to this public school that was granted flexibility in terms of structure and curriculum, many of the board members sided with policies that justified a substandard, status-quo education for students who would be attending the school. While the idea for the school was noble and progressive, many board members felt that an education for ‘these’ students (read African American, Latino/a and poor) should focus on rudimentary issues to get students ‘up to speed.’ (2010, p. 413)

Ball and Robinson provide key constraints that may be limiting the ability to deliver research knowledge in such a way as to interrupt the perceived value of continuing the practice. Researchers, top tier educators (scholar practitioners, district level administrators, and academicians), advocates and policy analyst have delivered robust knowing around the disparity of exclusionary discipline practices in PreK-12 schools nationally since the 1972-1973 school year. Yet we still know very little about how educational leadership is involved with the practice and the enactment of racially inequitable outcomes from the implementation of the practice (Ball, 2012).

Educational Leadership & Discipline Practices

We know that the practice of educational leadership is involved with how race is impacting exclusionary discipline practices from the research and literature (Skiba, et al., 2011; Children's Defense Fund, 1975; Bireda, 2010); however, the scholarship is not robust and requires further examination. Here's what we do know about how the involvement of educational leaders can unfold. Losen (2011) provides the following observation on the research around education leaders and disparate discipline practices:

Other kinds of research also suggest that suspensions are significantly influenced by factors other than student misbehavior. For example, researchers have concluded, after controlling for race and poverty that the attitude of a school's principal toward the use of suspension correlated highly with its use. Principals who believed frequent punishments helped improve behavior and those who tended to blame behavioral problems on poor parenting and poverty also tended to suspend more students than those principals who strongly believed in enforcing school rules but who regarded suspension as a measure to be used sparingly. This evidence suggests that factors other than student behavior (in this case, principals' beliefs) can influence suspension and expulsion rates. (p. 8)

We also know that knowledge-practice gaps exist in educational leadership in the context of how race and racism are involved with the ways in which disciplinary practices are enacted. The research indicates that we might not know enough about educators' beliefs, biases, and assumptions about race in general and both as factors in exclusionary discipline practices. The research has however, demonstrated a correlative effect of education leaders' beliefs around

exclusionary discipline practices and the rate of its use for the practice. Skiba and colleagues (2011) identify race and ethnic differential disciplinary treatment in the “selection at the classroom level and processing at the administrative level” that contributes significantly to disproportionate racial disparity in discipline practices (p. 88). Gregory and colleagues (2010) report, “...no studies have been conducted on the implicit bias of teachers and how race may activate stereotypes” (p.63).

Skiba and colleagues (2002) raised awareness around the role of K-12 education leaders in disciplinary practices. The authors demonstrated in the study that African American students were disproportionately referred for subjective violations – “disrespect” and “perceived threat” – resulting in a higher rate of suspensions, while White students were referred for objective violations – smoking, vandalism, and leaving school without permission (Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002, p. 334). This study concluded that the racial discipline disparity observed was due in large part to disproportionate discipline referrals of African American students to school administration. The agenda of this project seeks to understand the role and preparation of education leadership in the context of discipline practices to inform learning in the field.

Presented thus far is the most compelling knowledge about the disparity crisis with discipline practices in PreK-12 public school settings from the most experienced interdisciplinary voices on this issue. For over 40 years we have seen both historical and current data utilized to build continuous research and to critically interrogate the propensity, key drivers, social theories and racialized practices in relationship to discipline practices (Children's Defense Fund, 1975; Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Losen, 2011; Bireda, 2010; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002; Skiba, et al., 2006; Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2010; The Pew Charitable Trusts, 2008; Synder & Sickmund, 2006; Nicolson-Crotty, Birchmeier, &

Valentine, 2009; NAACP, 2005).

Yet, knowing that racial inequity exists in the system of discipline practices and subsequently produces grave life outcomes for African American students, is not enough to produce sustainable change. There appears to be a gap not only in the knowledge-practice continuum but also in how education researchers (theorist and scholars) understand how education leaders (scholar practitioners) are making sense of the practice.

SECTION II: DESIGN FOR ENGAGEMENT

CHAPTER 3: ENGAGING A DESIGN-THINKING PROCESS

Qualitative Research Rationale

Qualitative inquiry methods are most appropriate for uncovering deep insights and bringing thick descriptions into the interpretation of lived experiences. In the edited volume, *The Sage Handbook of Educational Leadership: Advances in Theory, Research and Practice*, Young and Lopez are proponents of expanding the scholarship of educational leadership “to include a broader range of perspectives” in conducting research. The authors argue,

To be certain, the research framework one uses dictates – to a large extent – the way one identifies and describes research problems, the way one researches these problems, the findings that are highlighted, the implications that one considers, and the approach(es) one takes to planning and implementation. (Young & Lopez, 2005)

I understand qualitative research as being oriented toward understanding phenomenon as natural occurrences unfolding in natural settings, and therefore is highly interpretive. Further, the design of qualitative inquiry recognizes that there exists a multiplicity of truths with varying interpretations of human experiences that engage in iterative relationships with socio-cultural and socio-political systems. The focus of a qualitative inquiry is on understanding of how folks make sense of their world through collaborative exploration of different aspects and different expressions. The research process unfolds as a discovering experience for both the researcher as participant observer and the participants. I witness this agenda as a qualitative bricolage, a research process that strategically quilts together methodologies to raise the voice, unearth

overlooked perspectives and bring forward in the conversation, the ability of the oppressed to discover, design and develop strategies to respond to problematic situations.

Qualitative Research Bricolage

The aim is to expand the construction of knowledge about ways community can be engaged with schools and academy in critical inquiry-based processes around problems of practices unfolding in schools.

In this chapter, the qualitative bricolage is introduced as the research methodology that frames the design for engagements as an examining tool. The qualitative bricolage allows space for multidisciplinary, multilogical, multimethod and multiperspective observations (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Denzin, 1994; Kincheloe, 2001; Kincheloe, 2008; Lincoln, 2001). Every aspect of this process is iterative, reflexive and responds to the seventh moment of qualitative research. A call to be critical and reflective, Lincoln and Denzin (1994) tell us that the seventh moment “asks that the social sciences and the humanities become sites for critical conversations about democracy, race, gender, class, nation, freedom, and community” (p. 1048). It achieves a mode of critical inquiry that empowers, liberates and emancipates knowledge, learning and thinking. A qualitative bricolage is employed to create a critical research space. In this space, I can quilt together design-based implementation research, hereafter DBIR, with autoethnography as the guiding methodologies. In this work, the DBIR and autoethnography are informed by critical race theory and black feminist standpoint theory, the analytical and interpretive tools that bring into focus my vantage point as a scholar practitioner researcher. What follows will be an explanation of (a) qualitative research bricolage; (b) the rationale for employing DBIR

autoethnography and restorative justice methodologies; and utilizing critical race theory and black feminist standpoint theory as conceptual frameworks.

Design Framework: Design Thinking Praxis

The goal of this inquiry is to cultivate a critical culture of inquiry. This framework – a heuristic method of thinking about engaging with community in democratic and genuinely participatory ways – maps out the discovery of key elements and artifacts to create an educational leadership platform. A heuristic qualitative design thinking process employs continuous critical problem posing of data (Kleining & Witt, 2000) as central in designing critical community engagement that (a) creates a knowing and doing space where schools, academy and community work in an authentically collaborative partnership to yield the deepest and richest participant voice; and (b) makes the community central to translating, navigating and facilitating sense making and designs for improvement. In this work, I am investigating the problem of racially disparate discipline practices and the ways in which my identity as a community-centric leader – one who intentionally lives in the community and experiences what it means to be marginalized – shapes how I practice educational leadership. How I am making sense of the phenomenon is influenced and informed through this very unique lens. Also, it means understanding how that sense making is informing my process of improvement designing.

Characteristics of the Qualitative Bricolage

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) used the metaphor of bricoleur as researcher and bricolage as a solution, a tool of the qualitative research bricoleur. The qualitative research bricoleur employs various qualitative tools to engage research in ways that (a) shed light on the nature of “emergent construction” (Denzin, 1994, p. 17) in qualitative research; (b) indicates the inevitability of

influences from the researcher's personal position, e.g. the epistemological beliefs, theoretical standing, personal history, gender, social class, race and ethnicity; and (c) indicates the complexity of the research product as "complex, dense, reflexive, collage like creations that represents the researcher's images, understanding and interpretations of the world or phenomenon under analysis" (p. 18).

Denzin (1994), in *Romancing the Text: The Qualitative Research-Writer-as-Bricoleur*, provides a detailed description of Qualitative Research, Qualitative Research as bricolage and its author/researcher/scholar as the bricoleur. The qualitative research paradigm serves as the broad process of engaging in "systematic and intentional inquiry" (Professional Doctorate in Educational Leadership [ProDEL], 2012, p. 5) to unearth multiple dimensions of understanding a phenomenon.

A Bricolage Framework: Design-based Implementation Research

Design thinking is an innovative designed-based research methodology within an improvement science matrix, described by Brown and Wyatt as a "system of overlapping spaces rather than a sequence of orderly steps" (Brown & Wyatt, 2010, p. 12). Here, the design thinking approach creates the qualitative research bricolage blueprint. The blueprint serves as a matrix that networks multiple theoretical and methodological frameworks into conversation as a means to meet the struggle of locating self and community reflexively (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Denzin 1994; Lincoln, 2001; Kincheloe 2001, 2008). The qualitative bricolage becomes a learning journey informing how the deliverable of a design comes to life, moving from exploration to implementation and then evaluation.

I am framing this agenda as qualitative bricolage, a design thinking process that seeks to (a) discover the aim; (b) design a proposal for engagement; and (c) present anticipated generative impacts by utilizing multiple methods and multiple perspectives of inquiry.

Since the main mission of this agenda is to provide a compelling presentation that will attract others to join the mission of improving the problem of practice, it is necessary to discover an aim. To discover the aim through a design thinking process is to explore the problem with a novice mindset, setting aside what one thinks is known about the problem.

Penuel, et al., (2011), identify four primary principles that are emergent across projects structured as DBIR, which are as follows: (a) a focus on persistent problems of practice from multiple stakeholder perspectives; (b) commitment to iterative, collaborative design; (c) developing theory related both to classroom learning and implementation through systematic inquiry; and (d) developing the capacity of sustainable systems change. The authors stress the need to engage “learning scientist, policy researchers, and practitioners in a model of collaborative, iterative, and systematic research and development” (p. 331).

I chose this format because it works well to layout the design as a qualitative bricolage. The interactive design both reflects and demonstrates how all parts of the process are not only interconnected and intersectional, but are also in a constant state of informative rethinking as new knowledge and sense-making is uncovered or discovered. Maxwell (2005) explains the qualitative design process by first quoting Hammersley and Atkinson, “research design should be a reflexive process operating through every stage of a project” (p. 214). He then goes a bit deeper, “...the activities of collecting and analyzing data, developing and modifying theory, elaborating or refocusing the research questions, and identifying and dealing with validity threats

are usually going simultaneously, each influencing all of the others” (p. 215) in a relational verses “linear or cyclic sequence”(p. 216).

For this agenda to deliver richer and thicker descriptions, I seek to expand the DBIR “stakeholder perspective” presented by Penuel and colleagues to include community-centric educational leaders who are involved in community-engaged work as relevant stakeholders in the DBIR model. I am positioning the community-centric educational leader as a voice that might be missing – whose voice adds value to the collaborative and iterative DBIR design principle, and increases the success of achieving sustainable systemic change.

The theories of learning that support the need to expand the DBIR practitioner role to include community-centric educational leaders is described by Russell & Jackson (2013) and colleagues as “cross-setting” learning and knowledge production. The authors examined four cases engaging DBIR as a response to problems of practice occurring in school settings. One of the four cases organized stakeholders around transitioning underserved youth into college placement. The case exposed the possibility for DBIR to encompass processes for boundary spanners as facilitators, navigators and translators who move between multiple settings. Moreover, the authors argue, “theories that conceptualize learning as cross-setting phenomenon... suggest that an individual’s participation in any particular event is shaped not only by what happens in that event or setting over time but also by the individuals participation in events in other settings and how resources and relationships are linked between events and settings” (Russell & Jackson, 2013, p. 166).

I also understand DBIR as a bricolage tool by listening to how Kincheloe (2008) describes the work. He advises,

...a key aspect of ‘doing bricolage’ involves the development of conceptual tools for boundary work... and [i]n its critical concern for just social change the critical multicultural bricolage seeks insight from the margins of Western societies and the knowledge and ways of knowing of non-Western peoples.” (p. 324)

Utilizing a design thinking process to create the qualitative bricolage matrix reveals to the reader the process of preparing the design for engagement and naming anticipated generative impacts beginning with the author’s critical reflexivity – meaning looking at how I am involved with and connected to the problem.

The Tools of a Black Activist Mother as Bricoleurs

The qualitative-researcher-as-bricoleur uses the tools of his or her methodological trade, deploying whatever strategies, methods, or empirical materials that are at hand...If new tools have to be invented or pieced together, the researcher will do this. (Denzin, 1994, p. 17)

Autoethnographic Narrative Approach

Autoethnographic narrative approach seeks to uncover deeper understanding and meaning of my experiences, thus allowing me to authenticate my position as insider and to demonstrate that the context is my own. Duncan explains that “[t]hrough autoethnography, those marginalized individuals who might typically have been the exotic subject of more traditional ethnographies have the chance to tell their stories.” (Duncan, 2004, p. 30)

With autoethnography, I can place myself at the center of the research, emphasizing reflexivity while stimulating deeper understanding and uncovering new meaning and

appreciation of social and cultural dynamics. This is a research method of inquiry that connects the personal to the cultural and uses personal texts as critical intervention in social, political, and cultural life” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 740). This method allows the author to remain authentic to an interwoven view of the self as both the outsider and the insider. By incorporating the autoethnographic report into the qualitative bricolage, my research is employing purposeful sampling strategy. As a sample of one, I represent an “information-rich case” (Patton, 2002, p. 242) from whose lived experience and professional experiential knowledge much can be learned that is central to the purpose of this agenda. As a single instrumental autoethnographic report, the storytelling will not only provide deep insight into my particular experiences but also facilitate understanding of broader social and cultural implications of the experiences. Duncan advises that “autoethnographic reports presented in the form of personal narratives...does more than just tell stories...It provides reports that are scholarly and justifiable interpretations based on multiple sources of evidence [that] do not consist solely of the researcher’s opinions but are also supported by other data that can confirm or triangulate those opinions” (Duncan, 2004, p. 31).

Ellis (1999), a leading voice on autoethnography, in a storytelling genre shares her experience mentoring a graduate student in the art and science of autoethnography. In *Heartful Autoethnography*, Ellis defines autoethnography as a “genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness...[u]sually written in first person voice, autoethnographic texts appear in a variety of forms – short stories, poetry, fiction, novels, photographic essays, personal essays, journals, fragmented and layered writing, and social science prose” (p. 673). Ellis further describes the process of doing autoethnography this way, “[b]ack and forth autoethnographers gaze first through an ethnographic wide angle lens, focusing outward on social and cultural

aspects of their personal experience; then, they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract, and resist cultural interpretations” (p. 673).

Autoethnography is utilized as a developmental tool for cultivating critical reflexivity. Here the tool is purposed to engage how I “show up” as a socially constructed *Being* in various roles as both privileged and oppressed. Denzin (2010) advocates that autoethnography as performative inquiry produces thick descriptions that become vessels of “intervention, interruption and resistance” (p. 58). Autoethnography as critical disruptive inquiry is also “creating this discomfort and unease in order to insist that the reader rely on another body of knowledge” (Morrison, 1984, p. 387), preformative processes that are all unfolding in conversations between theories, practice and practitioner. Critical inquiry produces spaces of activism allowing scholars researchers and practitioners to engage as advocates of social justice.

Simply, autoethnography is a methodological response to the call for critical inquiry to be reflective and reflexive in qualitative research designs. The seventh moment call of qualitative research is speaking to how I understand the Black cultural art form of call-and-response, a cultural currency where I come from. The call-and-response process both engages and depends on the communal voice working together to ensure that the call is meaningful and functional. Call-and-response as a method of communication nurtures the collective body by placing value not only on what is called out, but also, on what is heard back. This traditional art form as cultural currency (Yosso, 2005) establishes a pattern of communication that values the improvisation of individual thoughts and responses in order to create a new, shared communal reality.

Restorative Justice: “A Seventh Moment Methodology”

Observing Restorative Justice as “holistic” process, “a process of authenticity and transparency to get to the bottom of the...institutionalized system and to reestablish accountability human beings have to each other” (Stanfield II, 2012, p. 107) grounds the ideology of restorative justice in the frame of a seventh moment methodology.

We imagine a form of qualitative inquiry in the 21st century that is simultaneously minimal, existential, autoethnographic, vulnerable, performative, and critical....It seeks to ground the self in a sense of the sacred, to connect the ethical, respectful self dialogically [in order]...to embed this self in deeply storied histories of sacred spaces and local places, to illuminate the unit of the self in its relationship to the reconstructed, moral, and sacred natural world... (Lincoln & Denzin, 2000, p. 1052)

I understand Restorative justice to function as a praxis that rest on the foundation of respect, relationship and responsibility – a praxis that is “simultaneously minimal, existential, autoethnographic, vulnerable, performative, and critical” (Denzin, 2000, p. 1052). Its processes serve as dialogical approaches to qualitative research that are based on: (a) building and/or repairing ***relationships***; (b) ***respecting*** simultaneously the harm, its context, and the voice of all relevant participants; and (c) embracing a standpoint of ***responsibility*** to the sacredness of the processes. Restorative justice is a seventh moment methodology, a chosen tool of this black activist mother researcher-bricoleur. It is a tool not just of my discipline but also of those African centered spiritual mechanisms (Dillard, 2008) that inform who and what I am and how I engage the work. Aligning my identity, as a black activist mother within a critical feminist standpoint paradigm is to be in direct conversation with hooks (2000) scholarship on love,

passion, feminism and justice. I hear the elder sharing that the black activist mother is on a liberatory mission to unite her African centered spiritual practice with restorative justice. A critical and both sacred quest to re-center the focus of qualitative research on communal accountability for enacted social change (Lincoln & Denzin, 2000).

1.1.1.1 Restorative Justice Praxis

Restorative Justice is a paradigm of thinking about and addressing harms, caused by wrongdoing and/or wrongheadedness. Most notably, its practices and processes are called upon as an alternative response to criminal and delinquent actions and/behaviors (Zehr, 2002; Braithwaite, 2002; Sullivan & Tifft, 2001). Accountability, authenticity and transparency along with interconnectedness are the roots of Restorative Justice. Restorative Justice in its most basic form is an invitation to dialogue.

Accountability calls for naming and identifying the harm and the responsibility to the harm at the individual and community level. Because harm causes a violation – “vio” signifies a disconnection or breaking of relationships²– to relationships then, authenticity together with transparency are mechanisms to repair the interconnectedness of broken systems including personal, community and structures. Thus, (re) establishing or (re) creating interconnectedness involves linking personal, systemic, structural, and historical narratives through processes that aim to move toward “coming out unified in restored lives sustained through new circles, networks, and environments” (Stanfield II, 2012, p. 109).

² <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?search=violate&searchmode=none>

1.1.1.2 Restorative Justice Practice

Restorative Justice is an alternative response to harm seeking to address the justice needs of the victim, the offender, and the community; while placing the needs of those harmed at the center of the process (Zehr, 2002; Braithwaite, 2002; Sullivan & Tift, 2001). RJ processes (circle processes, victim offender mediation, and family group conferencing) are understood as retributive and seek to answer retributive focused questions: *Who has been harmed? Who/What has responsibility for the harm? What will be good here?* It is typically utilized as a retributive response to crime within the criminal justice framework, an alternative to some punitive responses of the criminal justice system (Zehr, 2002).

1.1.1.3 Restorative Justice as Narrative Inquiry

As stated, Restorative Justice as a response to direct or indirect conflict – in its most basic sense – is an invitation to dialogue (Zehr, 2002; Sullivan & Tift, 2001). Conflict generates harm and that harm violates relationships. The foci of Restorative Justice approaches are the harm and the relationships impacted by the harm. Those harmed are the center of the process, their needs are solicited and their voices are given a venue to be heard by all relevant listeners (Zehr, 2002). Daly (2000) argues that restorative justice “can deliver a ‘better’ or ‘more effective’ kind of justice in diverse and unequal societies if it is tied to a political process” (p. 8). Restorative justice can deliver what Daly argues for through engaging in critical dialogue that raises all narratives – personal, structural, and historical – to the surface. Through these narratives, generative themes are discovered by those engaged in the process. When the community has raised its voice, the strategic risk takers can identify policy interests that match the interest of the community. In the process the listener is engaged in “fearless listening” (Yancy, 2011); they are

struggling and experiencing discomfort and agitation. When discomfort, agitation, and struggle begin those harmed, those who have responsibility to the harm and their intersection as community become engaged in critically interrogating the harm. It is not critical in the sense of judging but more in the sense of curiosity which invokes guidance and a desire for deeper knowing. The spirit of questioning penetrates the surface of what we are told to know down into the moral imagination of what is possible to know (Welch, 2000; Lederach, 2005).

The Natural Bricoleur: A Mother Traveling on the Black Feminist Standpoint Paradigm

I use critical race theory and the critical black feminist standpoint paradigm as the worldviews to shape how I investigate. These frames inform how I formulated the design as an engagement product that involves a school, academy and community partnership in response to the problem of racially disparate discipline practices. Black feminist thought and critical race feminism are the theoretical supports which allow room in this agenda to “choose methods that foster some kind of political, social or economic transformation that benefits the people...[and] to use nontraditional data such as life narratives, poetry, fiction and revisionist histories in...[my] research” (Few, 2007, p. 457) to situate my experiences. I make sense of social justice through a black activist mothering lens which implies an obligation to speak up and speak out for those more vulnerable; it instantiates moral rightness, shared resources, and equity. I employ autoethnography and critical race methodology as the qualitative methods to present my discovery and to situate my lived experiences as a standpoint.

Standpoint theory, a byproduct of critical feminism, means reflecting on the absence of women from and in research and it is a perspective that seeks to elevate knowledge that comes out of marginal experiences (Harding, 1987, p. 184, as cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 243) to also have voice. Resisting the practice of feminist thought to universalize the experiences of

all women, standpoint theory expands the table for the “situated woman with experiences and knowledge specific to her place in the material division of labor and the racial stratification systems” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 243).

Thus, the foundation of standpoint theories is that members of oppressed groups, like Black women, have special kinds of knowledge systems produced and reproduced by their marginalized status in society. These knowledge systems become assets gifted by their particular standpoint. The standpoint of Black women, as a symbolic center stone of marginalization, are then, the most effective navigators, facilitators and translators of political empowerment processes – best achieved through a raised group consciousness (Omolade, 1990; Omolade, 1987; Hill Collins, 1990). Even if the notion that black women have privileged access to multiple realities is challenged, at the very least, our standpoint offers uniquely developed alternative representations of the dominant reality that are more useful to the group than are other theoretical representations.

Black feminist standpoint theories reject the notion of an unmediated truth. Instead arguing, that knowledge is always mediated and mitigated by a multiplicity of truths. Moreover, these truths are related to our personal being and related to the community’s situatedness within various sociohistorical, sociopolitical and sociocultural landscapes. Referring to Black Feminist Thought, Patricia Hill Collins shines a light on standpoint theory as a tool to unearth experiences and knowledge of black women, which are grounded in material circumstances and political situation (Collins, 1990).

1.1.1.4 Black Activist Mothering

The third wave feminism paradigm is inclusive of those intersectional voices from marginalized women and their knowledge producing systems who were left out. As the authors of *All the Men are Black, All the Women are White, But Some of Us are Brave* (Hull, Scott, & Smith, 1982) argue, they were strategically forgotten about within the social and scholarly feminism movement. The need for a standpoint from a Black activist mothering perspective bellows from the breadth and depth of the genderized structural development of Black women in America and does so, across dimensions of race and class (social, political and economic movements for justice) in league with labor.

In this work, I have situated the black activist mothering worldview on the black feminism standpoint paradigm. We facilitate community work through boundary spanning, passing through concentric – cyclical systems of oppression that intersect vertically and laterally – circles of oppression by transporting and translating knowledge as a liberatory process.

My desire as the author of this work is similar to what Morrison desired of her work, “to urge the reader into active participation in the nonnarrative, nonliterary experience of the text, which makes it difficult for the reader to confine himself to a cool and distant acceptance of data” (Morrison, 1984, p. 387). I seek to engage the reader, in fact, to call the reader to respond to a problem that is persistent and unacceptable. Morrison is speaking to my reliance on proverbs and seeking the guidance of my Elders and Ancestors as the practical, the experiential, and tacit knowledge that are the cornerstones of all my knowing and the root of my sense-

making tools. Who am I? What am I? How did I learn that? How does my situatedness inform how I understand the problem and how I think about the design to engage the problem?

The answers to the above questions inform my ways of knowing, and shape the way I make sense of and understand the problem of racially inequitable discipline practices. It then is a necessity to situate my standpoint as the navigator of this agenda in order to prepare the reader for why and how the problem is rendered in the following section.

First and foremost, my situatedness emerges as a black activist mother (McDonald, 1997; Naples, 1992) and thus calibrates my autoethnographic lens. The “activist mothering” worldview emerged out of Naples study of black low-income women living in urban neighborhoods engaged in community work. Naples (1992) discovered that “the ways knowledge generated from the standpoint of women from different classes and racial-class backgrounds transforms our understanding of politics, labor, and mothering. It was McDonald (McDonald, 1997) who thickened the description of the political, social, and economic work of black mothers engaged in community work as black activist mothering. She discovered in her work that Black Activist Mothering, serves as an identity and as a complex practice of biological mothering, community othermothering and political activism driven by resiliency in the midst of struggle (Hill Collins, 1991; Hill Collins, 1990; McDonald, 1997; Edwards, 2000). It is a continuous process of “going up for the oppressed” (Townsend Gilkes, 1983, p. 115), always assessing which social, political and economic strategies are most appropriate to meet the needs of black women, their families, and the black community.

However, the work around reassessing and redefining the ways in which black women engage in community work and their roles as mothers (Edwards, 2000) goes back to the work of

Dill (Dill Thorton, 1983) who unearthed socio-cultural tools utilized by black domestic workers to establish strategic upward mobility plans for their children. Townsend Gilkes' (1983) work raised up how community work for black women equaled utilizing a strategic upward mobility process. Townsend Gilkes discovered that black women from working class and middle class background working and living in urban cities had a formula for "going up for the oppressed" as political activism and black community nation-building. This means "going up for the oppressed...a type of economic and career mobility that comprises a set of activities aimed at social change and the empowerment of the powerless. Edwards (2000) discovered where Hill Collins referenced Townsend Gilkes' black women doing community worker as "the power of Black motherhood" (p. 87).

The power of black motherhood fuels my navigational system, and is the voice in the autoethnographic narrative and the critical race chronicle found in Section III of this agenda. Operating as black activist mothering, "keeps me more humble and helps rationalize that I am not acting above my raising' (Whitlock, 2010, p. 458) and is the center stone of this agenda, its frameworks, aim and design. Whitlock, in her work, is making a case for raising up and out of the margins the voice as culture. She argues, "[p]ublic pedagogy, then, takes place at sites where political and cultural engagements play out in performative moves that are a constant entanglement of regulation and emancipation" (2010, p. 459). I envision Whitlock's notion of voice as culture and as public pedagogy to be a systematic process of transforming "speaking out" into radical performative narrations (Denzin, 2010) that occurs in innovative spaces. Black women engaging in community work as activist mothering are responding to issues of perpetual inequity and are doing so utilizing our unique voice, a voice informed by intersecting experiences of oppression. Black activist mothering is my political, social and cultural standpoint

– an internal navigation and belief system, the root of my practice, and the lens through which I examine the work.

The situatedness of the Black activist mother presents a uniquely historical perspective. Her vantage point is always intersecting and simultaneously with oppressive dimensions of race, class and gender and with issues of social injustice for herself and her community. I understand Carby (1982) situating black activist mothering standpoint this way, “history has constructed our sexuality and femininity as deviating from those qualities with which white women, as the prize objects of the western world have been endowed” (p. 110). When looking out at injustice the situatedness of black women – who are mothers, who practice community work as activism, and who share a similar socioeconomic status with the community – bring to the conversation a unique way of understanding and knowing that folds in experiences of gender with the historical relationship of race.

I am a black activist mother as bricoleur, whose work is a response to Lincoln’s (2001) call to be “an expansion in the definition of bricolage of undreamt-of-proportions” (p. 693). As the writer of this agenda, I am “the [undreamt-of] writer-as-a-bricoleur [who in this work] produces a bricolage” (Denzin, 1994), an aesthetic solution of community-centric pedagogy to a problematic situation – the unlawful practice of discipline disparity in schools. The political, racial, historical, and spatial implications of the problem call for the bricoleur to engage in boundary spanning. Lincoln discusses the notion of boundary spanning to facilitate the bricolage as “boundary-work” (694). Boundary spanning is the primary vehicle utilized by the bricoleur to do their quilting together of pieces of fabric and patterns that create messages of liberation and emancipatory spaces of learning. The bricoleur as the boundary spanner, spans between concentric circles of oppression, passing through the veils of “isms” to translate, facilitate and

navigate multiplicities of truths, perspectives and ways of knowing. Boundary work from a black activist mothering standpoint, living both marginalized and privileged, requires a process of retrieving and returning. This means that when I work the borders and liminal spaces passing through the veil of race and racism; that my quest is not only to transport and translate knowledge from the dominant world back to marginalized spaces but also, to carry that rich thick counter-knowledge “*from the bottom up*” and across systems of power.

Lincoln (2001) suggests, “it is ‘boundary-work’ taken to the extreme, boundary-work beyond race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, class...[it] works the margins and liminal spaces between both formal knowledge and what has been proposed as boundary knowledge, knitting them together, forming a new consciousness” (p. 694). Critical race methodology and black feminism paradigm as boundary spanning methodologies of critical inquiry and counter-theories about ways of seeing and knowing might offer some forward thinking and learning (Lincoln, 2001; Young & Lopez, 2005).

I am through the Black activist mothering worldview a research/writer bricoleur “a person who fashions meaning out of experience, using whatever aesthetic and instrumental tools that are available” (Denzin, 1994, p. 15). For example, my role as a black activist mother engaged in community work and operationalizing othermothering is much like the qualitative researcher who chooses to engage his/her inquiry as a “passionate participant” (Cavanagh, 2005, p. 30) as a critical vehicle to cultivate deep thinking about phenomena.

“The bricoleur is adept at performing a large number of diverse tasks, ranging from interviewing, to observing, to interpreting personal and historical documents, to intensive self-reflection and introspection” (Denzin, 1994, p. 17). Denzin is defining the researcher-writer as a

bricoleur and in it, if not mirroring it, I hear echoing the practice of black women historically. We are engaging in community work – often, making many ways out of no way – to gain rich thick descriptions of what is unfolding inside and outside their community.

Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory (CRT) was born out of the struggle and agitation experienced by Derrick Bell and others at how slowly racial reform was unfolding during the 1970's. After great diligence and the legal achievement of moral rightness, Bell did not witness a swift generation of remedies to accompany the hard won rights of the Civil Rights Movement (Bell, 2004). Bell and his colleagues grew weary in regard to the expected impact of traditional civil rights strategies and legal approaches of “filing amicus briefs, conducting protests and marches, and appealing to the moral sensibilities of decent citizens” (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 10). Therefore, CRT has roots in a personal liberation cycle for Bell and a systemic liberation cycle of the critical legal studies movement. Both journeys sought to create new ways of critically thinking about and examining law that incorporates the impact of racial inequity through the social and cultural narratives of individuals and groups. Specifically, critical race theory examines how racialized legal and social structures recreate and legitimate structural and systemic networks of power.

Utilizing critical race theory (CRT) as a framework to analyze inequities in the organization of education was introduced in Ladson-Billings and Tate's (1995) work. Ladson-Billings and Tate argue that because race and racism are interwoven within our societal belief systems – legitimizing and normalizing dominant and subordinate communities – it is a safe assertion that racism is systemically embedded in the educational system. Gloria Ladson-Billings (2012) warns in the annual Brown lecture in Education Research that “[u]ntil we begin

to carefully examine the way race and racialized thinking influence our work, we will continue to perpetuate destructive thinking about the capabilities of learners based on race” (p. 115).

An invaluable asset of CRT is the recognition and authentication of the lived experiences of marginalized people. CRT methods center marginalized narratives as critical to developing a holistic ontology or deep understanding of how racialized policy and practices impact their situatedness within dominant and subordinate dimensions of power. Critical race theory transcends academic boundaries in order to position scholarship within the greater historical impact of race/racism. Now with race/racism and counter-narration centered, CRT examines theories, research and methods from various social, cultural, political and economic areas of knowledge and vantage points.

1.1.1.5 Critical Race Methodology

Solórzano and Yosso (2002) define critical race methodology as a theoretically grounded approach to research that...uses the interdisciplinary knowledge base of ethnic studies, women’s studies, sociology, history, humanities, and the law to better understand the experience of students of color” (p. 24). Critical race theory as a methodology:

- (a) foregrounds race and racism in all aspects of the process while acknowledging and demonstrating the intersectionality of race, gender and class;
- (b) challenges traditional ontological, epistemological, methodological, philosophical, disciplinary paradigms, texts, and theories, and praxis debates;
- (c) offers liberatory and transformative responses to engage social and political action;
- (d) makes central the racialized, gendered and classed experiences as valuable

information; and (e) utilizes an interdisciplinary and multiperspective knowledge base to create rich, thick descriptions of lived experiences of oppression.

Zamudio, et al. (2011) and colleagues explain critical race methodology this way, as a research process that utilizes counter narration to focus the scope of the examination on “*who* is telling *which stories* in *what way*, from *what theoretical lens* are they being explained and for *what purpose* are they being told” (p. 117).

1.1.1.6 Narratives & Storytelling as CRT Methodological Tools

Narratives and storytelling are qualitative tools utilized within critical race theory, black feminist paradigm autoethnography and restorative justice to produce rich, thick data. Clarke identifies three types of narrative data; (a) personal narratives as autoethnography and personal stories; (b) narrative of others; and (c) documents. Designing this agenda as a design thinking qualitative bricolage, provides a creative research space to weave together multiple narrative methodologies from multiple conceptual frameworks in order to anchor my experiential knowledge – a means of validation – “to deeply contextualize and situate personal narratives” (Clarke, 2005, p. 182) ... as data. The counter narrative methodology serves as a process of critical analysis that is more than gaining a deeper understanding and achieving validation; as a methodology, counter narratives expose, unsettle, and disrupt what has been sanctioned as the norm (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002; Zamudio, et al., 2011; Giroux et al., 1996).

Counter narration is a form of critical analysis that serves to disrupt; the “grand, master, and meta narrative,” along with “countering the official and hegemonic narrative“(Giroux, et al., 1996, p. 2). The counter-narrative as a research methodology utilizes literature, historical context, data, and tacit knowledge to create a “whole” narrative; thus, problematizing a single

and often fragmented truth through storytelling as a way to produce the human side of change necessary. In Section III you will encounter an autoethnographic narrative approach and counter-narrative storytelling-the design for engagement with the generative innovations or implications and suggestions for future work. When networked together, these conceptual frameworks and research methods become a critical qualitative bricolage to achieve my research goals. This critical, feminist, and praxis-oriented bricolage seek to deliver emancipatory and liberatory tools and strategies. The post-modern approaches seek to expand the research-practice table by de/reconstructing knowledge about the marginalized voice as a collaborative voice.

This section closes with, "...the art of interpretation" (Denzin, 1994, p. 20) an autoethnographic narrative and a critical race chronicle, as deliverables to document the "...making sense of what has been learned" (p. 20). Chapter 4 represents the quilting together of the theories, frameworks, and methodologies (the thinking) "to translate what has been learned into a body of textual work that communicates these understandings to the reader" (p. 20). Subsequently, what follows are interpretations of discipline disparity from a black activist mother, research-writer as bricoleur, vantage point.

CHAPTER 4: EXAMINING DISCIPLINE DISPARITY THROUGH COUNTER-NARRATIVE STORYTELLING & AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC NARRATIVE

Through the following storytelling, the reader will encounter policy initiatives, empirical data, reports, and my lived experiences translated into narratives of the problem of inequitable discipline practices. The highly visible matter of discipline disparity is forcing African American students out of schools nationally at disproportionate and disparate rates and thus, is a grave matter of social injustice.

The following critical race narratives is constructed, utilizing counternarrative methodology (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002) and autoethnographic narrative approach. These methodologies serve to assist in translating current research and data into tangible sense making mechanisms. Most significantly, these methods allow the art and imagination of storytelling and story-making (Guajardo & Guajardo, 2010) to be generated through a critical synthesis of current research, data, and my lived experiences as a practitioner. I consider creating counternarratives as a research methodology-a social justice art form to unearth and expose the ties that bind problems in education with notions of race, and actions of racism.

The first narrative, *The Mighty One & The Forgotten One*, an autoethnographic narrative, is about two African American male youth impacted across a spectrum of discipline practices in a public school. Both young men receive special education services that grant them additional processes and procedures before disciplinary actions can be implemented; however, their outcomes, both grave, connected them differently to secondary risk factors.

The second narrative is a fictitious account, based on true events, utilizing counternarrative methodology (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). The chronicle of Coach TJ is a fictitious account of Coach Tyrone Jackson, a doctoral candidate examining the role of

educational leaders reproducing racially inequitable discipline practices in an urban school setting. Tyrone is a former high school and college star athlete, and is currently an administrator at the local high school and coaches the high school football team. He is affectionately known as Coach TJ. In this counternarrative I introduce how the problem of disparate discipline practices might be investigated at the district level and how race and racism play out in the process.

The Might One & The Forgotten One

The school-to-prison pipeline is a trajectory of youth who enter school – some youth as early as preschool, are forced out through disparate discipline practices – and are somehow tracked into the criminal justice system. This form of tracking has been widely documented. I bear witness to this phenomenon in a managerial position, coordinating advocacy services for families of students with disabilities and students within that population that experience discipline referrals. The agency serves the entire state and I serve the families and students located in the western region of this southern state. Specifically, my role consisted of assisting families and in some cases state service agency advocates; to exercise the rights and procedures afforded students under IDEIA³ when discipline practices are enacted. These are processes that often placed me in the throes of sociopolitical conflicts.

Shopping one evening I look up and noticed a very familiar face, we both smile and embrace. I love meeting up with families that I have served while I'm out in the community. I think, because, the experience grounds me. Anyway, we hugged and I ask Dad, "how's my son?" He shares the wonderful updates and thanks me again for aiding his family several months prior with filing a State

³ Reauthorized in 2010: The Individuals with Disabilities and Education and Improvement Act

complaint and advocating for the IDEIA rights afforded their son. I thank him for allowing me to serve them.

My daughters are with me and I can almost anticipate their questions, “who was that, what’s his name, how do you know him, but it was the last question that flung me into my role as black activist mothering. My daughter asked, “do you have a son with that man?” After a hearty laugh, I mean honestly speaking, her facial expression alone, was enough to send me into an uncontrollable fit of laughter. I explained to my daughter that I assisted their family with an issue and most importantly – a life lesson that I desire for her and her siblings to script into their lives – that we are all responsible for each other and our children, so in that regard, he is also my son. She gives me that 7-year old, “huh”, what do you mean face. I expand the lesson explaining that his Mom takes care of his needs and provides for him and nurtures him every day like I do for you. However, if his mom encounters a need that she might not have enough resources to manage and I have those resources; then, I believe in a responsibility to share those resources not like a hand out but like a caregiver, as if he were my own son. I asked her if that explanation made sense. I observed her face; first which revealed that she had achieved a level of understanding that made her comfortable and she was on to the next inquiry.

Black mothers participate in developing the wholistic wellness of spaces, nurture extended family networks, and engage our “outsider within” (Hill Collins, 1990) position in higher education to enhance our political activism efforts. According to Hill Collins (1991), “A substantial portion of Black women’s status in African American communities stems not only

from their roles as mothers in their own families but from their contributions as community othermothers to Black community development as well” (p. 174). So naturally, black activist mothering is the primordial waters⁴ - that ancient mass from which all life formed – that nourish my “worldview and social justice agenda when designing a study, interpreting the results and developing implications that make sense to members of a community who are studied” (Few, 2007, p. 458).

In short, I am demonstrating through this auto-ethnographic report the need to expand the dimensions of knowing to include the unique voice and perspective of a community-centric leader. I intentionally and/both by circumstances live in the margins as both an act of resistance and transformation. Through this situatedness, I observe scholarship and research through critical lenses that hold the Black experience as centric and that place not only “behavior under scrutiny but also the socio-historical context of a specified group or community” (p. Few, 2007, p. 458).

The “Mighty One” entered this world stricken with hemiplegic cerebral palsy that significantly inhibits the mobility and ability on one side of the body making that side less vibrant and functional than the other. His parents and teachers describe him as a great student with some learning delays, with receptive language and vision impairments but, socially adaptable in the school setting. His days that school year were going along nicely, he was very excited about achieving the honor roll and then a new student transfers to the school and is placed in his classroom.

The new student, The Forgotten One, is a ward of the state (That’s why it is not as significant as is who will answer the call to be his keeper.) and for

⁴ See Washington, T. (2010). Nickles in the nation sack: Continuity in Africana spiritual technologies. *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, 5-28.

For a deeper discussion of the primordial waters and the African spiritual system

whatever reasons, does not get along very well with The Mighty One. The two had been engaging in verbal assaults within the classroom off and on and the teacher reported the incidents to Administration (They simply explained, referring to The Forgotten One, “he’s in Foster care” as if that placement negates pouring into his person and providing him access to equitable educational opportunities.).

On this day, matters escalated between The Mighty One and the Forgotten One. While working on worksheets, the Forgotten One walks by and knocks The Mighty One’s papers onto the floor. This happens a couple of times more before The Mighty One gets up from his seat (remember, one side of his body is less functional) to demand that The Forgotten One pickup his papers. The incident continues to escalate with verbal attacks back and forth and then, in the hallway while transitioning, a physical altercation finally erupts.

Two of my sons are subjectively labeled disruptive, mainly because they “developed a fairly sophisticated understanding of the politics of race and community power at an early age” (Townsend Gilkes, 1983, p. 133), and this elevated understanding places them consistently in spaces of strategic resistance with teachers and administrators – spaces they must learn to demonstrate for their peers processes of negotiating and navigating activism as rising social justice leaders.

My eldest son – who is on the mild end of the Autism Spectrum and labeled “intellectually disabled” - has been detained on a corner on a Sunday afternoon because he “fit the description.” He was walking while young, male, and black to the neighborhood grocery

store with his younger brother to buy snacks for his siblings – within the dominant narrative, a proud moment for any mother.

I know what it's like to receive a phone call from a son that the "police" have our brother held on the corner." Strategic, his tone was not excited, not panicking, but a tone of high alert – I know to move swiftly. I race out of the house, jumping down stairs speeding up the street, coming only to a rolling stop at stop signs; and to get to my son to bear witness, to advocate, and to be a black activist mother. Because I am always centric in the community, experiencing (very similar and in some cases mirroring) grave inequity or "sharing its troubles" (Townsend Gilkes, 1983, p. 133), it creates an autoethnographic space where my voice and the ways in which I bear witness and investigate is a lived experience anchored as data. I am an authentic participant observer.

Here's what I learned from speaking with those involved and reading the reports.

The Forgotten One lunges at The Mighty One and knocks him to the floor. The Forgotten One is mildly restrained, continuing to spew threats to The Mighty One while he struggles to get up and gather himself. The administrator is called to the classroom and by her report she arrives in time to block The Forgotten One from lunging at The Mighty One again. The Forgotten One is taken to the office but he must wait for a state official to pick him up. Needless to say, he is in the office so long that the adults have "forgotten" about him even in plain sight. The day progresses on and The Forgotten One is still forgotten...

Meanwhile The Mighty One is lining up at the door to leave for the day and the teacher opens the door and The Forgotten One rushes in towards The Mighty One and just before he can reach him, the administrator grabs The Forgotten One and the class

is quickly escorted out of the room. The administrator reports the incident to the Mighty One's parents and no one learns about The Forgotten One's day.

At our first meeting in my office located in one the historic districts in the city The Might One's parents explain that in their son's statement, he reports that after The Forgotten One knocked him down, he got up and pushed The Forgotten One back; however, the teacher and other students who witnessed the event, report that The Mighty One struggled to get up and never made contact with The Forgotten One after he was knocked down to the floor.

While the Mighty One is a black male youth with a disability; The Forgotten One is a black male youth and a ward of the state. They both have membership in more than one super-subgroup; however, they have very different returns on their social and cultural capital. After the incident, the educational leaders did not meet with The Mighty One to deconstruct the events, nor to hear his thoughts, or assess his needs. Instead, he was turned over to his parents. As for the Forgotten One, he was simply forgotten and expelled away through paperwork that signs him off to another system. The following day after the incident The Mighty One, in secrecy, takes a kitchen paring knife to school (he later reported he wanted to protect himself). The knife was discovered and he was issued a 180 day suspension – an expulsion that removes him from his home school placement and assigns him to an Alternative school. He is yet aware of the hierarchy of value, meaning, he was not aware that his concerns to protect himself were unwarranted as The Forgotten One would not return to school and that he, the Mighty One, had more value that day. The Mighty One has more value because he is not in State

custody, because he goes home to parents, because he has members in the community standing ground on his behalf.

Mom filed an appeal to the suspension – an employee of the school district – and she meets with me and is fearful for her son. Mom explains in the presence of The Mighty One that, “he cannot defend himself, he may have wanted to push the boy but he is unable to...” Mom now cautioning, turns to The Mighty One saying, “be honest with yourself, you know you didn’t push that boy back.” My heart swells and I am holding back the tears, tears I’m gathering for The Mighty One, for The Forgotten One, for Mom and for all the other youth that I can’t catch with my net. I feel like I’m “holding back the ocean with a broom.”⁵

Mom shares her son’s compelling story and my heart begins to ache not like a pain but more like, a sense of spiritual anguish. Behar compares this type of witnessing that to getting “down into the mud” (Behar, 1996, p. 2) with the storytellers emotions, listening, and assisting them with discovering strategies. Behar is describing the “doing” of black activist mothering, the caretaking of experiences, not just people. As a community-centric leader with Black activist mothering roots, I facilitate witnessing, storytelling, activism and scholarship through a cacophony of voices. A process that recognizes those common truths nested within the multiplicity of truths. Here on this fertile ground made rich from the compost of struggle, agitation, harm and discomfort, I operationalize the outsider (strategic critical distance that yields deeper knowing) within a rich and fertile personal knowing. This is my passion and how I show up as a

⁵ See Gilkes, C.T. ‘Holding back the ocean with a broom’: Black women and their community work. In L.R. Rose (Ed.), *The black woman*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1980

community-centric leader in a black activist mothering standpoint is to critically examine problematic phenomena.

I attended the hearing with The Mighty One and his parents; the process was simply a technicality. The hearing body would only decide whether the educational leaders followed protocol and issued an appropriate consequence for the violation. This body would not hear whether the IEP team conducted the Manifestation Determination Hearing appropriately, which they did not... The policy (Zero-Tolerance) and school politics held that the educational leader must only judge the violation, not take all other relevant antecedents along with contextual factors; and definitely not cultural factors into consideration. She seemed to respond from a place of powerlessness; I needed to understand her perception as an African American administrator. I needed to understand if my perception of her exhibiting powerlessness while seated in a position of power was correct. I needed to know whether she felt an obligation to community to be an activist; and if not, then why.

When the hearing official reviewed with the body the determination that The Mighty One's actions were not a manifestation of his disability, the teacher began to cry, the administrator appeared remorseful, never making eye contact. I later assisted the family to file an Administrative Complaint with the State. Mom would have to file a complaint with the state and/or the US Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights.

There are many stories that motivate my work and that serve as incentives to engage in gaining a deep understanding of how what I know rubs up against yet a new discovery that the

“system needs to be jacked up” (Townsend Gilkes, 1983, p. 129). Like, how educational leaders who I perceive to be in a space of authority, the crown of hierarchy and power in the school building, can act, feel and/or react powerless in disrupting practices that reek of inequity (Parker & Stovall, 2004; Stovall, 2010). I have sat with administrators and when speaking about their privilege and power within the structure often make comments like, “my hands are tied.” With a visceral reaction, one educational leader twisted both her arms around and grabbing the outside of each hand, demonstrated a bind.

The hearing officer, a middle aged white male, gave The Mighty One the following advice after upholding the 180 day suspension and placement in an Alternative School. He advised, if someone breaks into your home, you have the right to defend yourself, your family and your home; however, you don't have that right at school.” That advice sent feelings of rage and disbelief through the core of my being and knowing. I knew confidently that I would assist The Mighty One and his family to the next level. I also at that moment thought very compassionately and empathetically about The Forgotten One. I knew the probability of him having a black activist mother on his team was slim to none and that the structure of the system would not allow such an individual from the outside to intervene. No, his black activist mother would have to be the change agent on the inside.

“The low points in any social situation...are when you think you belong and then you realize you don't” (Integrity USA, 2012).

I discovered that I needed more strategic information about what was unfolding in the organization of education and its role in the school-to-prison pipeline. I wanted to know more about the entry points of this metaphorical pipeline. During this career mobility, my social

justice identity as Black activist mothering merged with focused education and dialectical career mobility (Townsend Gilkes, 1983). My experiential knowledge was in an on-going reciprocal relationship with my career development.

Coach TJ, The Taskforce & The War of the Narratives

Coach TJ's doctoral cohort has been invited by the Antebellum School District to assist with developing a strategic plan to address discipline practices. The district has been flagged by the State for facilitating a high racial disparity ratio through discipline practices. Thomas Jefferson Accelerated Academy Middle School suspended 200 students in the month of February of 2012. The Professor gives background on the problem and some information on key committee members.

The Professor:

The Superintendent has asked our cohort to partner with the Districts' school-turn-around Taskforce, assembled as a requirement of a lawsuit which found that the district violated the civil rights of students through inequitable discipline practices. In both the federal Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) report and the state Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS), Antebellum School District was among the top three school districts in the state with the highest rate of African American students suspended and/or expelled in the previous school year. Thomas Jefferson K-8 Academy last school year in the month of February had a rate of suspensions/expulsions of African American students that was three times the total number of African American students enrolled in the district. Colleagues, let's stop and process the data for just a moment...

The State is requiring that ASD examine current discipline practices for potential Civil Rights violations. While ASD as a whole is being monitored by the DOE Office of Civil Rights, Antebellum Middle has the largest disproportionate rate and racial disparity in the practice of discipline in the district. Because of the success of our social justice learning and design research model, the Superintendent has asked that practitioners from this cohort assist the Taskforce with designing a process for improvement.

We will all go over to Thomas Jefferson Academy today for our initial meeting. Coach TJ along with Emily and Robin will be the on-site support team for all other meetings. The rest of us will act as the external critical friends examining the issues and findings generated by the taskforce. So, a little background on the Taskforce committee members: Alison Parker is the Assistant Director of Federal Programs, Grants, & Compliance for the district, and a 2009-2011 Nicene Institute for Urban Education Fellow. Ms. Parker holds a JD and worked in the District Attorney Office under Juvenile Justice and Truancy before being accepted into the Nicene Institute Residency in Urban Education. For those of us not familiar with the Nicene Institute, it's a management development program that trains recent graduate students with at least two years' work experience to be placed in management positions within the central offices of urban school districts.

The other members are Dr. Linda Thomas, Director of Exceptional Children; Richard Stevenson, Chief of School Safety, Security and Emergency Management. Just a side note here colleagues, last year, Richard Stevenson led

the political battle to acquire licensure for Antebellum School District Security to become an independent police force. Ok, next, Mrs. Catherine Matthews, State PTA Representative; Dr. Louisa Martinez, Director of English Language Learners Services; and finally, Khadijah Saleem, Executive Director of Urban Youth Empowerment. Khadijah Saleem is a scholar practitioner, and a graduate of the predecessor of this very program. She is a proponent for urban school equity with very close ties to the Jefferson Academy community.

The Professor: *Coach, you have worked with Dr. Khadijah Saleem, is that right?*

Coach TJ:

Yes, wow, I was in the first cohort of UYE Sankofa Fellows. The project was very successful, and short-lived...

The Professor:

Yes, Dr. Saleem in our many conversations, often speaks of the lack of success with various initiatives at Jefferson as the rug being pulled from under Jefferson Academy. Please, Coach, give us some background?

Coach TJ:

The Sankofa Fellowship recruited teacher candidates from HBCU's - historically black colleges and universities placed these candidates in urban schools. Jefferson was the flagship site and was set to serve as the model after the two-year pilot. The district designated Jefferson a "Teaching Academy" where teacher candidates could gain real world teaching experience and culturally relevant strategies as a professional development on-site. Dr. Saleem brought in veteran teachers and top ranked scholars to participate in the program. While I was a fellow, "the" Dr. Rosa Tubman, whose pivotal and seminal work cultivated

what we know as urban educational leadership, spent her sabbatical at Jefferson Teaching Academy. At the end of year two, the school board pulled the funding for the pilot.

The Professor:

Ok colleagues, any questions? If not, we will adjourn and meet at Jefferson Academy

The cohort reconvenes in the conference room at Jefferson Academy. The deputy superintendent, Mr. Lieber, who ironically served as the middle school principal when Coach TJ was in middle school and who in one year suspended Coach TJ 57 times, facilitates the meeting, makes introductions, and opens the floor for discussion. Coach and the superintendent have been engaged in several organic conversations about equity and place since Coach started the doctoral program. Mr. Lieber makes the introductions, and the following dialogue ensues:

Alison Parker:

How does the federal government propose that we deal with this situation, which is clearly driven by cultural issues? Let's see, the Middle School is designated Title I; 81% of the students are recipients of the Free and/or Reduced Lunch program and 92% come from families identified as low socioeconomic status who reside in Eastgate Federal Housing. Oh, and a third of those numbers are super subgroup kids receiving special education services.

The rest of the committee members are silent or nodding in agreement. Alison Parker continues:

The Superintendent is fully aware of the cultural and social issues of these kids and the dysfunctional issues they bring with them from home and community. I mean honestly speaking, are we really expected to repair the social and culture deficits along with being accountable for their educational deficits? So tell us,

what's the next new and dazzling methodology that you are proposing and I'm sure you have factored in how teachers are going to squeeze whatever it is... in with the educational and effectiveness mandates? Oh, and what of the budget?

Richard Stevenson:

Right...I mean the district provides breakfast, lunch and now dinner, along with wellness exams. What are the parents responsible to provide? I understand, really I do, but I spend time with these kids and their parents, well usually just the mom or the grandmother because the father is not necessarily in the picture. A high percentage of these kids have at least one incarcerated parent. Some of them get in trouble on purpose because at least at juvenile detention they get a good meal, place to sleep, and structure. How are we supposed to fix that, which in my opinion is the real cause of why only certain kids are receiving referrals?

We create our reality by describing it but what happens when the reality we try to describe conflicts with the stories created by others? To put it bluntly, there is war: an ideological war. In the war between stories, narratives that seek to *justify* why things are the way they are do battle against narratives that seek to *interrogate* why things are the way they are (Zamudio, et al., 2011, p. 124).

Khadijah leans forward, crosses her arms and rest on the table, as if settling her temperament, a preparation process. She looks at Alison Parker and then pans the rest of the table:

*Are we suggesting black kids and their families are inherently "problems?"
It has been my experience that when Low SES is discussed it is code
for...generational welfare black mothers (some drug addicted) breeding with
absentee criminal black fathers who produce criminally prone black babies - who*

are destined to low achievement. Free/Reduced Lunch is code for...criminal black babies who come to school with intellectual deficits, developmentally and socially bankrupt, and destined to develop into the black "super-predator" (for boys) or black aggressive and promiscuous teen mothers; participating in a continuous Eugenics cycle of grossly deficient and/or dysfunctional narratives? We are here because ASD is currently being monitored for the possible Civil Rights violation of its students, who are disproportionately African American male youth? This is not a situation that is only occurring in the ASD, it's a national problem that has been tracked since the first study conducted by Children's Defense Fund in the early 70's. While low SES and cultural misunderstandings are variables, these factors do not explain the intractability and longevity of the problem. We know this from the most recent data on discipline disparity. This is a high leverage civil rights issue, which means we must investigate the inequity within the problem. I am challenging this committee to be courageous enough to investigate the social justice issues embedded in this problem and the systemic issues influencing the problem of race and discipline practices.

My social justice identity is shaped by black activist mothering, an intentional and strategic “getting down” with community work, meaning strategically and purposefully moving between systems – as people, structures and communities – as a means to respond and to transport tools (tangible deliverables) of teaching and learning. How I exercise my social justice identity is by examining matters of social injustice through lenses that make central race, space, and relationships. Showing up as a black activist mother – a critical perspective that intersects

race, class and gender – enriches the task of decoding research into tangible actions for educational leadership. Ball (2012) suggests research models that incorporate a mediator to serve in the function of decoder. The mediator is a research practitioner who “translates the research into reports, policies, research materials, and professional development programs” (p. 286) that can be absorbed by practitioners.

...[black women as] community workers also discovered more of the social structure or ‘the system’ that they were trying to change. They discovered the effects of ‘the system’ [on the black community and] on other ‘people of color.’
(Townsend Gilkes, 1983, p. 124)

We examine problems of practice as a system that is embedded in other systems and structures of inequity. In the case of racially inequitable discipline practices, this system of practice is embedded in urban schools, embedded in the system of education as an enterprise, all embedded in historical systems of racial harm. The Deputy Superintendent jumps in with nervous laughter sensing the tension as discomfort is building:

Good stuff. I would like our discussion, and the questions raised here today to set the foundation for our next meeting. I also would like to share a story to perhaps set the tone for next time. I was the Assistant Principal when Coach was in middle school in this district. Under my tenure, I personally suspended him, literally pushed him out of school, 57 times in one school year.

Everyone looks over at Coach TJ. The Deputy Superintendent:

Coach, please remind me what grade that was for you?

Coach TJ:

That was my seventh grade year.

The Deputy Superintendent:

Right, my actions impacted his 8th grade achievement marker because he subsequently, failed 7th grade that year. However he sits before you today as a colleague, as a respected community member, and a highly rated educational leader. I want this taskforce to reconvene, prepared to engage in the hard work of relationship building. I would like you to first work amongst one another at this table and then work to design a sustainably transformative response that weaves and mends the torn relationships between schools and community.

The *Chronicle of Coach TJ, The Taskforce, & The War of the Narratives* intentionally problematizes the notion of a collaborative team of stakeholders coming together to investigate a complex and complicated phenomenon with multiple social and cultural dynamics. Looking back at the research practice gap reviewed in Chapter 2 then, this critical race storytelling can serve to demonstrate what normative disagreements (Ball, 2010, p. 288) and being engaged in the human side of change process (Langley, et al., 2009) might look like.

Below, I borrow a quote from one of the participants in Townsend-Gilkes' (1983) study (black women engaged in community work in urban neighborhoods between 1970 – 1980) to triangulate what is currently known about black students and disparate discipline practices with the knowing of black mothers engaged in community work during the 1970 – 1980 time period. At the time of the study, this participant would have been between 60 – 70 years old.

The elder is telling a story about a community center that provided wraparound services. In course of providing these services in the community, the elder discovered that Black youth were being pushed out of school through discipline practices:

The case loads at the center became quickly unbearable because people said, ‘Gee, they will help you.’ And interestingly enough, I think it was the best total example of how change can be brought about that comes from a day by day experience in the community. All of our workers soon began to see, whether they were the legal people, or the mental health people, or the casework people, or the public health people, that black kids were being pushed out of school. If they acted out behaviorally, it was easy enough for the public schools to say they didn’t fit in so, in a sense, they pushed them out. (Townsend Gilkes, 1983, p. 128)

Conclusion: The War of Narratives & Educational Leadership

Schools are viewed as critical public pedagogy where school leaders are informed and/or influenced by a school district and its board policies; culture and politics; but also by community and social agencies outside the school building. School leaders find themselves governed and politically beholden to not only the school district but also local and both national funding organizations (Stovall, 2010). I argue that in these current school spaces we can locate the “war of narratives,” an ideological war described by Zamudio and colleagues (2011) as unfolding during partnerships of power interrogations. The casualties of this war are stuck efforts that fail to mature into improvement and continue to reproduce and legitimate inequity in practice and knowledge systems.

How do we find remedies if the present structural inequity is not transformed? How do we make a way out of no way? How do we as social justice practitioners engage in reflective advocacy, resistance, and critical dialogue that situate the practitioner within the problem? How do schools, community, and academy partnerships both demonstrate and design models of fearless listening and speaking? What would such a model look like?

Here's what we know about educational leadership in general; that research, centering education leaders in relation to discipline disparity must be explored more critically (Giroux, 1992; Riehl & Firestone, 2005). In general, we simply don't know enough about what educational leaders know and the ways in which they are making sense of phenomena. Specifically, the literature is very limited on the ways in which educational leadership is involved with the disparity crisis of discipline practices in schools nationally as an example.

Are educational leaders being prepared to be facilitators, navigators, and translators of public pedagogies and educational research? Have we expanded the knowledge system of educational leadership to include collaborative community-engagement that is genuine and effective?

The tenets illustrated throughout this chapter are anchored to my lived experiences and provide a framework that speak to how my social justice identities and ways of understanding and producing knowledge inform (a) how I see the problem of discipline disparities in schools; (b) why I foreground race and racism as central to the inquiry; (c) legitimate the significance of expanding the research table to include community-centric leaders; and (d) the call to develop community engaged educational leadership.

SECTION III: GENERATIVE INNOVATIONS FOR EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

...from the bottom up

CHAPTER 5: THE SANKOFA PROJECT



Figure 3: Sankofa Adinkra Symbol West Africa

“return and get it”

wisdom, learning from the past

The implied meaning of Sankofa is using past experiences to build the future (Adinkra Index, 2001-2007).

The idea of returning to retrieve something, or someone, or some purpose to engage past, present and future learning, is profound. For example, embedded in the notion of returning to my experience as an instructor at the Summer Peacebuilding Institute for this work, is also a returning to the program that issued to me a Masters of Arts in 2009 – a key stop, on my current “focused education” journey. Secondly, participating in the Northeast North Carolina Community Learning Exchange and traveling to Oxford, NC, is a returning to my Ancestral roots, where my maternal grandmother grew up and met her husband, my maternal grandfather. This is also the place my maternal great-grandmother spoke to me about on many nights as she prepared me for bed. This returning in particular, holds a special significance – it foregrounds

my ancestral knowledge systems as the informants of the epistemological and ontological vantage points of this work.

Once I called the Sankofa Adinkra Symbol – a symbolic system of storytelling, dilemma tales and guidance as we grow and develop (Adinkra Index, 2001-2007) – I realized that I was returning in multiple ways and retrieving multiple perspectives and multiple stories across time, space and place. In this chapter, I will draw upon my community-based experiences and foreground those knowledge systems as the informing agents of a working model for generative, innovative leadership. I do so by 1) drawing upon my observations as a participant observer in the Northeast North Carolina Community Learning Exchange; and 2) drawing upon my observations as co-instructor of an advance restorative justice course for Masters level practitioners this past summer. This design for action foregrounds race and racism, speaks to the role of educational leadership, the role of community, and the influence of the research-practice gap on the ways in which discipline practices are enacted with African American youth.

We left off in Chapter 4 with Coach TJ and a few of his colleagues coming back to serve as facilitators of the Taskforce meetings. Imagine Coach TJ and his colleagues with the goal to transform the Taskforce into a schools, academy, community critical collaborative. They go to the research and begin by utilizing recommendations from the Discipline Disparity Research-to-Practice Collaborative as guiding principles to “develop thick critical descriptions of phenomena and to uncover how things are understood from the perspective of those who are mostly directly affected” (Zamudio, et al., 2011, p. 118).

As a way toward improving the problem of racially inequitable discipline practices, what scholarship, tools, and processes might Coach TJ and his colleagues – as future educational leaders – seek to translate and then activate the following recommendations:

(a) the need for more and deeper research; **(b) educational leaders to be included as relevant stakeholders;** **(c) “critical” research-practice gaps exist;** **(d) the need to expand the inquiry table;** **(e) investigating how restorative justice might be utilized;** and **(f) race matters**

I have spoken and demonstrated that knowing that a problem exists and delivers inequitable results is not enough to neither transform nor eradicate the practice. Similarly, critically thinking about instances/issues/problems of practice is not necessarily enough to produce sustainable transformative change. I am responding to the challenge that neither knowing nor critical thinking alone are enough to bring improvement to instances/issues/problems of education practice. Subsequently, I respond through a design thinking process. I am thinking heuristically with critical race and black activist mothering lenses about bringing improvements that will lessen the impact of discipline disparity on black youth. I utilize community-based strategies as the center stone of knowledge production.

Quilting into this qualitative bricolage De Bono’s notion of making critical thinking actionable and Kleining & Witts’ (2000, 2001) scholarship on the qualitative heuristic approach, I expand the critical inquiry of this thinking design into action. De Bono states, “Critical thinking alone is reactive in that it lacks the creative elements necessary for social progress [that is equitable]” (DeBono, 1984, p. 16). His work around heuristic thinking processes, critical thinking and educational leadership encourages scholar practitioners to make critical thinking

actionable by engaging the “breadth” of our own perceptions as front-end work; work he describes as “developing a perceptual map” (De Bono, 1984, p. 16).

Next we engage the perceptions or dominant narratives informing the instances/issues/problems of practice being investigated to initiate change, a process De Bono describes as “using the [perceptual] map to discover solutions” (De Bono, 1984, p. 16). Throughout the investigation the scholar practitioner is leaning through emergent, iterative and reflexive processes to map the perceptions unfolding and being unearthed. We then are capable of pushing those discoveries around the corner of critical social change that is both equitable and sustainable.

Kleining and Witt (2000, 2001) give us a tool to assist with pushing those discoveries. The qualitative heuristic approach is a response their argument that research “should be directed toward discoveries rather than reflexive interpretations” (2001 p. 1). Hence, because as De Bono argues, critical thinking is not enough. The authors give four rules of qualitative heuristic approaches that transforms the reflexive introspection of the research-practitioner; the other and data into an actionable process that is “not linear but dialectical” (Kleining & Witt, 2000, p. 3). The four rules are listed below in a table:

Figure 4: The Four Rules of Qualitative Heuristic Approach (Kleining & Witt, 2000)

RULES OF THE QUALITATIVE HEURISTICS APPROACH

(Kleining & Witt, 2000, p. 2)

1. The Practitioner is open and accepts that his/her beliefs/ideas/notions must shift and move with the data.

2. The instance/issue/problem is fluid.
3. Data collection processes are multi-perspective, multi-method, multi-variable.
4. Analysis seeks to discover common ground among diverse and varied data.

Working with this agenda as discovery and exploration, I am in dialogue with self, others and with what I am learning. Applying the rules of qualitative heuristics allow for critical interrogation of the practitioner and my discoveries “in a similar way one may ask a person, receiving “answers” and questioning again” (Kleining & Witt, 2000, p. 2).

What follows are qualitative tools, strategies and processes deployed to build tangible mechanisms. The conceptual map in Figure 5 is built upon throughout this section, adding on the discoveries harvested from each learning process. This can produce deliverables that can be taken up by others who desire to join this work toward improving discipline disparity; or other racialized instances/issues/problems of practices.

The Re-Imagining

Rule one of the qualitative heuristics approach calls on the practitioner-researcher to be open and accepting that what is known, believed, and perceived, must shift and move with the data as needed. The data calls for action designing that can “speak back” to the research practice gap explored in Chapter 2 and; that take up recommendations from the Discipline Disparity Research-to-Practice Collaborative – a multidisciplinary research practice collaboration. Re-imagining ideas that expand research-to-practice processes can look like a “Critical Educational Leadership Community Learning Exchange,” hereafter the CEL-CLE. The CEL-CLE can be

imagined as a design thinking idea born from my experiences; boundary spanning between schools, academy, and community. The CEL-CLE is democratic and genuinely, participatory. Consequently, the CEL-CLE emerged while interrogating discipline disparity, educational leadership, and authentic community engagement. The CEL-CLE as the deliverable is a fluid process not an event meaning. It is a way of thinking about critical educational leadership and authentic community engagement as a response to problems of practice enacted in school settings like, disparate discipline practices. I have come to learn that problems of practice unfolding in school settings are merely a thread to follow – a thread, leading to instances/issues. These are instances/issues that must be named by the communities which grow and develop the students impacted.

The CEL-CLE is designed to function as a third space for “community-engaged” research. This is a space defined by Stovall (2010) as aligned to activist scholarship, engaged research, and participatory action research (PAR) methods and integrated with “...the day-to-day community work, [and] with research to address the issues and concerns expressed by those communities in relationship to education” (p. 411). Routledge (1996) draws our attention to a notion of research practitioners who engage in matters of social justice and do so in a space of activist and a defined academic space.

This “third space” (Routledge, 1996, p. 399) functions as a critical engagement opportunity to “live theory and as well as write about it” (p. 403). He argues that the two spaces – activist and academic – are interwoven and can influence one another in important ways” (p. 399); however, there is a disconnect “between the academy and the lives of the people it professes to represent” (p. 400). Routledge is bringing to our attention a vital research-practice gap in educational leadership. There is a need for processes that make central competencies in

activism, school – community relationship building, and authentic community engagement within educational leadership candidacy (Katz, 1994).

Pulling together Stovall and Routledge then, the idea of the CEL-CLE can serve as a critical space where the scholars as activist working alongside community folk can serve as both designers and researchers to improve problems of practice. An act of internal and external liberation as the oppressed activates his/her empowerment and succinctly liberates systems from delivering inequitable outcomes (Freire, 1970). The CEL-CLE took shape as a discovery from interrogating a participant observation experience with a Community Learning Exchange process.

The Community Learning Exchange Model

The Community Learning Exchange, hereafter the CLE, concept was born out of leadership work conducted by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. The Kellogg Leadership for Community Change (KLCC) is a leadership design to test the impact of place-based, collective leadership across racial, class and age boundaries on transformative sustainable change in communities. Through a successful leadership development process, it was discovered that only 35% of the participants of the leadership development program stayed rooted and engaged in their local community (The Community Learning Exchange, 2013, p. 8). Seeking to improve the local retention rate of community centered leadership, the KLCC made improvements on their design by creating a process “to promote community-based collective leadership that was rooted in communities,” a design that began with 11 communities.

The communities from the improved model partnered with the Institute for Educational Leadership and the Center for Ethical Leadership and established The Community Learning Exchange. The following are the core methodologies of the CLE

CLE Core Methodologies (The Community Learning Exchange, 2013)

1. Collective Leadership

The CLE define Collective Leadership as a diverse group of people working together in partnership to make a difference in their communities.

2. Gracious Space

The CLE define Gracious Space as a way of establishing trust and creating a safe space to engage honestly. The major tenets of Gracious Space are: Spirit, Setting, Invite the Stranger, Learn in Public.

3. Storytelling

The CLE define storytelling as a process that allows participants to share wisdom of place and culture.

4. Theory of Change

The CLE define Theory of Change as a reimagining a process of discovering new pathways and different ways of thinking to achieve desired outcomes.

Each CLE method is operationalized utilizing various pedagogies to facilitate the goal of the process. For example, appreciative inquiry is a method of inquiry that first appreciates what is present and then asks what more is needed. Or circle processes defined by the CLE as “a space that lifts the barriers between people, opening up fresh possibilities for connections and understanding... [in order] to change one’s relationship with oneself, to the community and to

the wider universe” (The Community Learning Exchange, 2013). These are two examples of pedagogical processes utilized to facilitate creating the outcomes of the core CLE methodologies. The discoveries from the rich experience at the Northeastern North Carolina CLE, *Looking Back to Move Forward: Leading for School, Family and Community Healing in 2013* serve as learning that informs the design of the CEL-CLE.

Serendipity: 2013 NC CLE

The Northeastern North Carolina CLE convened in Whitaker, North Carolina on a historical site, a former school that educated colored students and prior to that, served as a specialized plantation. This former plantation is where slave owners sent their “unruly slaves,” where a large tree served as the whipping post, and where acres of cotton cascaded across the fields, in its full blooming season – *I heard just as clear, my thoughts say ‘picking’ but we don’t pick cotton anymore* – ready for harvesting.

The CLE preparation process is as follows:

During the pre-planning process of the CLE local teams are identified and invited to conversation with the national CLE team to identify a practice issue impacting their community or that the community of learners want to explore deeper with colleagues locally and nationally. Identification of this issue then informs the invitation to participants, the planning of curriculum and the resources needed to host the CLE convening.

The local team consisted of professors and students of a graduate educational leadership program, who live and work as educational leaders in the neighboring communities. A major criterion of the CLE is the team composition, which must include youth, community, school, and

academy folks. Several teams answered the call of the Northeastern North Carolina CLE from various parts of the country as far northwest as Wisconsin, as far south as Florida and as far west as California. Once in Whitaker, the teams convene together participating in the welcoming and orientation and then as a large community in the opening circle.

These processes initiate the context and tone of the weekend, weaving into each process the theme of the CLE. The teams were divided into groups, representative of different teams to visit local communities. Each group – and we only learned of the community we would visit after we arrived – was led by guides from the host team and met with local folks at the site. I traveled with the group that visited Oxford, North Carolina; a location that served to situate my experience literally and metaphorically within the context of the symbol for the NC CLE, the Sankofa bird – a version of the Adinkra symbology, meaning “return and get it” or learn from the past.

I was returning by fate of a focused education to gain a deeper and richer understanding of how my grandparents and great-grandparents and their families survived, so that I can continue to thrive. I was also returning to gain information that enriches my ways of understanding the community work. The group was diverse racially, ethnically, gendered, and generationally. What was less obvious included social, economic, and ability diversity; and I would argue that a diversity of perspectives could have been more robust.

So, Looking Back to Move Forward...

Each team member was given the book, *Blood Done Sign My Name* by Timothy B. Tyson as a gathering gift but it also set the historical backdrop of Oxford, preparing those of us visiting this site for the context of racial tension.

Oxford, NC, served as the incubator for my great-grandmother's siblings who became master builders and caregivers at the segregated orphanage for black boys. In fact, Oxford is where my grandmother met my grandfather. My grandmother's aunt and husband cared for her while her mother, my great-grandmother, worked for the tobacco mill in Winston Salem, NC. Racial tensions have been festering in Oxford since before Jim Crow.

Benjamin Chavis, who comes from a lineage of freedom fighters, black activist mothers and civil rights activists and who became an educator and a prominent figure serving with Dr. Martin Luther King during the Civil Rights Movement is from Oxford, NC, with strong thick family roots (Tyson, 2004).

John Chavis, the great-great-grandfather of Benjamin Chavis, was born free in 1763. He became an educator of whites and blacks, a minister, and a soldier during the American Revolutionary War. It was through Jim Crow legislation in North Carolina that he lost his right to "preach and teach" (Tyson, 2004, p. 132) along with his land by 1836. There's a story handed down through the Chavis lineage that in 1838, John Chavis was beaten to death because he refused to stop preaching, and teaching black folks (Tyson, 2004). However it was the murder of Henry Marrow, a black man shot in the head by a white storeowner and left "begging for his life" (p. 1) in the street of the local black community in 1970, that seemed to be the focus of this visit.

For the community experience, our group visited the former home – now a museum – of Dr. George Clayton Shaw, founder of the Mary Potter Academy, the meeting and rendezvous point for our journey into Oxford. The community walk was led by a black woman who I identify as a living-breathing example of Omolades' griot-historian.

Omolade describes the black woman who is also a griot-historian in the West as “a symbolic conveyor of African oral and spiritual traditions of the entire community...a scholar in any discipline who connects, uses, and understands the methods and insights of both Western and African world-views and historical perspectives” (Omolade B. , 1990, p. 284). I identified her to be a daughter of the community; I sensed this by the ways she spoke of and to the elders and her mannerism while in their presence.

This griot-historian was well versed on the history of the community, the town and the culture; articulating key historical facts on our walking tour of downtown Oxford. Two key learning moments of the tour where I engaged discoveries (1) the statue and (2) the closing circle with the elders in Oxford, NC, brought my awareness to what more might be needed in a shared learning exchange with educational leaders as scholar-practitioners designing critical collaborations.

1.1.1.7 The Statue

The statue was of a confederate soldier, a very large bronze artifact that I remember as monument size.

In 1909, the Granville Grays chapter of the Daughters of the Confederacy, in Oxford, NC, purchased the thirty-foot bronze statue of a Confederate soldier and planted his feet atop a high pedestal of local granite in the center of Oxford.
(Tyson, 2004, p. 162)

The griot-historian narrated that the statue was moved from the center of town. Tyson describes the position, place and discourse of the statue as, “standing guard in front of the courthouse... [t]he monument faced forever north, the majority of whites believed, because the

boys who'd worn the gray had never run from the damn Yankees" (Tyson, 2004, p. 162). The day of Henry Marrow's funeral in 1970, civil rights activist Golden Frinks speaks about the Confederate soldier statue in the center of town. Tyson writes, "[t]he monument needed to be moved he said, 'because it's a stigma, because it stands for hundreds of years of a repressive period – slavery, segregation, Jim Crow, discrimination, bigotry, and all that complicity of keeping a people down'" (p. 163). Now, 90 plus years later, I'm staring up at the 30 foot bronze statue on a granite pedestal in front of the small public library, thinking..."*this is traumatic and both symbolic*" and as a symbol continued to cause visceral reactions, the statue still shook the black folks.

The statue appeared to reflect disempowerment in 2013, among the local folks and the visiting CLE folks alike. Its historical ties and wounds were somehow quilted together with the wounds of Henry Marrow's murder. When asked about the storeowners that murdered Henry, the griot-historian let us know they were still around and that justice had been eluded. So, I started to envision the types of critical pedagogies, artifacts and tools that might be needed for the CEL-CLE when issues of historical and structural harms are interwoven with the work. It is during this reflection point discoveries are revealing the CLE as a pre-planning process to foster a strategic space for the "war of narratives" (Zamudio, Russell, Rios, & Bridgeman, 2011) and "normative disagreements" (Ball, 2012) to unfold.

1.1.1.8 The Closing Circle at Oxford

The elder was described by Tyson as "a graceful, broad-shouldered man, born in 1942 in a shotgun house across from the jail" (Tyson, 2004, p. 164). Tyson continues "[n]othing in my family's history – nothing in American history, for that matter prepared my father for Black

Power in the manner of... [this elder]" (p. 167). After sitting in a circle process with the elder, listening to his storytelling, and later speaking with him on the phone, I totally agree with the authors' description. I will add that not only is this elder dynamic in the ways in which he renders accounts of history, place, and space but also, I argue, he is raising up a unique voice, a perspective that is overlooked, minimized or even ridiculed. I personally identify with that unique voice, a voice described in my context as those "loud black girls" or the "angry black woman." The elders' voicing his autoethnographic report about the racial tensions in Oxford contained discourse that is rejected and silenced – he is speaking about those historical instances/issues/problems that are to remain seen but not heard. He is challenging the dominant voice in ways that are uneasy and uncomfortable.

The NC CLE group that traveled to Oxford was a mix of veteran national team members, veteran CLE participants, first-timers like me, and local folks. However, it appeared that the team really did not have enough tools to hear appreciatively the elder's truth. The following quote by the elder in *Blood Done Signed My Name* is an example of how he spoke – sternly and purposefully – and what he spoke about in our closing circle:

I was doing that stuff back then, sit-ins and marches and all the rest and nowadays nobody even knows what it was like. People right now think that the white man opened up his drug-store and said, 'Y'all come on in now, integration done come,' but every time a door opened, somebody was kicked in the butt; somebody was knocked around – you better believe it. You didn't get it for free. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 had been a good thing... [The elder] conceded, but it was the determination of local citizens, not the legislation itself, that made the new law meaningful. Law or no law... [The elder] spat, somebody still had to go in there

and get kicked in the ass. And by the time they killed Dickie Marrow nobody was having that shit anymore. We was about ready to kick some ass our own selves.

(Tyson, 2004, p. 166)

The Oxford CLE group traveled by way of caravan; folks caught rides with those who drove to the NC CLE. I rode with a national CLE team member, a veteran CLE participant and another first-timer. One of the folks in the car I traveled in was a professor and the other two, white women – all very friendly – were very open and friendly. On the travel to Oxford we discussed coffee rituals, family heritage, the cotton and our excitement about the CLE. The ride back however started with thick air. The air was so thick you could have cut it with a knife. This is how my grandmother would have described the tension.

I was the last person to make it back to the car because I stayed back listening to the elder while others seemed to slowly distance themselves from him. The elder, aware of the distancing, spoke about folks having a difficult time hearing his truth. He shared with a few of us brave enough to sit with his storytelling how he was running for a city office and that folks asked him why was he running. His response, “because my daddy couldn’t do it.” I felt uneasy when I finally made it back to the car and it felt like my travel companions were also feeling uneasy.

The Veil: Seeing the System of Racism

I remember thinking, “*I need to pass through the veil. I need to speak through this discomfort. I need to engage a conversation* because other narratives are at play, informing and influencing the relationships of us as participants.

Community workers’ careers became like Ezekiel’s entry into the Valley of the Dry Bones. They discovered that one problem was related to another problem

and that these problems were tied to some basic faults of the dominant social structure (Townsend Gilkes, 1983, p. 128)

The above quote from *Going up for the Oppressed*, reflects that community workers are capable of understanding that structural forces that often undergird inequities in the community. Another unique discovery found that the Black women community workers that came from working class backgrounds because of their experience both in traditional education settings and in settings rooted in the community "...were also more apt at...seeing the system" (Townsend Gilkes, 1983, p. 128) than their middle class community worker counterparts. It is through my experiences with being groomed to be a proverb master and a street wisdomkeeper, sharpened my capability to "see the system" in operation. I also learned how to pass through the veil whole, intact, not leaving any parts of my "self" in the void. Navigating between veils to learn and transport knowledge, requires an intense seeing and requires the entire body to see the system of the problem and how that system is informed by and nested within structural and historical systems.

The veils separating systems are not unlike the veil reflected on by W.E.B Dubois in his seminal work, *The Souls of Black Folks*. He spoke intensely about the discomfort of this ethereal type space, which he named "double consciousness," separating the socially constructed white world from the black world. He discussed the ways in which black folks learn to manage living within both worlds and passing back and forth between these worlds. The veil "operates at the personal or intrapsychic and at the institutional or structural level of social interaction" (Winant, 2004, p. 1).

During the Ancestor Dubois' lifework, his notion of the veil made several transformations informed by scholarship, his experiences, and how he viewed the changing

social landscape of America. The veil is a metaphorical image for race and racism that began as a thin viscous film. Then, it became a type of barrier that one could see through and that could be removed. By his later years the veil looked more like Ladson-Billings' (2012) "dark glass;" as a metaphor to describe the unhealthy co-dependent relationship of education and racism. The veil transformed again for Dubois to a barrier unable to be seen through and unable to be lifted. The latter veil forces Blacks to sterilize and remove all socially stigmatized coloring agents from their souls, a "compulsory abandonment of blackness and black identity" (Winant, 2004, p. 3).

My work, informed by Black feminist tools, the veil shifts from a metaphor of a barrier to be lifted or shattered to one that can be passed through. The veil operates at the micro-level of identity, where we experience the divisions and struggles within the racialized self [and at]...a macro-social understanding...level of the social whole, the collectivity, the state, history, the nation of racism" (Winant, 2004, p. 6). Shifting the metaphor of the veil as a space to pass through and between we see the othered moving as an outsider within carrying messages and possibilities back and forth between individuals, systems, structures, and histories. The double consciousness then, functions as a portal that exposes the learning of the othered, transforming the experience of marginalization to an asset.

Black women who are leaders as community work; intentionally live in the margins as an act of resistance and transformation, are community-centric, and their work is community-engaged. This kind of work is described by Thomas, et al. (2004) as "incorporating neutral and liberal gender roles and expectations, Afrocentric values of collective survival, emotional vitality, African-centric spiritualism, oral tradition, role sharing, nurturing relationships both within and extended from the family, and a being orientation to time" (p. 427). In other words, the trick or key is to remain grounded as to not get lost within the veil; unable to hold nor

transport a voice of equity between levels – simply taking on whichever voice is dominant.

Townsend Gilkes (1983) discovered that black women doing community accessed “strategies to maintain commitment and ties to the community” (p. 115) to remain grounded and to keep us healthy and whole as we participate in activism – resistant to becoming fragmented as the pass between the veil.

Once I have a clear vision of the system, I can facilitate a process to then translate what I’m learning from the theory and policy dimensions where the system is operationalized. In this step of facilitating knowledge, I am intentionally engaged in genuine reciprocity of knowledge production with community-centric leaders engaged in the problem and/or engaged in the community where the problem is generating.

The Analysis

The analysis is a combination of observations and an autoethnographic report from the NC CLE; critical introspection of my situatedness; and interpreting literature about race relations in Oxford as a means to triangulate my thinking. To employ the art of triangulating, these learning and discoveries are not as Denzin (1994) notes to be “...a tool or a strategy of validation, but an alternative to validation...that adds rigor, breadth and depth to any investigation” (p. 17). I also apply Farmer’s framing of bricoleurs engaged in processes of public discourse; and points from Sheldon George’s⁶ scholarship because of his analysis around

⁶ Sheldon George is assistant professor in the English Department at Simmons College. He teaches courses in both literature and theory, concentrating on American and African-American literature from the antebellum period to present. His courses have a focus on the deeper understanding of the relationship between literature, culture, and identity. In the spring of 2001, published *Trauma and the Conservation of African-American Racial Identity* in *The Journal for the Psychoanalysis of Culture & Society*. He continued this work on trauma and identity completing his doctoral dissertation titled, *Traumatic Attachments: a Lacanian Analysis of African-American Racial Identity* in 2005 at Boston College.

trauma, history, identity and culture to deepen where my thinking is going about the CEL-CLE toolbox.

Does bricolage have anything to suggest about the activist and advocacy work that many of us conduct in our local communities, including the various forms of engaged scholarship that we undertake? (Farmer, 2013, p. 151)

First, I apologized to my travel companions for holding up the travel and received what I remember as a dry acknowledgement and a statement about the elders desires to continue to be in conversation with me specifically. Then I spoke about the difficulty of the work we do, to sit with discomfort and to be willing to honor a multiplicity of truths even when we might not agree. I remember making that statement more than once in different ways before the air thinned and my travel companions joined in to begin a process of repair, processing and deconstructing through dialogue.

To facilitate the car ride back to the NC CLE gathering point, I went into my bricoleur bag of tools, strategies and processes and pulled out my expertise with restorative justice and quilted it to "...the act of centering our work in cultural practices that honor and respect what we know and are as African people generally and as Black feminist scholars more particularly" (Dillard, 2008, p. 286). Additionally, accessing the second rule of the qualitative heuristic approach – remain focused that instances/issues/problems are fluid – set the tone for modeling the process of remaining engaged in dialogue through a cacophony of narratives and in the midst of chaotic thoughts.

The car became a public space to engage in public discourse around the discomfort that storytelling about the “traumatic-reals” anchored to historic brutality that are personal, historical and always political. Farmer reminds me that, [t]he bricoleur resists the compartmentalized roles by which public participation is typically authorized and will use all available tools at hand, even if this means (as it does) transforming received identifiable roles into uses, methods, and tactics (Farmer, 2013, p. 152).

As Farmer suggested, I shifted my shape to be not only a graduate student on a team of participant observers at the NC CLE; but, also a facilitator, modeling how to engage difficult dialogue with deep racialized roots. But, whew, the tension was a bit thick, for real. I also remember thinking about the experience of the scholar practitioner in the car and feeling apprehensive about pushing forward. I had thoughts around techniques and I interrogated critically the idea of expertise. At that moment the tension and discomfort in the car on our way back to the NC CLE gathering of gracious space, a feeling of unease with my practitioner identity surfaced. I remember thinking, *“what more could I possibly offer that existed outside the scope of the seasoned practitioner in our group.”*

The experience was awkward – we as practitioners coming to engage in race work would be uncomfortable with a 70-year-old black male elder speaking a bitter truth wrapped in the historicity of slavery experientially, temporally, and spatially.

George argues that the trauma of slavery is captured in the “real” (George, 2001, p. 59) of the consciousness of African-Americans and, in that space, narratives are diverted away from the psychological trauma of the legacy of slavery and into the replay of the historical brutality of slavery. He describes the “real” as a place where we store the “impossible” (p. 59) unable to file

it anywhere in our conscious reality. Replaying is defined by George as the recurring of traumatic events through story without a creative space for expression or witnessing, leaving the trauma trapped in the psyche. Comparatively, narrating creates a space for expressing, reacting and witnessing both to and about the trauma, and the bringing together emotional responses, i.e. rage, terror, grief (Audergon, 2004 (Behar, 1996; Kohler Riessman, 2002; Kohler Riessman, 2002)).

In George's conclusion, he encourages African-Americans to "[i]nstead of the traumatic *real* of slavery being the agency that makes them speak, African-Americans can become the agency that makes the trauma of slavery speak" (George, 2001, p. 72). This challenge is quite liberating and empowering; however, it will require deep narrating where the interaction of all views of the traumatic events can be heard between and among the harmed community and those relevant listeners who are outside the local community (Audergon, 2004). This includes revealing those deepest emotions and detangling the lived and generationally remembered traumatic experiences from the legacy of slavery.

Interrogating my observations and data from the closing circle at Oxford, the ride back from Oxford, the Confederate Statue, the Sankofa theme, and the NC CLE broadly are influencing my thinking about what more might be needed to take the CEL-CLE experience deeper to engage critical thinking and critical knowing as a thinking-doing praxis for sustainable transformative change.

I am thinking about how scholar practitioners as researchers are facilitating the multiple meanings and perspectives, translating concrete symbols, observations and critical introspection; and navigating narratives of individuals and community that are at war with master narratives.

George maintains that the racial identity of African-Americans is reduced in scope around the historical content and discourse of slavery. It is there at the core of the discourse where the trauma of slavery is festering without a proper naming.

This perspective has me reflecting on the historical content and discourse of the statue and what might be needed for unpacking definitions, notions, perspectives, and shared meanings. I am also wondering how incorporating a community story-mapping process that included the elder, the griot-historian as core team members during the preplanning phases might have altered our visit to Oxford, NC.

I am thinking deeply about my perception of all the nuances of the statue and the various types of narratives bound to it along with how Tyson narrates about the statue. Here, in this moment of reflection, I begin to imagine strategies, tools, and processes for a CEL-CLE that incorporate pedagogies that speak to historical harm caused by the co-dependent relationship of race and education. Specifically, those mechanisms that can be cultivated and cross populated with restorative justice frameworks and critical methods of storytelling and storymaking. I leave the NC CLE knowing that history matters, narratives matter, and race matters when engaging in community-centric work. This is work that prepares intergenerational community teams to work in the context on problem centered research with schools and academy folk. Through the literature and tacit experiences during this dissertating journey I am naming key pedagogical tools that might serve to enhance the educational leadership toolbox.

The Learning

I gained some significant learning during this adventure with the NC CLE as a black activist mother bricoleur, engaging in community-centric work. I put on my black activist

mothering, critical race and restorative justice lenses and through those critical lenses I examined the experiences and scholarship on navigating public discourses from a “bricolagic perspective” (Farmer, 2013, p. 151).

The bricoleur is someone who is not as interested in bearing the title of public intellectual or expert or activist. The bricoleur is, instead, someone interested in fulfilling these roles on an as needed basis. The bricoleur is someone able to find new uses *not* for public intellectuals but for the important critical functions they perform; *not* for experts but for situational uses of their expertise; *not* for activist but the public spaces they make in the course of their activism, however it may be directed.

I learned first and foremost that my role is fluid when engaged in community learning exchange work. I must be able to shift between the various “who and what” I am to be and become the identity and example needed and/or called upon by the situation. It is Farmer’s work in developing what he names the “counterpublic” perspective, a critical turn in composition and rhetoric studies. His explanation of the bricoleur and the bricolage as counterpublic work that brings my awareness to scholars as activists and advocates who shape shift in order to conjure up processes to “perform the intellectual questioning needed for a deeper understanding of local issues, [and who] conduct research and inquiry (no matter how unorthodox) as well as advocate, organize and write and reflect” (Farmer, 2013, p. 151). To facilitate conversations that stirrup historical and public discourses an activist scholar bricoleur “must be free to draw upon their expertise in situations that call for specialized knowledge” (p. 151).

A Critical Educational Leadership Toolbox

A crucial phase of the CLE process is the pre-planning stage because during this time the core team works to create the theme of the CLE. The theme is anchored to what they discover as a problem of practice or phenomenon. The desire to know more drives the pedagogical tools and strategies and sets the tone of all events.

What follows are critical pedagogies – from various disciplines – interrogated for repurposing to become critical educational leadership tools, strategies, and/or processes to improve instances/issues/problems of practice. By bringing diverse voices together to improve the wellbeing of the community in a space that cultivates notions of spirituality, setting, a multiplicity of truths and “learning in public” is in order to reimagine new ways of thinking about outcomes.

1.1.1.9 KWHW – Define & Situate Practitioner Knowing

The KWHW is utilized in design-based thinking as a tool to facilitate a team through discovering the aim(s) for a project. In this work, the KWHW – as a critical introspection mechanism for scholar practitioners as researchers – is included into a dialectical organizer to better interrogate perceptions about the situatedness of self, others, and the instance/issue/problem of practices. Grappling with these questions becomes a process of discovery – a sitting with continuous critical reflexive inquiry wholistically:

(1) What do you **Know**? (2) **What** do you want to know? (3) **How** will you learn? (4) **Who** will you learn from?

Schon says this about reflexive folks engaged in community-centric reflective practice,

... [t[hrough countless acts of attention and inattention, naming, sense making, boundary setting [and spanning] and control [and/or the lack thereof], they make and maintain the worlds matched to their professional knowledge and know-how. They are in transaction with their practice worlds, framing the problems that arise in practice situations and shaping the situations to fit the frames, framing their roles and constructing practice situation to make their role-frames operational.” (1987, p. 36)

I have experienced this form of “worldmaking” that Schon borrows from Nelson Goodman (Schon, 1987, p. 36) as a black activist mother and on my journey of discovering this design for thinking. I also understand from my learning and my knowing that it is essential to think of and design for tools that encourage and develop the capacity to disrupt “our perceptions, appreciations, and beliefs are rooted in worlds of our making that we come to *accept* as reality” (p. 36).

The KWHW is an organizer to sharpen understanding and to further develop how a practitioner is engaging in the reflection of and being reflexive about a problem. I experimented with this chart in a Research and Development course on education policy and learned a great deal about what I thought I knew about the problem of racially disparate discipline practices. This past May, I incorporated the KWHW tool in a course I co-instructed on the social justice impacts on instances/issues/problems they were wrestling with as restorative justice practitioners. The participants were mostly white females in leadership positions working in underserved communities as practitioners. I discovered that the KWHW organizer allows the practitioner to grapple with the “professional way of seeing their world and a way of constructing and maintaining the world as they see it” (Schon, 1987, p. 36). In addition, I notice

how what they are examining is actually showing up which may or may not be in-line with their socially and professionally constructed view of the issue/problem/practice. Navigating the KWHW drills down through what is being examined to the “who” of the examiner.

1.1.1.10 “I AM”: Situating the “looking glass self”

The “I Am” activity was an awesome self-reflective exercise and one of my favorite exercises during the NC CLE experience. After reading several examples from host team members, participants were asked to generate an “I AM” statement. We were given very little instruction to elicit more of our own meaning making of the activity – which I learned later.

I also utilized this activity in course with restorative justice practitioners. The experience of working with “I AM” activity as a critical introspection tool produced similar outcomes with the participants in the course. The “I AM” I prepared during the NC CLE touched on but in no way covered what Tatum describes as the “looking glass self” because the “I AM” “is not a flat one-dimensional reflection but multidimensional” process of critical introspection.

The “I AM activity as a “looking glass self” unearths for self and others who and what I am and how I’ve come to learn these dimensions that create my cultural identities. The creativity cultivated by working with the activity is innovative in that the participants can present the work in any format to an audience within various forms of sharing circles. The sharing in circle creates dialogue opportunities to unpack the rendition of who they are and how they came to be this person. It is here that the “I AM” doer and receiver can discover new ideas and notion about the “looking glass self”.

I went back to look at the journal entry of my “I AM” during the NC CLE on October 12, 2013, and realized that I had since discovered more dimensions⁷.

I Am unruly

I live in spaces that are uncomfortable.

I enjoy being disruptive and creating spaces that are both safe and uncomfortable.

This next iteration came later that same day after I listened more to my “self,” the experience unfolding, and to others as they shared.

I am a mother’s mother; a daughter of many molded by scholars, hustlers, grandmas and sight.

I am a Sojourner, seeking paths of truth while reflecting on the fence by Harriet.

I am a trail of freedom to insight.

I am last to receive and the first to begin.

I discovered just as my “looking glass self” (Tatum, 2000, p. 9) developed over time as I engaged in reflective introspection and reflexive activities, so did the participants in the course. Over the seven days of the course each student continued to engage her “looking glass self,” demonstrated through the blog site where the “I AM” exercises were posted.

Also, during the opening circle of each class, students shared how working with the “I AM” activity created the desire to add more and/or revise their original posting. The “I AM” activity appeared to be influenced by my role as instructor, facilitating learning from a black activist mothering worldview; the course materials and exercises; and their individual instances/issues/problems of practice. We were bearing witness to dimensions of power and privilege as these notions surfaced. Tatum (2000) captures Audrey Lourde’s thoughts on what

she describes as “the tensions between the dominant and targeted identities co-existing in one individual” (p. 10) in the following Lourde quote:

Somewhere on the edge of consciousness, there is what I call a *mythical norm*, which each one of us within our hearts knows “that is not me.” In America this norm is usually defined as white, thin, male, heterosexual, Christian, and financially secure. It is with this mythical norm that the trappings of power reside within society. Those of us who stand outside that power often identify one way in which we are different and we assume that way to be the primary cause of all oppression, forgetting other distortions around difference, some of which we ourselves may be practicing. (p. 11)

The “I AM” activity exercises the identity of the practitioner, breathing life into the process of reflecting and reflectivity. Tatum quoting Erikson, from his work, *Identity, Youth and Crisis*, explains the complexity of bringing identity into conversation as “a process ‘located’ in the core of the individual and yet also in the core of the communal culture” (Tatum, 2000, p. 9).

1.1.1.11 Power & Privilege: Centering the Educational Leadership Team

I observed as the course progressed that it appeared much easier for the participants to focus on race as a variable; while speaking on issues of power and privilege caused greater disruption of thoughts, perceptions, and creativity. One of the students – a professor at a research one institution on the west coast – spoke with me after class one evening about how her position of privilege in the academy was being unearthed. She expressed how upon reflection, she linked not having to conduct much research to her position of power and privilege as a white

middle class woman in the academy. She then shared a section from a book she would be teaching from, Dr. Cheryl Hyde wrote the section⁸.

This example, “a situation of unequal power” between how I navigate spaces of privilege within a subordinate identity and the way the student functioning within a dominant identity navigates very similar spaces created another reflection point for the CEL-CLE toolbox – and a literature introduction to Dr. Cheryl Hyde.

Establishing the CEL-CLE as a qualitative collaboratory is what Jefferies & Generett (2003) describe as an alternative way of gathering and processing information, as well as an alternative way of understanding human interactions. The authors share that in such a collaborator it often times exposes “the identity struggle that all academics and researchers endure” (Jefferies & Generett, 2003, p. 8). Inviting all voices, on a continuum, from the “ordinary” to the academic researcher unearths notions of power and privilege in the form of knowledge production. The rationale presented supports my understanding that a tool that probes power and privilege will most likely be needed.

1.1.1.12 Hyde’s Critical Self Reflection Framework

Dr. Cheryl Hyde presents a model of community engaged organizing for Social Workers that employs a series of questions aimed at taking practitioners deeper into their perspectives of power and privilege. The model “Critical Self Reflection” is a framework that Hyde has utilized in her work “as a learner, teacher, trainer, and practitioner and is comprised of two assessments

⁸ Dr. Cheryl Hyde is a professor of Social Work at Temple University, coordinator for the Community and Policy Practice concentration and assistant director for education, training and community outreach for the Center for Intervention Practice and Research. Her focus is on organizational and community capacity building, organizing multicultural education, feminist praxis, social movements and collective action and socioeconomic class issues. For complete details about Dr Hyde’s work referenced in this dissertation see: Hyde, C. A. (2012). Challenging ourselves: Critical self-reflection on power and privilege. In M. Minkler, *Community organizaing and community building for health and welfare* (pp. 428-436). New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.

that are designed to be driven by the desire to go deeper as a practitioner authentically and genuinely “and then when a group debriefing can support further exploration and exchange of ideas” (Hyde, 2012, p. 429). The Critical Self Reflection framework has four major steps: (1) defining and situating culture; (2) privilege and power; (3) the significance of the vantage point; (4) synthesis and next steps; and (5) connecting the critically reflective practitioner to community work.

The first step in the critical reflection framework is naming which cultural dimensions (race, gender, sex, class, ability, citizenship, religion or other) influence the practitioner’s identity in order to discover how we as scholar practitioners construct “our complex cultural selves” (p. 430). Hyde defines culture as the “values, attitudes, beliefs, practices and rituals that shape who we are and how we act, all of which flow from the various groups for which we are members” (p. 429). Next the practitioner indicates how each cultural dimension manifests and interacts “with values, messages or actions associated with that dimension” (p. 429).

Exploring issues of power and privilege is exercised through the inventory by asking the practitioner to name whether their cultural dimension places them within the dominant group or subordinate group. Also, discovering the weightiness of each cultural dimension is explored. For example, does being in the dominant racial dimension outweigh a subordinate religious dimension? The purpose of the Cultural Identity Inventory is to guide and assist the practitioner with defining and situating how culture impacts their identity. This means interrogating the ways that power and privilege inform their identity and how practitioners view themselves compared to how others perceive them.

The process of the Cultural Identity Inventory serves as a tangible tool for practitioners to be critically self-reflective. It also serves as preparation for merging the cultural identity work with the “*Community Practice*” assessment. The second tool in Hyde’s framework activates the reflexivity of the practitioners practice by connecting the cultural dimensions and identity learning to how they show up in the work. Hyde names this way of showing up in the work as the “strategic use of self” (p. 434). When this process is cultivated, the scholar practitioner “is concerned with relationship building that encourages constructive change, which in many respects is the core of community practice” (p. 434). At the junction of the two, the cultural inventory and the community practice assessment suggest that the practitioner who has been dutiful and diligent in the critical self-reflection will be better prepared to engage in genuine relationship building and authentic participatory community transformation.

1.1.1.13 Restorative Geospatial Storytelling

But the ground has shifted. The flexibility and connectivity of geospatial technologies have motivated widespread interest across disciplines in applying these innovations to new visualizations of past landscapes (Pearce & Hermann, 2010, p. 33).

At this phase, if Coach TJ and his colleagues along with the Taskforce have worked with the self-reflective and reflexive tools, might the team be situated to begin engaging in an authentic collaboratory with the community? I reflect on the perspectives unearthed during the Taskforce meeting with Coach TJ and his colleagues around deficits and implied meanings of students, their families and their communities from low socioeconomic status. In such a reflection, I’m drawn to an idea of storytelling integrated with mapping that creates a reimagining and reimagining of community.

The planning phase for the community experience – the going out to experience the life of the community – is a critical component of the CLE. The major goal of the community experience seeks to be an engaging and informative process that is also inquiry based. The NC CLE host team consisted of graduate students in the North Carolina State University, Northeast Leadership Academy, Principal Preparation Program. The NC CLE host team ventured over to Texas to learn and plan with a prior CLE team. Visiting with prior CLE host teams is an objective of the CLE process that works toward “establish[ing] a sustainable and accessible way for place-based communities to share with each other what works in different contexts and communities” (The Community Learning Exchange, 2013, p. 17). During this pre-planning phase of the process, the host team is engaging in the type of pedagogy and equitable learning that (a) they desire to model for the visiting teams and (b) will help to generate informed decisions about designing the community experience. On the second day of their visit, the NC CLE team grappled with “how to engage communities authentically” (p. 22). One of the questions that surfaced for the team during that session, “*how do you get to know a geographic area?*” (p. 22) lays the foundation for Restorative Geospatial Storytelling as a CEL-CLE tool.

So, how can the CEL-CLE get to “*know*” a geographic area? I reflected on my NC CLE experience and on the ways in which I was thinking about the role of educational leadership in authentic community engagement and my learning that history, race, and stories matter when engaging communities in critical collaboratories.

The CLE model merges the art and empowerment of storytelling with digital and media technology as a “compelling process through which to tell your story to the world” (The Community Learning Exchange, 2013). Digital storytelling situates participants as storytellers with a unique and inspiring message to convey. Digital storytelling opens a space for

communities to connect their storytelling (subjective) with visual data of time, space and place (objective), thus engaging communities toward story-making. Participants are able to connect their lived experience with social, political and economic planning and development issues (Vajjhala, 2005).

Specifically, Offen shares in his review of some ways historical geographers have utilized digital and media technology to tell stories; in the following quote he is referencing the work of indigenous folks working with digital storytelling. He shares that “some native peoples have set up online forms of ‘digital storytelling’ to help connect elders with youth, to enliven cultural traditions, and to create productions beneficial to community members” (Offen, 2012, p. 568).

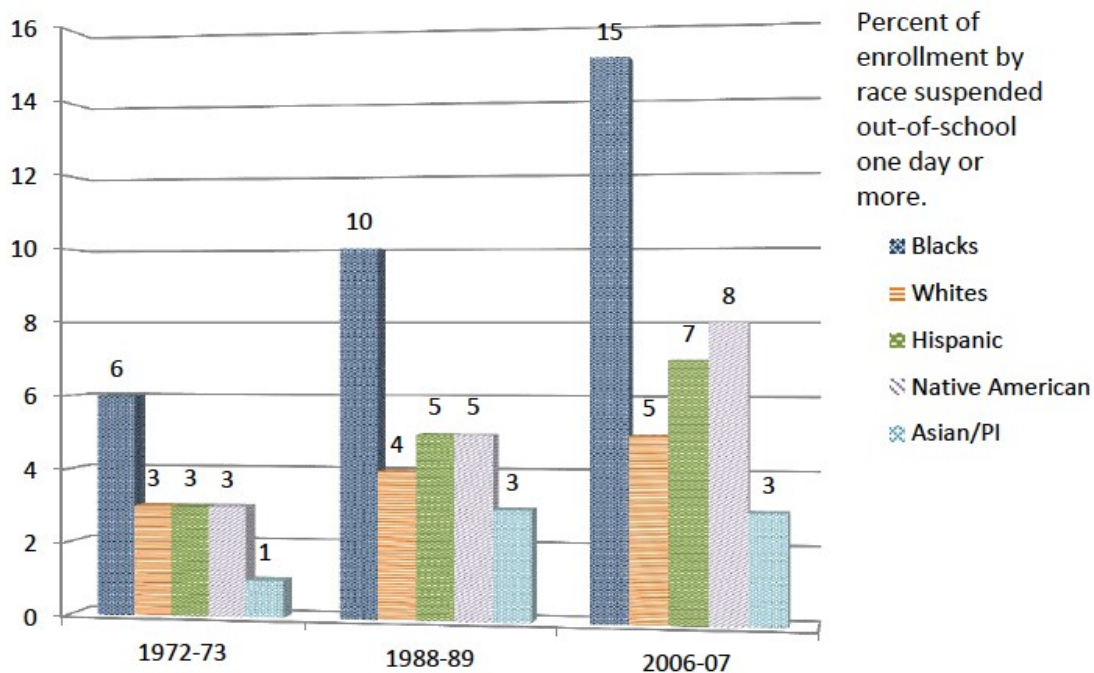
Restorative Geospatial Storytelling is a tool that can bring awareness to those aspects mentioned above by centering harm (restorative justice) and mapping it across space, place and time (Geospatial). Further, through the art of storytelling, Restorative Geospatial Storytelling is designed to bring all relevant voices into the conversation (Pearce & Hermann, 2010). Elwood argues in her work around narratives, urban space, social justice and geographical information systems, which spatial politics, institutional politics and knowledge politics are always intersecting and interconnected when engaging inequitable issues within communities. These types of politics can serve to “expand role[s] and power...or can be “sites of disempowerment” for community-centric leadership (Elwood, 2005, p. 324).

Maps and associated media help in a unique way to tell stories about people, places, space, and society (Caquard, et al., p. 85). In fact, Pearce and Hermann

(2010) argue that maps are capable of telling multiple stories and “conveying multiple experiences of place.” (p. 33)

Below, we return back to the Losen (2011) graph of the racial impact of disparate discipline practices nationally. I mapped some significant and critical events occurring alongside the dates on the graph⁹ that represent the cultural, socioeconomic, and sociopolitical circumstances, impacting black folks and the black community experiences.

“The central tenet of dynamic systems theory is that the structure of a system gives rise to its behavior” (Langley, et al. 2009).



C. Murray/BC- AC Crisis/“Superpredator”/Zero Tolerance/Massive Social Service cutbacks/Vanishing Public Sector Jobs/Moynihan Report

Figure 5: Adapted Losen (2011) graph

⁹ See Gloria Wade-Gayles for an insightful discussion on the impact of the Moynihan Report and its aftermath on black communities. Wade-Gayles, G. (1980). *She who is black and mother: In sociology and fiction*. In L. Rodgers-Rose, *The black woman* (pp. 89-106). Beverly Hills: Sage Publications.

Figure 6 is a current map of the Hill District, a neighborhood located in Pittsburgh. The neighborhood is comprised of several smaller communities, Crawford Roberts, Bellford Dwellings, Middle Hill, Upper Hill and Terrace Village with a provocative historical timeline,¹⁰ specifically, for African Americans that are filled with rich and vibrant geospatial narratives.

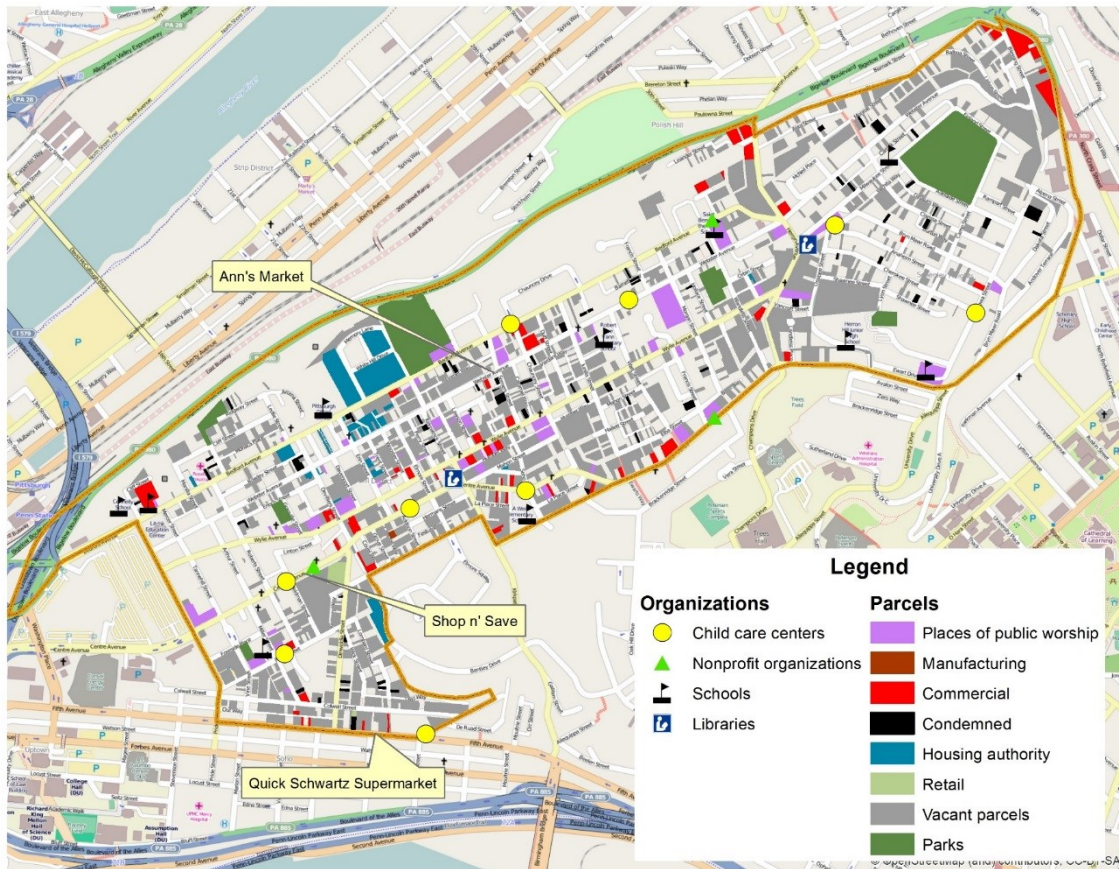


Figure 6: Geographical Map of the Hill District neighborhood, Pittsburgh, PA

To “create place in narrative, including intimacy, identity and connection with the reader” Pearce utilized lifesize maps with small text” (Pearce & Hermann, 2010).

¹⁰ See a digital history of the Hill District for visual comparisons of the historical timeline. Visited August 22, 2014, <http://multimedia.post-gazette.com/ThenNow/Hill/Devillers/default.asp>
Also in Vajjhala work with GIS and participatory mapping projects of several communities in Pittsburgh includes the Hill District. Vajjhala, S. (2005). Integrating GIS and participatory mapping in community development planning. *ESRI International User Conference*, (pp. 1-23).

The Restorative Geospatial Storymapping is situated as a CEL-CLE tool to recreate Pearce's mapping experience: First, it is an enlarged stationary printed version of Figure 6, the Losen graph with mapped on critical national events that impact cultural, social, economic and political experiences of communities; then we create three enlarged community maps like the example in Figure 7; one map representing each of the school years reflected on the Losen graph, Figure 6; and lastly, planning a community experience that includes a storymapping walk of the community by CEL-CLE teams, representative of school, academy, community and youth with handheld versions of the enlarged graph and maps and simply instructing them to "work with artifacts."

There is utility in not explaining, "work with the map." It creates a space where the participants can respond to the activity in their own voice with their own authority. I'm imagining, what stories might be told? How many perspectives might be challenged, transformed and created? How much more could we "know" about the geographical space of the community where schools are nested? To "create place in narrative, including intimacy, identity and connection with the reader" Pearce utilized lifesize maps with small text" (Pearce & Hermann, 2010).

CHAPTER 6: CRITICAL INTERSECTIONALITY: WHEN BLACK ACTIVIST MOTHERING MEETS EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP



Figure 7: Leadership Adinkra Symbol, West Africa

“Chief of the Adinkra Symbols”

“greatness, charisma, leadership”

“This symbol is said to have played an inspiring role in the designing of other symbols. It signifies the importance of playing a leadership role.” (Adinkra Index).

I lead from within myself; leading from within the community; advocating for the common acceptance of those of us who are marginalized. We have the innate ability to creatively and constructively discover ways of responding to and when needed solving those instances, issues and problems that are enacted within and upon our communities.

To triangulate my lived experiences with theory, I incorporate the tenets of Cheryl Townsend Gilkes’ (1983) black women as community workers and black activist mothering as bricoleur, to give shape and orientation to how I understand social justice work and to serve as a roadmap of my social justice identity. These tenets speak to my understanding, and serve as a gateway to how I enter the work moving between the “black mother and community, “othermother” (Hill Collins, 1990; Townsend Gilkes, 1983; Omolade, 1987). We are

activist/advocate and scholar-practitioners operating across disciplinary boundaries and (socio) cultural, political and economic borders as the “outsider-within” (Hill Collins, 1986). The interconnectedness, interrelatedness and continuity of black activist mothering (Townsend Gilkes, 1983; Hill Collins, 1991; Hill Collins, 2000; Omolade, 1987) serve as the nexus of Black feminist standpoint thought and critical race feminism¹¹ that “emerged as a product of grassroots activism and social science and humanities scholarship” (Few, 2007, p. 458). This positionality undergirds how I understand operationalizing social justice as community work.

Townsend Gilkes (1983) in her seminal work *Going Up for the Oppressed: The Career Mobility of Black Women Community Workers*, talks about black women across working class and middle class statuses who are community workers in an urban city, from 1960 - 1980.

Townsend Gilkes’ qualitative study was driven by the author’s desire to expand the literature to include the dynamics of how Black middle class women engage their socioeconomic status as both a system and a form of resistance to better serve the black community – “or occupational and professional mobility on behalf of the community” (p. 115). Townsend Gilkes conducted this study utilizing open-ended interview questions of 25 black women who were identified by their community to have “worked hard for a long time for change in the black community” (p. 117) and were engaged at various levels in community work. She discovered three emergent activities in their work to serve the community interests:

- (1) ***focused education*** – “a political act – the focused use of the institutions of the dominant society in order to change that society”

¹¹ See Few, A. (2007). Integrating black consciousness and critical race feminism into family studies research. *Journal of Family Issues*, 452-473. While distinctions in methodology can be made between critical race feminism and Black feminism each theoretical perspective is rooted in black activism as community work. Few argues, “Although critical race feminism is a distinct theoretical perspective, in its evolving form, it can be considered a theoretical extension of Black feminism when examining Black experiences.”

(2) ***dialectical career*** - involving increased levels of authority, prestige, and job opportunities along with increased levels of political consciousness, social criticism, and conflict with the dominant culture; and

(3) ***commitment maintenance*** - strategies to maintain commitment and ties to the community, its people, and their interests (p. 115).

Focusing my educational trajectory was not a straight and linear path; I took some alternative routes and encountered some detours between undergraduate and doctoral studies. Interestingly, Townsend Gilkes found a similar journey with some of the black women focused on strategic community-centric work and cultivating empowerment. In fact, she discovered that some of the black women whose parents were working class, started college but left early because of family financial restrictions and/or to pursue raising families, and rooting themselves in community work, which almost mirrors my college experience.

The working class women acquired credentials and information they felt were necessary to the solution of specific community problems; these were acquired *after* they entered community affairs because of their concerns for their children and their neighborhood. (Townsend Gilkes, 1983, p. 121)

It is while working and engaged in daily community affairs working hard at “going up for the oppressed when “specific community problems” are exposed and the community worker realizes more knowing is required. My moment of clarity, the moment when I realized I needed to recalibrate my education and refocus my purpose to effectively respond to the new “struggle of the hour” (Townsend Gilkes, 1983, p. 121) occurred during my work at the county prison. My duties included connecting resources and activities from the community organizations to the needs of the men, women and youth incarcerated in the county prison. Two significant issues

surfaced during that work, which are as follows: (a) locating programs in the community to provide activities and education to the youth charged as adults for non-violent crimes – waiting to turn age of majority (18 years old) and move into general population; and (b) locating services in the community to create a more humane environment for family visitation.

I needed to understand, to make sense of a phenomenon that made no sense. Similar to the women in the study, engaging in this work exposed an opportunity pool. The Grants Manager sent me to a workshop on Restorative Discipline practices to find support for the youth. That opportunity turned out to be the starting point of my current focused education. It was at this point of my career trajectory that I experienced,

a special type of career mobility that combines an individual's consciousness and opportunities in a way that is beneficial not only to the individual but also to the community. (Townsend Gilkes, 1983, p. 119)

That workshop led to a Master's degree in Conflict Transformation with a concentration in Restorative Justice processes.

As they [black women engaged in community work] became more involved in and committed to the social world of community other men and women told them about special or flexible educational programs that would fit their needs.

(Townsend Gilkes, 1983, p. 123)

The workshop facilitator learned of my work in the community and made a recommendation so that I could receive a scholarship to attend a summer institute. Once there, a lead professor of Restorative Justice recommended that I apply for the two-year program in Conflict Transformation with a focus on Restorative Justice. In that space and time my nation-class consciousness deepened and when I returned to the community with more credentials, so

did my experiences of the dialectical career. During this segment of my focused educational journey, I learned about conflict and more about the criminal justice system. These new and expanded discoveries and learning's coupled with working at a management level in a county adult prison system; and my lived experiences learning as a black working class woman and mother, heightened my critical thinking and strategic engagement platform expanded. As Townsend Gilkes discovered,

Focused education and professional mobility remained inextricably linked...the women acquired a focused education by creatively using dominate culture educational institutions not only to acquire credentials (become 'qualified') but also to expand their own understanding of practical black community needs and interest and to maintain a high level of nation-class consciousness. (Townsend Gilkes, 1983, p.123)

Daughter of the Community



Figure 8: Mate Masie Adinkra Symbol, West Africa

“What I Hear I Keep”

The Symbol of wisdom, knowledge and prudence.

I returned to the community with strategic credentials in engaging conflict that built upon the utilization of proverbs, an engrained skill from my community learning. Proverbs are a tool that produce embedded solutions to perpetual problems (Arewa & Dundes, 1964) because as methodology it allows one to “bring proverbial speech into focus as a device for assisting in negotiations between not only personal but also cultural Self and Other” (Pahlad, 1996, p. 40). I learned to wield this skill at the feet of the “proverb masters” in my community. Pahlad (p. 124) explains how the community knows these folks –the proverb masters – as wielders of proverbial speech; who can interpret and apply it contextually. Proverbial speech enhanced and fortified my ability to be “‘qualified’ for, and ideologically prepared to engage in conflict with, professional settings” (Townsend Gilkes, 1983, p. 124).

These community workers were black women who saw the black community as a group of relatives and other friends whose interests should be advanced and promoted at all times, under all conditions, and by almost any means. (Townsend Gilkes, 1983, p.117)

My frame of knowing and understanding my social justice identity as community worker is constructed out of my personal narrative of a collectivist culture. In my narratives family is synonymous with community. My grandparents had a combined high school diploma, meaning totaling up primary education for each of them might equal 12 years of a complete secondary education. However with limited education they managed to hustle their way up the class structure from generational poverty to “Black Middle Class,” one of the significant goals of the “Great Migration” out of the south to the north. I say hustle because my grandfather worked at a steel manufacturing company, taking the job of shoveling the coal and my grandmother and great-grandmother were employed as domestic help.

My community consisted of hustlers, elders, griots, and professionals who carried and transmitted the “old way” in different ways. I learned both a street ethic (The Street Wisdom Keepers) and a proverbial ethic of responsibility, accountability and equity alongside a way of seeing with all five senses and the old ways of inquiry – the sixth sense (mother’s wit, emotional intelligence, intuition etc.). I was taught to hold responsibility for those in the community that were vulnerable – actually more vulnerable as we were all living in a vulnerable community. For example, if someone demonstrated a financial need then I knew to share. I commonly heard elders speak, “*If I have, then you will have. I ain’t gonna see you do without.*” This proverbial speech was enacted when the women got together in the community to play card games as a means of creating a “sou sou pot” – a communal financial savings process to provide extra income for the members or to make a communal purchase. Or, if the hustlers were putting in money to buy items for a rent party, held to support our neighborhood childcare provider.

The *Street Wisdomkeepers*, those hustlers, black consciousness nation-builders and plain old corner folks who through knowledge systems of self-empowerment and spiritual militancy, inoculated my identity to resist acculturation transmitted through various political viruses and social bacteria. Common, a masterful lyricist and artist in the hip-hop genre wrote about the phenomenon of the street wisdom keepers in the black community. This is the hook from *The Corner* by Common (2005) featuring the Last Poets:

The corner was our magic, our music, our politics

Fires raised as tribal dancers and

war cries that broke out on different corners

Power to the people, black power, black is beautiful”

The corner was our Rock of Gibraltar, our Stonehenge

Our Taj Mahal, our monument,
Our testimonial to freedom, to peace and to love
Down on the corner...

The term hustler carried many spoken and unspoken meanings. Hustlers were street people with respect but nonetheless street people who were cast – by their community and society – as failing to achieve merit, those folks who refused to make an “honest living.” My grandparents, back when being black middle class was significant, would be insulted to hear my reference to their journey as hustling. However, my grandparents and their kin all played the “numbers” and looked out for the community numbers runners. The primary purpose for playing the game of chance was simply to “hit big” and “come up” and the winnings would be utilized to benefit the collective.

At the same time [during the Great Depression] that black-owned retail outlets, banks and manufacturing concerns were either closing or losing money across the country, the "numbers racket," or "policy" (an off-the-books lottery run by private individuals), took off. In fact, numbers rapidly eclipsed legitimate black businesses as the primary economic force in Depression-era black communities. Although the numbers racket targeted working-class and poor communities, and were unregulated and untaxed by the local governments, there was little, if any, stigma among blacks to being involved with policy. Numbers bosses nevertheless sought respectability by investing gambling profits in legitimate businesses. During the 1930s, black baseball attracted a great deal of this money. (Weems, 2008, p. 1)

For instance, I remember stories about my Grandmother's Aunt and cousin scoring big on the numbers and pooling their monies together to purchase and furnish the house. The house was a four story brick row house in Northwest, Washington, DC that they purchased for about \$13,000 in the late 1940's. My grandparents' contribution to the purchase of the "Big House" came from an industrial job and domestic work. My grandfather drove an hour each way to this a major steel mill for 50 years to become the black working middle class. My grandmother contributed by cleaning houses, washing walls, and toilets. (When speaking about domestic work, my grandmother always parsed out the chores of washing walls and cleaning toilets in the conversation.) She aided my grandfather in achieving the merit of black working middle class.

The hustlers where I come from pushed black women to get an education and diligently become the black working middle class. Both of these groups seemed to move in similar communal patterns, an ethic framed by Cheru (1997, p. 137) as the "silent revolution of the poor" activities – often "hidden" – that incorporate strategic innovations in defense of inequitable economic and political actions. Cheru is providing a perspective of the unique knowledge systems, employed by the global poor, that frames these unique knowledge systems of those "from below" as ingenious forms of resistance" (p. 137).

I remember the street wisdom keepers reciting this proverb well. They would profess, *"See what we got is the butter and what you gone have is the bread. We could lose everything, all this overnight but what you will have is solid. You will be able to help us until we can get back on our feet."*

Again, like their forefathers and foremothers during The Depression era, the street wisdomkeepers expected for certain daughters of the community to return the talent back to the community and raise legitimate economic empowerment. This is how I understood "Hustlin"

from sitting at the feet of elders either on the porch or on the corner; doing what it takes to “come up” to achieve status, and pulling others with you. I also learned the ethic of being in a collective, using your achievement to assist others coming up behind you to make “it” beyond your placement. The old folks would say, *“I’m clean ’n toilets so you don’t havta, so you can get an education.”* In the context of paving a way for the next generation, this proverbial speech informs that sacrifices are made and chosen to create pathways of liberation for those who will follow.

What I Hear, I Keep

The front and back porch, and the corner up the street from the “big house” (the house that my great-grand mother, her sister, her nephew and my grandfather collectively purchased, where my great-grandmother resided until she passed in 2007) constituted my learning spaces. In those spaces, I formed my practical frameworks, situating the purpose of my education into focus. These were the public nontraditional spaces where my schooling took place, where I learned to engage in “aggressive self-education in matters concerning the community” (Townsend Gilkes, 1983, p. 115) described above by Townsend Gilkes.

The front and back porch were the spaces that I literally sat at the feet of my elders snapping peas and string beans, shucking corn (removing the outer husk from the ears of corn), peeling potatoes, and most importantly, decoding and deconstructing proverbs. Listening to proverbs and being able to hear between the words to understand the message is one gift; however, it is in understanding the context of the proverb and the skill of applying this cultural knowledge system that is educative (Arewa & Dundes, 1964; Prahlad, 1996).

I learned to listen and observe with all six of my senses. I listened in on my Great-grandmother's conversations with those who came by the front porch – were she sat daily sharing her wisdom. When these folks dropped by, I was the direct recipient of proverb raising. It is how in the introduction of *Proverbs and the Ethnography of Speaking Folklore*, Arewa and Dundes' (1964) seminal work on the ethnography of speaking; explain very precisely why the power of proverbs that programmed my social justice identity still guide my work today,

It is a proverb from the cultural past whose voice speaks truth in traditional terms.

It is the 'One,' the 'Elders,' or the 'They' in 'They say,' who direct. The parent is but the instrument through which the proverb speaks to the audience. (p. 50)

Zora Neale Hurston (1935) tells the following story in *Mules and Men* to illustrate and further substantiate the expectations foreseen by our foremothers and forefathers of Black women. In this story that follows, the Ancestor Hurston is speaking to the notion of the daughters of the community – returning from higher education to the soil that cultivated them as strategic nation builders – not losing what they left with but instead, returning more fortified:

Ah know another man wid a daughter.

The man sent his daughter off to school for seben years, den she come home all finished up. So he said to her, "Daughter, git yo' things and write me a letter to my brogher!" So she did.

He says, "Head it up," and she done so.

"Now tell'im, 'Dear Brother, our chile is done come home from school and all finished up and we is very proud of her.'"

Then he ast de girl "Is you got dat?"

She tole 'im "yeah."

“Now tell him some mo’. ‘Our mule is dead but Ah got another mule and when Ah say (clucking sound of tongue and teeth) he moved from de word.’” “Is you got dat?” he askt de girl.

“Naw suh,” she tole ‘im

He waited a while and he ast her again, “You got dat down yet?”

“Naw suh, Ah ain’t got it yet.”

“How come you ain’t got it?”

“Cause Ah can’t spell (clucking sound).”

“You mean to tell me you been off to school seven years and can’t spell (clucking sound)? Why Ah could spell dat myself and Ah ain’t been to school a day in mah life. Well jes’say (clucking sound) he’ll know what you’ mean and go on wid de letter (pp. 43-44).

It was this type of excitement shown by the father in Zora’s tale that not only spoke to the need for, but also spoke the loving admiration of, our forefathers and foremothers about their offspring. Implicit in this story, is an expectation for the daughters to *‘go off now, and get what you can and return the talent back to the community’* that is deeply felt and imprinted on my Soul.

I remember the elders showing admiration for my talents very early, like when Soul Train – the African American music show, showcasing the newest Rhythm and Blues talent along with local talent – came on. Someone would yell, “show’em how to do the “bump baby”. Or, going around asking all my elders – from the street wisdom keepers to the elite club members – about the meaning of reincarnation when I was eight years old. While the elders admired my tenacity and precociousness, no one really wanted to be responsible for explaining that subject. This is a

story the elders still tell 35 plus years later and foregrounds how I was recognized and groomed to be a proverb master who goes to get “it” and return it back to the community.

This interrelatedness manifests a welcomed sense of “social debt to the community” (McDonald, 1997, p. 776) that continues to keep me connected to the community. I intuitively knew how to avoid “the trappings” (Townsend Gilkes, 1983, p. 134) of higher education. Or to avoid what Omolade discovered that “[b]lack women attending colleges have been taught to instruct, but not to teach, to learn but not to know to research the works of others, but not create their own (Omolade B. , 1990, p. 282).

When pulling together situated facts from different standpoints to form a pattern, the patterns themselves could be seen as knowledge. Looking through such a lens, we can change the conversation, the discourse of the Black woman community worker to one of privilege. The black woman, as a socially constructed oppressed group, is seen as possessing what W. E. B. DuBois terms double consciousness. The ability to see instances/issues/problems from both the perspective of the dominant structure and from the perspective of the oppressed; heightens my observational talents to comparatively evaluate both perspectives.

Black women engage in activist mothering of not just our biological offspring, but as other mothering to the whole community. They have an interest in representing social phenomena in ways that reveal rather than mask a multiplicity of truths because we too are oppressed. We are oppressed not just as black people; not just as black women; but, as black working class women. Black activist mothers as community-centric leaders are uniquely "outsiders within," have deeply rooted personal experience. We form experiences as insiders from a privileged standpoint that allows for an advantageous critical distance to empower critique.

Community Centered Strategies for Critical Educational Leadership

I struggled to discover just which professional/occupational vehicles and which avenues would be most effective to meet the needs unearthed through the discoveries shared in this work. However, the commitment to remain rooted in the community with the social justice needs of the collective as the centerstone never faltered. My personal narrative acts as the reminder that folks are depending on me to return my talents back to the community. Their expectations are, (a) that I hold on to and set as the cornerstones the community schooling afforded to me and; (b) that I bring tools learned in the dominant culture back to aid in liberating Black folks from social, political and economic injustices. Most significantly for this work is that I continue to cultivate and learn, to repurpose tools gained and both handed down.

The following are community-based strategies, learned from my combined experience as a black activist mother doing community work and as a scholar practitioner engaged in critical community practice. I now usher in my learning to the field of educational leadership to lessen disciplinary practices on Black youth.

Educational leaders re-imagining the community spaces of the school in order to construct critical collaborations with community and academy folks might utilize these strategies, *Coordinates of Critical Community Practice*, as coordinates for critical community engagement. If we think about these nine coordinates as heuristic navigation points; then, we begin to shift our way of thinking about instances/issues/problems of practice unfolding in schools. The coordinates can assist educational leaders to (a) facilitate problem thinking that centers the community as the primary knowing agent; and (b) generate a belief that community in authentic partnership with educational leadership has agency to name instances/issues/problems and to discover creative and constructive ways of responding. Some of

the coordinates represent an acquired mindset; versus other recommendations represent more specific practices to be implemented, perhaps through professional development opportunities or as core competencies in educational leadership preparation programs. They are as follows:

Critical Community Practice Coordinates

Authentic Participation

To participate authentically, is to meet the community “as is” meaning, how the community shows up in all its narration both broadly and specifically is accepted unconditionally and void of judgment. Too often, scholars and practitioners of the academy show up with preconceived notions and definitions of acceptable behavior; however, the stories and sub-stories are more complicated and diverse than a theory or general definition can encompass. Similarly, with participation, the academy asks and in some case demands that their scholars and practitioners show up objectively. Fueled by the dominant culture’s ways of knowing, education scholars and practitioners are required to show up with an already approved measuring stick of knowledge and knowledge creation.

When the educational leader enters the community to participate authentically he/she is agreeing to “do” what it takes. This is the work of the bricoleur; to call upon, resurface and repurpose tools, strategies and knowledge centers to naturally participate with the learning and the learning environment. To participate authentically accepts with deep embrace the existence of a multiplicity of perspectives. These are perspectives that act as the informing center to establish successful community learning environments outside the traditional school setting. Thus, authentic participation stirs the social justice identity of educational leaders; serves as a centering mechanism to ground their identity to the work; and creates a stable foundation for the educational leader to build upon. It is through authentic participation with the vary community

who nurtures the “pushed out” black students that the educational leader will begin to alter seeing black youths, intrinsically as a problem.

I AM as Critical Self-Reflection

Creating mechanisms that call on the educational leader to be critically self-reflexive is the center stone of authentic participation. In the discipline of educational leadership, the capacity for white folks and African American folks (who are far removed from urban centers where they serve as educators) to stretch beyond normative practices and the politics of respectability (for black folks) is grossly limited. The lack of critical reflective and reflexive techniques limits the ability for educational leaders to create a shared reality with the students and their respective urban communities. To learn reflexively is to examine the self and the various roles in play continuously while, engaging in the content and context of both the scholarship and the work.

Critical self-reflection operationalizes locating the self in the many cultural and political dimensions of power. From the learning that unfolds during processes of critical self-reflection, practitioners can actively situate themselves, within the practice of discipline disparity. Here, exercising moments of self-reflection, actively situating and resituating ourselves, we are establishing the process as a standard of practice. When we participate in critical self-work with the community, a new pathway and mindset can emerge. This is primarily because the notion that who and what we are is not to be easily dissected; nor, set aside from how we engage the work becomes evident.

Care-Giving as Ubuntu

When the critical self-reflective educational leader is authentically participating with the community, we become care-givers of the collective. We understand care-giving as Ubuntuism. This introduces educational leaders to the African philosophy of care-giving as Hunhuism or Ubuntuism, a “code of behavior” for being in relationship with “others and life” (Samkange, S.J.T, Samkange, T.M, 1980, p.39) It is teaching them how to love the children they serve as they love their own. This is not unlike black women during slavery, who could love unconditionally the Master’s children even while being brutally mistreated. These are-giving behaviors that include; “kindness, courtesy, consideration and friendliness” (p. 39), behaviors that create complete acceptance of connectedness to the other. To seek transformative change we must not be satisfied with immediate solutions but demand strategic thinking that is inclusive of the long term capacity to sustain and develop continued change.

The educational leader involved in the practice of care-giving, of creating a shared reality with students and their community is to see their future as connected to African American students, and to the community. Expanding the mindset of educational leaders to include care-giving behaviors might lessen the impact of the problem of discipline disparities on black youth. Care-giving behaviors create spaces of shared reimagining between educational leaders, students and their community. Educational leaders who believe that their work is not social work, not community engaged social services, are neglecting to discover and connect their “why” they travel from their middle class dominant communities to educate students in vulnerable marginalized communities.

The Baobab Tree: Centering the School as a Gathering Place

In the African tradition, the Baobab Tree is where the community gathers to hear the news of the day and to bring to the community, specifically the Elders, any problems or concerns that have surfaced. Every part of the Baobab Tree can be utilized to support the needs of the community; even the trunk can provide shelter for the community. Centering the school symbolically as a gathering post to discuss and investigate matters of the community and a complete place of utility to the community creates opportunities for the educational leader to participate authentically. The school then becomes a communal space comprised of an interlocking network of school, academy and community folk binding together groups of competing interests and ideologies to improve problems of practice.

Also, centering the school as a place of civic engagement is an invitation for the Elders of the community to announce their perspectives and to unearth the history of space and place as it relates to the social and cultural challenges unfolding in the community. If educational leaders have no perspective of the historical and discriminatory treatment of black folks living in underserved communities – between past and present circumstances – then, they have no reference point to grapple with the 40 year problem of discipline disparity. The perspectives from the Elders of the community are invaluable data for educational leaders. Elders as data are language – as proverb and metaphors – that bridge a people’s way of knowing, being, seeing and thinking. Then, elders of a community become critical assets for educational leaders doing community work.

Neighborhood Storymapping

What does it mean for educational leaders to walk a community, to know the geographical space; to map a community as professional development? The vast majority of

high density, vulnerable and underserved black urban neighborhoods exist as segregated communities. For example, I have experienced one such urban community comprised mostly of black family units, who are isolated, literally living in a community encased by concrete barricades. Mapping the narratives of individuals, families, structures and systems that inform and give life to the community can provide practical and actionable implications for educational leaders. When educational leaders live segregated from the communities they serve, there exist an absence of cultural contexts of black folks. The void of naming and embracing cultural context hinders educational leaders' ability to respond, relate, and communicate in ways that are authentic, connected and socially just.

Neighborhood Storymapping sparks the agency of educational leaders to push against institutional disagreements that disrupt educational opportunity and equity for marginalized students. As a professional development tool, this process unveils unique perspectives and knowledge systems. The storymapping process that is designed as a critical process can situate educational leaders to be in solidarity with the community. This activity will garner fruitful opportunities for educational leaders to practice continuous critical self-reflection while, decoding issues and translating policy and research agendas in ways that are liberatory and emancipatory.

Cultivating Collective Empowerment

Authentically engaging a community requires educational leaders to go beyond offering suggestions and strategies. It goes beyond merely providing information and opportunities that empower. Authentic engagement calls educational leaders to assist in cultivating the empowerment of the community. However, educational leaders engaged in authentic

participation understand the former and the latter to be means for activating the empowerment of individuals and communities.

Cultivating empowerment is an organic process that flows and guides simultaneously. The educational leader learns where and when to enter a learning environment and, ways of looking back that connects the past not just nostalgically but strategically. Cultivating empowerment is a navigational dance of applying pressure where needed that allows for growth without folks for example; falling into privilege and/or retreating to overzealous discipline practices toward black youth.

Holistic Observation

Educators are often taught to be objective observers. It is expected that we will separate our lived experiences and cultural identities from the work we engage. That is, to be reflexive about what it means to be an educational leader in relation to high density Black populations in urban areas, is not a normal practice in educational leadership. I am learning how to observe holistically, utilizing all senses to soak in all that encompasses what it means to be the Black community.

I sat in on a community conversation with Pharaoh Monche, a critical consciousness hip-hop artist who demonstrates social activism through the art of lyricism. He describes his neighborhood prior to, during, and after crack cocaine through the use of colors when he states, “seems like the colors changed from orange, greens and blues to grays in the neighborhood when crack hit that summer” (Monche, 2014). We can locate embedded stories in Pharaoh Monche’s narrative by imagining his community through the colors he utilizes to narrate his perspective and then asking critical questions that facilitate a deeper knowing of the geographic space of his neighborhood.

Learning to observe the community holistically by incorporating colors, sounds, smells and tastes not literally in all cases, but figuratively, strengthens the educational leaders' connection to the community. Listening to stories from the community that are told in colors, sounds, or smells, enlightens the educational leader to the inanimate voices of the systems, structures and experiences embedded in the narratives of individuals living in the school community.

Generative Activism

In the context of this work, the educational leader is in action to lessen the unfair discipline practices on Black youth. She is consistently and continuously engaging her situatedness and positionality in critical reflection and is doing so reflexively. Meaning as a white middle class woman, she is identifying her impact on the environment and how the environment is informing her ways of knowing, understanding and acting. Through this practice, she has established an authentic participatory role with the community and together they have centered the school as the community think tank, a symbolic Baobab Tree. Now, the educational leader models generative activism; she is modeling how to holistically observe and authentically participate with research in such a way to be connected and disjointed simultaneously. She does so to create generative impacts that not only return empirical analysis but also create products and/or deliverables to be utilized and replicated by the community.

Generative Activism produces actionable deliverables that are practical and translatable across schools, academy and community. For example, the educational leader has participated in neighborhood storymapping, spending time with community folk as they move through a narrative process of replaying, storytelling and storymaking. It is in the replaying of narratives,

when folks who have been mistreated, spend time retelling issues and narratives of harm and injustice.

Educators are trained to view oppressed folks replaying stories as creating deficit discourse; however, harmed folks will continue to replay a story until they feel their narratives have reached relevant listeners. While the educational leader spends time with the community facilitating, navigating and translating processes of re-storying, she is listening actively, and knows when to enter the process with reflective questions. I describe this strategic and empathetic process of listening as “*prophetic listening*.” The educational leader learns to listen as a journey, one that travels to a place of deep emotions and to deep voids; constantly reminded that the deep emotional and deep void spaces might also be her own. And, she does so, so well, that the narrator learns something new and untapped about themselves, their community, and/or instances/issues/problems.

The process is generative activism because new ways of knowing are discovered and the narrator has moved from replaying stories through the activist art of storytelling into the generative activism of storymaking. Now the educational leader along with the community will begin to see, think, and know new ways of understanding. This is the blossoming of generative activism when deliverables are discovered through reimagining and repurposing knowledge as a means to bring improvement.

Locating Community Fellows

Wikipedia defines fellow in the context of academia as “a member of a group of learned people who work together as peers in the pursuit of mutual knowledge or practice” (Wikipedia, 2014). The educational leader participating with the community centered think tank advocates for more spaces at the research table. She understands researching socially unjust problems of

practice require making space for Community Fellows to be peers in the pursuit of mutual knowledge and practice. The educational leader aligns with community-engaged leaders, folks she is introduced to through the gatherings, meeting with Elders and participating in neighborhood storymapping. When educational leaders learn to observe holistically and participate with fidelity, the Community Fellows will be identified and/or announced by the community or he/she will self-identify; either way, they will possess an energy of readiness.

Community Fellows might be outside the normative definition of black community leadership i.e. Pastors, local officials. These folks might be members of the progressive and under 30 generation. For instance the young black men who train and support the neighborhood peewee football team. They might also look like the *Street Wisdomkeepers* or the neighborhood *Candy Lady* (who sell treats from her porch). There might also be located at neighborhood Barbershops and Beauty Salons, serving in the community. Whoever they are, the community will let the educational leader know and she must be ready to respond, relate and communicate in ways that engender authentic collaborative partnerships.

I am learning that the community-centric educational leader as scholar practitioner is perpetually participant observer and therefore is in a continuous process of data generation and analysis. Figure 10 below is a conceptual map of how educational leaders might enact the coordinates to navigate a qualitative heuristics agenda.

Figure 9: Critical Community Engagement Conceptual Map

RESPECT		RELATIONSHIP		RESPONSIBILITY	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Practitioner beliefs/ideas/notions must shift and move with the data 2. Instance/issue/problem is fluid 3. Data collection processes are multi-perspective, multi-method, multi-variable 4. Analysis seeks to discover common ground among diverse and varied data 	<p>What do you KNOW about _____</p> <p>instance/issue/problem</p> <p>-social justice?</p> <p>-policy</p> <p>-what is it?</p> <p>-what does it look like in action?</p> <p>-how does it affect me & my work?</p>	<p>What do you WANT to learn about _____</p> <p>instance/issue/problem</p> <p>-what questions need to be asked to support your understanding of ___?</p> <p>-what do you need to know for your PoP?</p>	<p>HOW can you learn more?</p> <p>-what are the resources available to you?</p> <p>-how will you seek out those resource?</p>	<p>WHO can help you learn more?</p> <p>-what are the networks you can engage to help you learn?</p> <p>-who are the people in those networks?</p>	<p>CRITICAL BLACK FEMINIST STANDPOINT THEORY</p> <p>Black Activist Mothering</p> <p>Critical Race Theory</p>
	<p>THE 9 COORDINATES OF</p> <p>CRITICAL COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT</p> <p><i>Authentic Participation; I AM as Critical Self-Reflection; Care-Giving as Ubuntu; The Baobab Tree: Centering the School as a Gathering Place; Neighborhood Storymapping; Cultivating Collective Empowerment; Holistic Observation; Generative Activism; and Locating Community Fellows</i></p>				

Figure 9, The Critical Community Engagement conceptual map is a practice tool and represents the culmination of this agenda. As the deliverable of this agenda, the tool serves as a heuristic thinking design, an agenda that is responding to the contemporary challenges of educational leadership. The coordinates are housed at the base of the map and serve as processes to actionize the introspection of the scholar practitioner. As activities, ways of thinking and/or practices, the coordinates serve illicit deeper and thicker responses to the KWHW questions in

the center. Above the rest of the guiding principles of the map are respect, relationship and responsibility. These principles are a constant reminder to the scholar practitioner to engage with the community authentically. On the right, the scholar practitioner can name their situatedness, the thinking, knowing and doing that is informing the work. To the left, the scholar practitioner is reminded to conduct a critical inquiry; and collect and analyze data through the guiding rules for engaging the qualitative heuristic approach. The Critical Community Engagement concept map are action steps that if developed into critical processes, might yield a platform to converge the interests of eradicating the disparity of discipline practices in ways that create sustainable transformative change.

In *The Silent Covenant*, Dr. Derrick Bell leaves behind some nuggets that undergird and are illustrated in Figure 10. I understand the overarching goal of Bell's nuggets as a call to develop tools, strategies and processes to prepare the community for the next opportunity when interests converge.

The foundation of the interest convergence thesis, as understood by critical race theorists, rests in understanding that "Black rights are recognized and protected when and only so long as policymakers perceive that such advances will further interests that are their primary concern" (Bell, 2004, p.49). Social and legal events unfolding around disparate discipline practices place the potentiality of an interest convergence opportunity on the horizon. I have demonstrated from the data how African American students over a 40-year span continue to be impacted disproportionately and at a disparate rate through the inequity of exclusionary discipline practices compared to their peers. The data has also demonstrated what might be discussed as a convergence of legal, educational and policy interests responding to the social injustice of discipline disparity enacted upon African American students in public schools.

It is not the purpose of this work to expand the scholarship of interest convergence as a theoretical framework and major tenant of critical race theory. It is in the scope of this agenda to be interested in and bring into conversation the practical application of how the author is applying her understanding of Derrick Bell's suggestions for a racial fortuity plan.

This agenda is suggesting that if, indeed, the mobilization of federal, local, and grassroots interests meet the tenets of an interest convergence; then, how might the critical educational leader capitalize on the momentum of the moment and be a catalyst in forging a fortuitous plan.

I am positing that the legal and policy focus on racial inequitable discipline practices in PreK-12 public school settings is an opportunity to avoid the reoccurrence of “race-conscious education policies that fail to account for race and racism...still advantag[ing] the dominant group and continue to disadvantage the group that such remedies [are] designed to serve” (Douglass Horsford, 2010, p. 294). However, to effectively and equitably converge the interests of African American students impacted by disparate discipline practices with the current social, legal and political interests; educational leadership must assist those marginalized in innovative and systematic ways to “forge fortuity” (Bell, 2004, p. 189). Bell chose a mighty counter discourse in “forge” with origins meaning to make way; to move ahead; and from the Latin “fabricari” (Online Etymology Dictionary, 2012) to frame, construct; build through steady planning, a critical resistance to dominant discourse – which Bell (2004) so eloquently describes as “providing insulation against the frustration of rejection” – when the chance to converge interests occurs (p. 189).

Bell is enlightening my journey with historical wisdom. This is a wisdom which has demonstrated that to effectively converge the interests of the marginalized with education policy interests, leaders will need to assist students, their families and the community in forging plans

that (a) develop critical resistance to dominant discourse. Giroux (1996) and colleagues view this resistance occurring in two dimensions; the “grand”, “master”, and “meta” narratives and “the official and hegemonic narratives” (p. 2); (b) frame an understanding of the situatedness of urban education– operating in three interlocking realms: agent, situation and context – within that discourse; (c) create a counter-narrative that disrupts both dimensions of narratives, a language capable of both engaging and negotiating a consensus of interests across boundaries and disciplines; and (d) develop networks that set goals for improvement initially and eventually toward sustainable transformative change.

AFTERWORD

The ways I participate and observe phenomena are informed by a very unique voice, a hybrid voice that speaks from experiences in both marginalized and privilege spaces. I speak in a marginalized voice because I am a black working class single mother who engages in community work; and privileged in some ways because I am a doctoral candidate. This hybridism of cultural identity and social class allows for movement between socio-political, economic, and cultural spaces or, “because of the privilege afforded intellectuals” (Omolade, 1987, p. 34). I relate so passionately with Barbara Omolade (1987) and how she speaks to her situatedness in relationship to the issue/problem she is examining. Omolade situates her identity and knowledge system as central to how she is making sense of the scholarship and of phenomenon being examined. She speaks of her sense of relatedness while instructing black women at City College in New York City and how closely she identifies with their historical, spatial, and temporal positionality. Or simply, she identifies with the ways in which they show up and who and what inform their identity. Omolade shares, “My condition and position in the society were (and are) sociologically and economically the same as my students... [b]ut as an employed intellectual who uses my mind and my skills to instruct others, I have greater status than my sister students in the classroom and in the society” (pp. 33, 34). Omolade is shedding light on yet another dimension of Hill Collins’ “community othermothers” and how they activate empowerment of self and the African American collective family.

This is who I am, identified and then groomed by sitting at the feet of and hanging on the skirt tales and waist coats of my elders, learning that took place in nontraditional education spaces; the kitchen table, the front and back porch, and the corners of the community. It is in

these cultural spaces where I learn to embrace that deep listening, sacrifice, submission and obedience are strategic tools of building “nation-consciousness¹².”

I sought out a doctorate program where critical lenses and placing race as central to the inquiry-based work would be expected. Choosing educational leadership as the field to focus my inquiry of disparate discipline practices on African American youth was intentional and driven by experiences with administrators from the school building to the federal levels and, by “[l]iving in the black community and sharing its troubles” (Townsend Gilkes, 1983, p. 133). For example, my children attend the very public schools where disparate discipline practices unfold so my reality is very similar to the communities I seek to serve. So, “[w]hat happens when the receiver of services become the deliverer of services?” (p. 137)

Writing this Dissertation in Practice in the Professional Doctorate in Educational Leadership (hereafter ProDEL) at Duquesne University, School of Education illustrates how I have continued to navigate the “focused education” (Townsend Gilkes, 1983, p. 115) process as a liberatory activity of social change. This educational opportunity has afforded me the critical space to expand beyond understanding the problem of discipline disparity at the local level, to gauge the impact of the national school discipline disparity on African Americans. The phenomenon is a problem of practice that is producing inequity and generating problematic consequences and outcomes for black youth and subsequently their communities. ProDEL captures my attention with the following assets; (a) a cohort that must be comprised of community workers engaged in education; (b) a redesigned program to elevate the expertise of the practice or clinical side of education; (c) a rooted and upfront focus on educational reform as a matter of social justice.

¹² Townsend Gilkes defines nation-consciousness as being consciously aware of the intersections of race and class and how this intersectionality is expressed politically.

I processed educational opportunities as a tool, not better than the tacit and experiential knowledge of the community wisdom keepers; but an addition to and thus a way allowing for the “going up for the oppressed” described by Townsend Gilkes (1983) as “a special type of career mobility that combines an individual’s consciousness and opportunities in a way that is beneficial not only to the individual but also to the community” (p. 119).

This call for extending the research practice table to include more innovative and forward thinking about educational leadership is perpetual within the organization of education (Firestone & Riehl, 2005) and specifically in urban education. This is called by Giroux (1992) as an “emancipatory theory of leadership...that speaks a common language of critique and possibility” (1992, p. 18). To engage in emancipatory leadership (Giroux, 1992; Cambron-McCabe, 2010; Starratt, 2004) is to engage in this process of critical examination, critical inquiry and critical understanding of problem of practices that situate race and racism within the examination of the problem (Parker & Villalpondo, 2007; Douglass Horsford, 2010). Miller and colleagues (Miller, Brown, & Hopson, 2011) call to engage in Freirean Leadership – educational leadership that walks with the community to challenge inequity; and a challenge by Ehrich & English (2012) for educational leadership to go and learn from the “grassroots leaders” whom the authors differentiated from community-based leaders and grassroots leadership. They are describing those folks in the community with “reverent power” whose followers work with [these] leaders not because they must, but because they identify with them and a common cause (p. 7).

The question then is how does field of educational leadership walk with, work with, and learn with community leaders with reverent power? Educational leaders must respond to the call to eradicate the social injustice of discipline disparities that grossly impact black youth in ways that authentically involve the community in partnership with schools and the academy. The field

must ponder several questions: How can educational leaders become more involved in the DBIR process that occurs in the context? Are urban educational leaders equipped in their programs to engage and decode research? What is the role of educational leadership in preparing the community to become active participants in school research? What tools, artifacts, and/or strategies are educational leaders in need of when engaging the political economy of urban education?

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